

## ***Francesco è vivo, e lotta insieme a noi!* Rebuilding local identities in the aftermath of the 1977 student protests in Bologna**

Andrea Hajek\*

*Institute of Advanced Study, University of Warwick, UK*

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The decade spanning from 1968 to 1980, known also as the *anni di piombo*, is among the most difficult and traumatic periods in Italian post-war history. One of the most memorable years of this decade was 1977, when a new student movement stood up against the established order. The so-called Movement of '77 manifested itself among others in Bologna, where it had a predominantly creative and joyful character. Nevertheless, the protests were violently struck down when left-wing student Francesco Lorusso was killed by police forces during clashes, resulting in an urban *guerriglia*. This incident worsened the relationship between the historical left and younger generations of (more radical) left-wing activists, and marked the beginning of the end of the Movement of '77. The chapter on 1977 was, however, never really closed, and a 'counter-memory' has continued to divide the local community ever since. In this article, we shall see how different memory communities in Bologna have dealt with this 'collective trauma', focusing on the former Movement of '77 and the way it has used public commemorative rituals to rebuild a collective identity for itself in subsequent years.

**Keywords:** collective trauma; public commemorations; memory communities; negotiation; 1977; student protests

### **Introduction**

The decade spanning from the late 1960s to 1980 is among the most dramatic in the history of the Italian nation. Statistics show that over 12,000 incidents of political violence occurred in the so-called *anni di piombo*, and some even speak of a national 'trauma' with regard to this decade.<sup>1</sup> A climax was reached in 1978, when the Red Brigades abducted and assassinated Christian Democrat leader Aldo Moro. This highly traumatic event tends to overshadow the events of 1977, a unique and memorable year which marked the coming together of a number of political, economic, social and cultural transformations that occurred throughout the 1970s. In particular the economic crisis of 1973, the threat of a return to an authoritative, right-wing government as happened in Chile, and the Italian Communist Party's (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, hereafter PCI) attempts to gain political power contributed to the creation of a new protest movement that stood up against the established order.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Movement of '77' manifested itself mainly in Rome, Milan and the popular university city of Bologna, where it had a predominantly creative and joyful character.

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\*Email: andreahajek@gmail.com

Nevertheless, the protests in Bologna were violently struck down when Francesco Lorusso – a student and sympathiser of the former left-wing extra-parliamentary group Lotta Continua (hereafter, LC) – was killed by police during clashes on 11 March 1977, which led the city into a state of total chaos for several days. This incident worsened the already poor relationship between the Communist Party and young generations of left-wing activists, and marked the beginning of the end of the Movement of '77. The protests of 1977 were therefore a turning point in the local history of Bologna, which continue to haunt its memory today.

Indeed, the chapter on 1977 was never really closed, as the police officer who had shot Lorusso was absolved on the basis of a disputed public order law, whereas many participants in the protests were arrested and detained for long periods of time. A strong sense of injustice has subsequently nurtured a 'counter-memory' (Foucault 1980) of the *fatti di marzo* among parts of the local community, which clashed with official versions of the events, thus resulting in a 'divided memory'.<sup>3</sup> March 1977 in Bologna therefore remains 'an area still obstructed by memory' (Galfré 2008, 122). Publications that aim at a more complex approach to 1977 have mostly been written by former protest leaders or consist of personal accounts by former participants, while a more critical and inclusive analysis of the events has yet to be written.<sup>4</sup>

This essay does not aim to write a history of the *fatti di marzo*, though: it is an investigation into the 'divided memory' of 1977 in Bologna, and the way its public memory has been (re)negotiated – through the years – by different local memory communities. These include the Communist administration, left-wing intellectuals and PCI dissidents, and Francesco Lorusso's family. The focus will, however, be on the former members of the Movement of '77 in Bologna: through an analysis of local press reports and material produced by the Movement itself, I will analyse its use of the public commemoration of 11 March in the promotion of a counter-memory of the events, and – more importantly – in the reconstruction of a collective identity.<sup>5</sup> We shall also see how this memory has been 'transferred' across various generations of left-wing activists and continues to inspire youth groups in Bologna today. First, though, I shall discuss a number of theoretical issues regarding 'collective traumas', and provide a brief account of the *fatti di marzo*.

### The 'trauma' of 11 March 1977

Over the past few decades, research on the role of memory in processes of identity formation has flourished, and it is commonly accepted now that groups tend to base 'the consciousness of their unity and their peculiarity on past events' (Assmann 1992, 132). Similarly, John Gillis maintains that 'what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity' of a group (1994, 3). In other words, we do not only remember *as* members of groups, but we also *constitute* those groups and their collective identities in the very act of remembering (Olick 2007, 29).

When it comes to processes of forming national identity, public commemorations and monuments are particularly relevant. Indeed, since the nineteenth century, nation-building has been increasingly determined by the ritual representation of myths and symbols that drew on key moments of the nation's past, e.g. wars (Ridolfi 2004, 10). The importance of commemorative objects and practices on these occasions can furthermore be explained by the fact that they refer to forms of collective and public suffering. Sociologist Kai Erikson

speaks, in this context, of a 'collective trauma', i.e. 'a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality', provoking 'a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support' (1976, cited in Alexander 2004, 4). In other words, collective trauma disconnects the members of a community and disrupts continuity by provoking a negative form of change (Neal 2005, 4).

If scholars have criticised the application of trauma – originally a medical term that relates to a physical or psychological, *individual* injury – in the analysis of collective experiences of violence or injustice (Kansteiner 2002; Weilnböck 2009; Keightley and Pickering 2010), we may nevertheless speak of a 'collective trauma' in the case of Bologna. A highly prosperous city in the 1970s, Bologna was the showpiece of the Communist Party, which had dominated the 'Red Belt' regions of Central Italy since the late 1960s (Mussi 1978; Clark 2008, 467–68). The shock was great when, on 11 March 1977 – about two months after the eruption of a new protest movement in Italy – student Francesco Lorusso was shot dead by a police officer during clashes, and the capital of 'Red Emilia' was transformed into a war zone. These events constituted a collectively shared trauma, first of all, for the students in the Movement of '77, who did not expect such a severe reaction from the authorities; second, the local Communist Party had to face the harsh reality of part of the local community explicitly challenging its authority; the citizens of Bologna, finally, were confronted with the violent outbursts of Lorusso's outraged companions and with the subsequent intimidation by police forces and even the army. Hence, a collective sense of trauma relates not simply to the events themselves, but to their repercussions on society. It is, indeed, the *impact* of an event, rather than the event itself, that constitutes trauma (Glynn 2006, 319), and this strongly depends on the way the events were interpreted in the media.

Collective traumas may, however, also *reinforce* an existing community or contribute to the creation of a new, different communality (i.e. therapy groups or victims' associations). In fact, past sufferings can help a group (re)construct its identity: they are thus employed as 'a source of group empowerment, as a vehicle for reclaiming the past and as a means of readdressing past injustices' (Misztal 2004, 75). In other words, traumatic memories not only help a community create a new collective identity, but they may also serve to claim collective rights, voice demands, and contest dominant political powers and their interpretations of the past (*ibid.* 79–80).

### **Negotiating memories of conflict**

Communities may thus promote an alternative memory, which implies that – even within a nation – there is not one single, collective memory that counts as the real one 'in contrast to other failed contenders or imitators' (Olick 2007, 92). Indeed, a variety of alternative group memories aim at 'restating views of reality derived from firsthand experience in small-scale communities rather than the "imagined" communities of a large nation' (Bodnar 1992, 14). The latter find expression in an 'official culture', promoted by authorities and cultural leaders who 'share a common interest in social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo' (*ibid.* 13), which at times requires the community to 'forget' incidents that may compromise this continuity

(Connerton 2008), such as the involvement of the secret services of the state in neo-fascist terrorism.

In a similar fashion, Michel Foucault (1980) opposed 'traditional history' – which promotes continuity and the 'permanence of the past' – to what he called 'effective history': the latter introduces *discontinuity* into our being, and refuses the 'certainty of absolutes' (ibid. 157–58). Foucault thus created the concept of counter-memory, which is produced by small groups of people who have been 'left out' of mainstream history (Miształ 2004, 77; Rigney 2005, 13), and whose visions are opposed to dominant, official views of the past. The promotion of counter-memories then implies a sense of *duty* to remember (Miształ 2004, 78), which ties in with the role of trauma as a 'vehicle for establishing collective rights and voicing collective demands' (ibid. 80). This is furthermore transmitted to future generations in a process Ann Rigney (2005) has defined as 'memory transfer'. Thus, events or persons can be transferred into the memory of other social groups – triggered by a more direct, personal memory of comparable incidents – that identify with and recognise these experiences. Hence, traumatic experiences not only give shape to new collective identities, but they also serve as a 'storehouse of lessons' (Booth 1999, 256) for future generations.

Finally, the competing restatements of reality that are produced by official memories and counter-memories are mediated in public memories, the background against which different parts of the social structure exchange and *negotiate* views (Bodnar 1992, 15). Public monuments and commemorations, then, are not static objects or rituals, but the product of negotiations and compromises: as Alex King observes, public commemorations give *authority* to one specific interpretation of social reality by 'encouraging holders of competing views to participate in commemoration, and then negotiating a form of commemorative event that all parties see as compatible with their interests' (2001, 149).

We must therefore always consider the level of negotiation 'through which different stories vie for a place in history' (Olick and Robbins 1998, 126). Before we move to an analysis of the extent to which the public memory of 1977 in Bologna has been (re)negotiated through the years, let us first look more closely at the actual incidents of March 1977, the *fatti di marzo*.

### **The *fatti di marzo***

The origins of the protests that erupted in early 1977 lie with a variety of economic, political, social and cultural transformations: first of all the economic crisis of 1973, which had considerably worsened working conditions and career perspectives for younger generations; second, the disappearance from the political scene of the extra-parliamentary groups of the left had reinforced the political void left by the Italian Communist Party. The decision – after its success at the national elections of 1976 – to indirectly support Giulio Andreotti's centre-right Christian Democrat (Democrazia Cristiana, hereafter DC) government, in particular, disappointed and outraged many young left-wing supporters (Ginsborg 2006; Cento Bull 2007, 5). Finally, changing consumerist attitudes and lifestyles further drove youth away from the PCI, which failed to adapt to social transformations and held on to its firm belief in party (i.e. work) ideologies as opposed to individual

liberties (Ginsborg 2003, 158). Hence, if the detonator of the protests of 1977 was an educational reform, tensions had been building for several years.

On the morning of 11 March 1977, a small group of Lotta Continua sympathisers clashed with student members of the Catholic association *Comunione e Liberazione* (hereafter, CL), during an assembly of CL at the University of Bologna. The situation soon got out of hand, as word spread and large numbers of left-wing supporters rushed to the scene of the conflict. The chancellor called for police intervention, which resulted in an unprecedentedly violent confrontation between students and police forces.

Lorusso was among a group of students throwing objects at police vehicles which were moving up a wide street that ran parallel to the university zone, when he was shot in the back by a young military police officer as he was running back towards the university (Menneas 2003; Cappellini 2007). What had begun as an apparently innocent and ordinary quarrel between politically opposed groups next turned into an urban *guerriglia*: in the afternoon, outraged students tried to assault the local headquarters of the DC, broke shop windows and vehicles stationed in the city centre, briefly occupied a platform at the railway station, and eventually sacked a luxury restaurant in the university zone (Cappellini 2007). The PCI did not know how to respond to the incidents effectively, and became tangled up in an internal conflict about what position to take.<sup>6</sup> The next day, clashes between police and students continued, and at night an armoury in the university zone was sacked.<sup>7</sup> Although most weapons were eventually retrieved, on Sunday 13 March the Minister of Internal Affairs Francesco Cossiga had the army regain control over the university zone. An announcement on national television of new, more severe measures against violence – accompanied by images of tanks, armed police units and barricades set up by the students, which dominated local newspapers the following days – left an indelible mark on the city's public memory of those days.

The situation stabilised a few days later (Cappellini 2007), but the wound left by the clashes and their aftermaths was never allowed to heal, due – in particular – to the meagre investigations into the circumstances of Lorusso's death. Although the culprit handed himself in to the police, public prosecutor Romano Ricciotti advised the examining magistrate not to prosecute him on the basis of the notorious *legge Reale*.<sup>8</sup> He was nevertheless arrested for manslaughter and the investigations reopened, but soon released again as the Court of Appeal overrode the magistrate's decision to charge him on the basis of his not being authorised to dismiss the decree of public prosecutor Ricciotti (Menneas 2003). The case was eventually closed on 22 October 1977.

### Remembering 11 March 1977 in the local public sphere

The incidents had a considerable impact on the city and on the relationship between students and the authorities. Enhanced by the dramatic reports in the local and national media, they therefore also represented a public trauma. One of the most popular local dailies, the conservative *Resto del Carlino*, used a particularly violent terminology and dramatic photographs in order to produce a fear-inspiring image of danger and destruction. The main headline on the front cover of the edition of 12 March, for example, read: 'Centre of Bologna devastated by the hooligans because of a student killed during clashes with police. City life has been upset by the *guerriglia*: shootings, shops attacked, barricades and fires', and an entire page in the local section was filled with images of barricades and armoured vehicles.<sup>9</sup>

National news reports on television, in particular the reports of violent clashes in Rome during a national demonstration on 12 March, further enhanced a sense of danger.

But the incidents affected the Communist Party as well, which suffered a severe blow to its public image: as we have seen, Bologna had the reputation of being a prosperous and well-governed city, and the incidents of March 1977 clearly shattered this positive image. Although the local section of the PCI initially abstained from taking a clear position against either police forces or the students, in the wake of the raid on the armoury on 12 March – and probably under pressure from the national leadership – its attitude changed radically (Bellassai 2009, 221). This may be explained by the *compromesso storico*, a project launched by Communist Party secretary Enrico Berlinguer in 1973 as a measure against the growing threat of right-wing terrorism and coups d'état, which foresaw an alliance with the Christian Democrats and the Italian Socialist Party (hereafter, PSI) and hence participation in the government (Ginsborg 2006). In other words, the PCI was concerned with maintaining its credibility as a party capable of governing, and eventually had to distance itself from the rebellious and anti-authoritative student movement. Dramatic tensions provoked by increasing left-wing political violence, in the second half of the decade, further forced the Communists to take on a more severe position against left-wing extremism. This explains why party organ *L'Unità* now described the students as anti-democratic hooligans, possibly connected to neo-fascist organisations, whereas 'embarrassing' facts such as the intervention of the army on 13 March were omitted (Morisi 1993, 125). The newspaper rather focused on a re-establishment of the presumed democratic character of the PCI, e.g. by publishing photographs of large crowds during official demonstrations.<sup>10</sup>

In subsequent years, however, the PCI began renegotiating its memory of the clashes in Bologna. Since its support of Andreotti's DC government, between 1976 and 1979, membership and electoral support had rapidly declined (Foot 2003, 182). The party had furthermore lost control of many city administrations (Clark 2008, 496), and considering the success of Bettino Craxi's rising Socialist Party throughout most of the 1980s, the Communists desperately needed to regain political ground and re-establish a positive relationship with local youth groups. This change of perspective was also motivated by the persisting terrorist climate in the country, which the local PCI interpreted as an outcome of the missing dialogue with youth.

Nevertheless, the *fatti di marzo* had profoundly worsened the party's relationship not only with the student community, but also with a group of former PCI voters and exponents of Bologna's 'high society' (i.e. lawyers, judges, magistrates), who founded the Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso, in February 1979. These people were not related to Lorusso by any personal affection or ideological affinity (Lorusso's stance was much more radical than theirs), but rather wanted to distance themselves from a local administration they no longer identified with.<sup>11</sup> Hence, they used their public reputation to gain recognition from the local community and, subsequently, the necessary public consensus for a reopening of the case and for the rehabilitation of Lorusso's figure, and of the student movement as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

Surprisingly, Lorusso's family remained external to the Associazione, and his political companions only joined in recent times: the presence of the latter, in particular, would have complicated the creation of a commonly shared memory of Lorusso's death, 'stigmatised' as they were by (media) memories of violence and public disorder.

Similarly, the emotional motivations that would have linked the family to the Associazione would also have obstructed the transmission of a political statement.<sup>13</sup>

The very first attempt to create a shared memory of Lorusso's figure and the incidents of March 1977 was, however, an initiative by Lorusso's political companions, which brings us to the final major memory community in Bologna: the former Movement of '77. During the 32nd anniversary of the Liberation, on 25 April 1977 (only two months after the incidents), Lorusso's companions had a marble commemorative plaque placed on the wall near the spot where he had been shot dead, in via Mascarella.<sup>14</sup> No authorisation was requested for the plaque, and its text was highly ideological:

I COMPAGNI DI/FRANCESCO LORUSSO/QUI/ASSASSINATO DALLA FEROCIA  
ARMATA DI REGIME/L'11 MARZO 1977/SANNO/CHE LA SUA IDEA/DI  
UGUAGLIANZA DI LIBERTÀ DI AMORE/SOPRAVVIVERÀ AD OGNI CRIMINE/  
FRANCESCO È VIVO E LOTTA INSIEME A NOI.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, the text does not focus on Lorusso as a person, i.e. on his achievements in life, but on the ideals he *shared* with the rest of the student movement.<sup>16</sup> The plaque then seems an attempt at reinforcing a sense of *belonging* within the student movement, and hence a reconstruction of the group's collective identity, which confirms the statement that traumatic experiences can be a source of group empowerment.

A second peculiarity of the plaque is the very choice of a marble commemorative plaque as the *medium* through which to transmit this message. After all, a marble plaque is a highly traditional and conventional form of commemoration, not at all in line with the views of the Movement on death and memory, as we shall see further on. It may then have been applied so as to give this counter-memory a more visible and tangible form of expression as well as to promote it among a wider public: by using a more widely accepted form or 'language', a larger number of people would be able to acknowledge and identify with this memory site, as opposed to – for example – a graffiti text, and it thus represents a form of compromise. It must also be observed, however, that the 1970s saw a Resistance 'revival' regarding monuments in particular (Cooke 2006), and so Lorusso's figure may also simply have been – unconsciously – assimilated with partisan heroes of the Second World War. Similarly, when his Lotta Continua companions made an official request to rename a university square after their friend, one year later, their request included implicit connotations of the local Resistance myth.<sup>17</sup>

From 1978 onwards, a brief commemorative ceremony was held in front of the plaque, initially attended solely by Lorusso's family and close friends, whereas the majority of the former student movement commemorated the incidents of March 1977 during an annual commemorative procession through the city centre, later in the day. In the early 1990s, the end of the Cold War and the Tangentopoli scandal radically changed the political landscape in Italy, forging a split in the former Communist Party which had significant consequences for left-wing collective identity. The ceremony in via Mascarella thus became an ever more official, institutional event attended by several politicians of the former PCI.

After generational clashes during the commemorative march of 1997, the two separate commemorative activities eventually converged into a single ceremony, in via Mascarella. Thus, what had originated as the promotion of a counter-memory was eventually incorporated into a public memory of the *fatti di marzo* in Bologna, which seems to confirm King's (2001) thesis about public commemorations bringing together 'holders of competing views' and negotiating a public memory that can be shared by all parties.

Yet, the memory of March 1977 has remained a divided one, not least within the former student movement itself, as we shall see in the rest of the article.

### ***Francesco è vivo e lotta insieme a noi!* The annual commemorative procession of the alternative left**

Not long after the incidents of March 1977, the fragmented Movement of '77 further split into subgroups, primarily Lotta Continua, the more radical Autonomia Operaia (hereafter, AO) and the Movimento lavoratori per il socialismo.<sup>18</sup> The various groups 'commemorated' the *fatti di marzo* through an annual commemorative procession, which departed from the central university square, Piazza Verdi, and crossed parts of the city centre before it returned to the university zone (Hajek 2010). This allowed the students, in the first place, to promote and keep alive a counter-memory which rejected the official reading of legitimate use of arms by the police. Second, the commemoration offered a visible and noisy counterpart to the increasingly official and – eventually – institutional ceremony in the morning, in spite of the ideological text of the commemorative plaque in via Mascarella. Hence, the procession helped create a distinction or differentiation, and thus re-defined the students' collective identity.

The procession was more than a protest against the *fatti di marzo*, though: at the same time, it offered an occasion to address *current* political problems and collective demands as well, in particular regarding (the prevention of) political violence and terrorism. In fact, in the early 1980s tougher anti-terrorist laws had been introduced, and General Dalla Chiesa's famous anti-terrorist squad brought down various sections of the Red Brigades (Ginsborg 2006; Clark 2008, 501). But less extremist forms of political violence or resistance were severely punished as well, and many militants were serving long sentences: thus, the commemorative procession on 11 March became an occasion to protest for the rights of political prisoners.<sup>19</sup>

Finally and most importantly, the procession shaped itself around the figure of Francesco Lorusso, whose memory thus offered a 'unifying and shaping moment': '[I]n spite of the enormous differences that separated the various components... there was always a strong sharing of this moment'.<sup>20</sup> The 'cult of the dead' is an important element in processes of reunification and reconstruction of collective identities, here illustrated by the rhetorical phrase, '*Francesco è vivo e lotta insieme a noi*', used as a slogan as well as on banners. Nevertheless, Lorusso was not considered a hero, but – with the exception of the Lotta Continua group, which had a more personal relationship with Lorusso – a symbol of the *collective* battle fought by the *entire* Movement of '77, rather than an individual victim of a common enemy:

Francesco is not a myth for us... We lay a claim to the movement of '77, its expressions of antagonism and 'counter-power', of direct action and mass self-defence. In this perspective we intend to continue on the road where – *together with tens of thousands of companions* – Francesco *too* walked, before the bullets of the State assassins stopped him forever. (GABBIA/NO 1987, 13; emphasis added)

The slogan '*Francesco è vivo e lotta insieme a noi*' also reveals a rejection of the very idea of commemorating the dead, which former LC member Mauro Collina explains as follows: '[N]obody ever wanted to construct a "commemoration", because it doesn't fit with us. It



isn't about "the commemoration". It's about keeping alive, so to say, a memory, about being there, but we don't like commemorations'.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, if the anniversaries on 11 March functioned as a symbolic and temporary moment of (re)unification for the fragmented student movement, discordances prior to and during the annual procession increased through the years. These were mostly related to issues of violence, *pentitismo* and dissociation from terrorism: the divide was particularly strong between Autonomia Operaia, on the one hand, and less radical groups, on the other.<sup>22</sup> In 1978, for example, members of AO disagreed with the decision of other groups to have a pacifist commemoration, and even defined themselves as the 'altro movimento'.<sup>23</sup> One year later, Proletarian Democracy (*Democrazia Proletaria*, DP) – a small, radical political party to the left of the PCI and very close to the Movement of '77 – reproached AO for having participated in a funerary procession for a local Prima Linea terrorist, a few days prior to the commemoration of 11 March, and in 1980 AO criticised – in its turn – other groups for placing Lorusso on the same level as Prima Linea *pentito* William Waccher, killed a month earlier by his former political companions.<sup>24</sup> In 1983, AO furthermore attacked the Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso for having organised a debate on dissociation from terrorism, and it seems then that the *autonomi* – as well as other, radicalised groups of the alternative left – used the 11 March procession more and more as an occasion to manifest their own visions on the legitimacy of political violence.<sup>25</sup>

All in all, if the commemorative procession – which mostly served to redefine groups and group identities in the present – managed to temporarily reunite the former fragmented Movement of '77, at the same time it accentuated deep and insurmountable internal conflicts.

### Recomposing the 'human chain'

The internal conflict reached a first climax in 1987, when former leaders Franco 'Bifo' Berardi and Valerio Monteventi published a document in a highly celebrative special issue of the left-wing alternative journal *Mongolfiera*. Signed by some 60 former *settantasettini*, the document offered a reading where 1977 'was not a political event of violence and resentment perpetrated by residual and emarginated social forces', but represented a 'human chain' that stood for ideals of freedom, equality and solidarity (Monteventi et al. 1987, 3). The authors of the document argued that these values had recently re-emerged in France, where a young man was kicked to death by police during student protests.<sup>26</sup> Hence, current events that bore similarities to the incidents of 10 years earlier were used to reactivate past memories and give them new life again.

Monteventi and company therefore proposed a symbolic re-enactment of the 'human chain' during the annual commemoration in via Mascarella, in an attempt not only to reconcile the former Movement with the local community, but – more significantly – to re-establish 'a chain of communication between ourselves'.<sup>27</sup> However, the initiative only brought back to the fore the internal divide that had revealed itself in the first years after the incidents: many former participants did not feel represented by Monteventi's group, criticised the fact that it had used the media to gain public visibility, or simply rejected the idea of reconciliation. There was also a sense that the memory of the Movement of '77 in Bologna was 'monopolised' by people like Berardi, who represented the creative side of the

former student movement. It seems then that a new battle was going on as to who – *within* the Movement – should represent and promote this memory, 10 years later.<sup>28</sup>

### The generational crisis of the 1990s

This discussion on ‘ownership’ continued in the following decade, as younger generations who had not directly experienced the events of 1977 began appropriating this memory, e.g. the ‘Pantera’ student movement in 1990: on the last day of the PCI’s penultimate national conference in Bologna, and one day before the annual commemoration of Lorusso’s death, students outside the conference building challenged the Communist politicians with a cardboard military tank which read ‘modello emiliano 77’.<sup>29</sup>

It was in 1997, however, that a true generational clash took place. The 20th anniversary was preceded by a national conference of *Autonomia Operaia* on the theme of amnesty for political prisoners of the 1970s and 1980s, and it was precisely the theme of amnesty that led to clashes within the local alternative left. Thus, before the annual procession from piazza Verdi – where the former leaders of the Movement in Bologna had organised a somewhat nostalgic gathering – had even departed, a discussion between former *settantasettini* and a group of students who were occupying a university canteen got out of hand: the students wanted to take the lead in the procession, among other things, thus explicitly challenging the authority of the older generation.<sup>30</sup>

Eventually, the students managed to take the lead, but it was only the beginning of a long day of tensions. When the procession reached a Feltrinelli bookshop at the beginning of the university zone, a group of youngsters initiated an ‘*esproprio proletario*’, physically clashing with members of the older generation who tried to stop them.<sup>31</sup> The latter strongly denounced this modern-day ‘*esproprio*’, accusing the students of having adopted ‘only what has been brought across by the media: broken shop windows, violent incidents. Certainly not the contents behind the protests...’<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Monteventi bitterly concluded that the cultural and political climate of 1977 had disappeared: ‘the “real” March 11 was a different matter’.<sup>33</sup>

The students, on the other hand, were reported to have shouted ‘*via via, la nuova polizia*’ against Monteventi and his companions, a famous slogan frequently used against the hated PCI during student protests in the 1970s (Vitali 2009, 215–16). During a press conference, the students furthermore stated that ‘the *fatti di marzo* are not an exclusive right of those who were there’.<sup>34</sup> All in all, the *settantasettini* had become, in their turn, the enemies of a new generation of rebels, and the commemoration therefore revealed a serious fracture: this time not between students and authorities, but between two generations of left-wing activists. More importantly, the memory of Lorusso was disconnected from its original ‘carrier groups’ (Alexander 2004).

The anniversary thus brought an end to the commemorative processions of the past 20 years, described by one former member of the movement as ‘the real “commemoration”... where companions went out to demonstrate while staying WELL AWAY from any institutional representation’. After the incidents, it became difficult to continue the procession, as the participants were fewer and fewer, and the *settantasettini* that remained were ‘forced’ to participate in the traditional commemoration in the morning: ‘It was therefore absolutely necessary to “converge” with the event in the morning and to “share” the memory with those same institutions (more precisely with the parties of which they

consisted) who had been “morally responsible” for those facts’.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the former participants in the local Movement of ’77 had to *renegotiate* their collective identity and accept the presence of other memory communities whose vision on the past they did not share. Yet, no truly shared memory of 1977 has taken shape during the anniversaries in via Mascarella, as the former *settantasettini* remain firm about the injustice done to their companion and to the Movement of ’77, while institutions have not fully acknowledged Lorusso’s figure in the public sphere. We may then speak of a silent ‘pact’, a mutual tolerance in the name of a simulated reconciliation that will perhaps never occur.

### Transfers of memory: 1977 in the new millennium

Nevertheless, the ceremony in via Mascarella has eventually taken over some of the characteristics of the commemorative procession, mostly that of reconnecting the memory of March 1977 and of Francesco Lorusso with current (political) issues or comparable incidents of violence. Especially since the rise of the no global movement in the early 2000s, Lorusso’s memory has offered an appropriate model of resistance for younger generations of activists, whose indirect memory of 1977 was ‘reactivated’ after the death – in very similar circumstances – of Carlo Giuliani, during the G8 in Genoa (2001). Thus, in 2002 the anniversary of 11 March was attended by a large number of young people, and Giuliani’s father, who – along with Carlo’s mother Heidi – frequently attends the ceremony, made a significant observation: ‘Those who did not live 1977 in first person can perhaps only now feel the profound significance of an event that has marked an entire generation’.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, the collective memory of March 1977 has been used to promote anti-war sentiments which are particularly dear, again, to the more radical left-wing groups of the 2000s, as was the case during the Iraq war: in 2003, a peace flag was hung underneath the commemorative plaque in via Mascarella, and Lorusso’s father Agostino noted the importance of commemorating Lorusso ‘in a period marked by a regained impetus of pacifist sentiment, for which Francesco too had fought’.<sup>37</sup> A year later, a militant archive in Bologna was dedicated to *both* Lorusso and Giuliani, whereas a student organisation protesting against educational reforms in 2005 – *Rete Universitaria* – converged the two memories even more explicitly when it dedicated an occupied university lecture hall to Lorusso. According to a former member of *Rete Universitaria*, this incident was well known among the local students, and Lorusso’s name apparently popped up ‘automatically’ during a discussion about the occupation. Hence, although the death of Giuliani in 2001 represented a more direct memory for the students, some of whom had been at the G8 in Genoa, the incidents of March 1977 nevertheless seem to have weighed more in the decision. This is due both to the *local* memory that Lorusso’s case represents, as well as to the similar, university contexts of the protests of 1977 and 2005.<sup>38</sup>

The connection between Lorusso/1977 and Giuliani/2001 was even more evident in a banner the *Rete Universitaria* attached to a wall during the ceremony in via Mascarella that same year. The banner clearly echoed the rhetoric of the 1970s, as the final part illustrates: ‘*Noi non dimentichiamo Carlo e non dimentichiamo Genova. Noi gridiamo che Francesco e Carlo vivono nelle nostre lotte*’.<sup>39</sup> All this seems to imply the existence of a persistent, collective and local memory of 1977 among these younger generations of activists.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

In this essay I have argued that public commemorative rituals related to collective, traumatic events are strongly determined by processes of negotiation. I have used the incidents that occurred in March 1977 in Bologna as a case study of a 'traumatic' and strongly divided memory, although the analysis was centred not so much on the contrast between an official and a counter-memory of the events, but on the internal conflicts *within* the former Movement of '77 in Bologna itself, as well as on its efforts to rebuild a collective identity in subsequent years. Indeed, disputes concerning the issue of violence in particular arose during the anniversaries, which in the long run only *accentuated* internal divisions. Thus, the local memory of March 1977 became an occasion for various subgroups to make political statements and claim a specific political identity in the *present*.

From this we may conclude that commemorative rituals – and accordingly also memory sites – are not static or pre-established occasions to honour the dead, where a single memory agent can claim authority over this past: they are, rather, processes in development that involve acts of negotiation, compromise and competition, either by necessity (i.e. due to the passing of time and the subsequent fading of 'living' memory), or for political motivations. Most importantly, they involve some level of conflict or discordance: as Ann Rigney has observed, 'consensus may facilitate inertia, and... controversy rather than canonization may be the most important motor in keeping a memory alive' (2008, 94). In order to survive and continue to provide a model for future generations of left-wing activists, it is then perhaps best that the public memory of March 1977 remain a divided one.

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## Notes

1. Antonello and O'Leary (2009, 1). See also Glynn (2006), O'Leary (2007, 51) and Hajek (2010).
2. Some may contest the definition of this movement as such: contrary to previous social movements, the 'Movement of '77' consisted of various subgroups and was more locally determined. In this paper, I will nevertheless use the commonly accepted and applied definition of 'movement'. For a discussion of the concept of social movement, see Sidney Tarrow (1998).
3. The concept of 'divided memory' was introduced by Giovanni Contini in a book on local memories of a Nazi massacre in a Tuscan village in 1944. More recently, John Foot (2009) has applied this notion to a series of incidents that have marked the Italian nation since Unification.
4. For example Piero Bernocchi's *Dal '77 in poi* (1997). See also *1977* (1997) by historian and eye witness Marco Grispigni, republished in 2007 and the edited volume *Gli Autonomi* (2007). One exception is *Rose e pistole. 1977. Cronache di un anno vissuto con rabbia* (2007), an attempt by young journalist Stefano Cappellini to reconstruct the main events of 1977 in a more objective way.

5. My sources include, among other things, two local newspapers of opposite ideological conviction, the Communist party organ *L'Unità* and the conservative *Resto del Carlino*: these offered the most detailed – even if partial – reports of the events. The more neutral dailies *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della sera* did not have a local edition at the time of the events. The *Lotta Continua* newspaper of the radical Left was consulted and analysed separately. A number of interviews have been used where these offered illustrations of the Movement's relationship to memory, commemorative practices and identity issues.
6. Del Prete, D. 1987. Il Pci choccolato e diviso alla fine scelse lo Stato, *La Repubblica*.
7. Police forces furthermore closed down the popular free radio station Radio Alice, in an operation reminiscent of a military, anti-terrorist raid. Bifo and Gomma (2002).
8. The law of 1975 legitimised the use of arms by police forces in situations of public disorder. See Menneas (2003) and Grisogni (2007).
9. Canditi, R. 1977. Centre of Bologna devastated by the hooligans because of a student killed during clashes with police. *Resto del Carlino*, March 12.
10. Pavolini, L. 1977. Torbidi scopi. *L'Unità*, March 13.
11. Some of these intellectuals furthermore created a journal of 'counter-information', aimed at those who were left on the margins of the official left. Sughì, C. 2007. Pietro Bellasi: 'Il '77, un doloroso, perdente appello alla felicità'. *Resto del Carlino*, March 11; Bellasai (2009, 228); Pullega (2007); Hajek (2011).
12. Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso, 1979, 1–2.
13. In particular his father, Agostino Lorusso, engaged himself, relentlessly, in reminding the local community of the injustice done to his son, using the Association as an instrument through which to gain public support for his legal battle. Interview with Virginio Pilò, March 30, 2010.
14. Although Mauro Collina – a political companion of Lorusso – denied that there was any deliberate symbolic meaning behind the choice of this specific date, on some occasions Lorusso has been equated with partisan heroes. Interview with Mauro Collina, March 27, 2010; N. a. 1977. 25 aprile: tutti in piazza perché siano puniti gli assassini di Francesco. *Lotta Continua*, April 21; N. a. 1977. Anticomunismo e slogan provocatori. *L'Unità*, April 26.
15. English translation: 'The companions of Francesco Lorusso, here assassinated by the ferocious army of the regime, on 11 March 1977, know that his ideal of equality, liberty and love will survive every crime. Francesco is alive and fights along with us'. According to Collina, the *Lotta Continua* group persuaded the local police force to refrain from taking action against the unauthorised plaque, and its controversial text as well as the political and social climate of the time indeed suggest that some form of negotiation must have taken place. Interview with Mauro Collina, March 20, 2009.
16. Note, for example, that the grammatical subject of the text is not Lorusso, but his companions.
17. Topographic Commission, February 15, 1978, protocol 216.
18. Cavallini, M. 1979. 11 marzo due anni dopo: c'è chi vuole la verità e chi la violenza. *L'Unità*, March 12.
19. 'During these anti-institutional demonstrations we always tried to place that experience in the perspective of current, political events'. Interview with Virginio Pilò, March 17, 2010.
20. Interview with Virginio Pilò, March 17, 2010.
21. Interview with Mauro Collina, March 20, 2009.
22. *Pentitismo* is when members of criminal or terrorist organisations collaborate with the authorities by providing information that may lead to the arrest of other members of the organisation, in return for a reduced sentence. Ginsborg (2006, 519–20).
23. N. a. 1978. Si al confronto democratico no a violenza e terrorismo. *Il Resto del Carlino*, March 10; N. a. 1978. Un appello del comitato per l'ordine democratico. *L'Unità*, March 7; Ramina, B. 1978. Bologna: domani il movimento in piazza. *Lotta Continua*, March 10; Cerruti, G. 1978. A Bologna un corteo di 20 mila. Tensione, paura, occhi lucidi. *La Repubblica*, March 12–13.
24. N. a. 1979. Sono passati solo due anni, ma è tutto molto diverso. *Lotta Continua*, March 8; N. a. 1980. Anniversario di Lorusso. Tensione all'Università. *Resto del Carlino*, March 10; Baldoni and Provvigionato, 2009: 380–1.
25. N. a. 1983. L'11 marzo si discute d'amnistia. Movimento in corteo. *La Repubblica*, March 10.
26. Monteventi et al., 1987: 5; Bryson, 1987.
27. Meletti, J. 1987. Una serata al Q.bò, con il 'Movimento'. *L'Unità*, March 11.

28. Interview with Virginio Pilò, March 30, 2010.
29. Smargiassi, M. 1990. Lorusso, 13 anni dopo; Lorusso, un corteo e un'autocritica. *La Repubblica*, March 11–12.
30. N. a., 1997. Il giorno di Lorusso. *La Repubblica*, March 11; RAI national news, March 11, 1997.
31. Quadrelli, N. 1997. Espropri per celebrare il '77. Bologna, assalto a 'Feltrinelli'. *L'Unità*, March 12; N. a. 1997. Bologna, 'fantasmi' violenti per il '77. *Resto del Carlino*. March 12. Such politically motivated 'expropriations' were frequent in the 1970s and an important element of the public memory of 1970s political activism among young generations.
32. Former protest leader Diego Becchi in an interview. Bergonzoni, P. 1997. Sono psicolabili, come chi lancia i sassi. *Resto del Carlino*, March 13.
33. Naldi, E. 1997. Brigate Rosse, gli ex sbarcano in città. *Resto del Carlino*, March 5.
34. Smargiassi, M. 1997. Ecco gli autonomi del '97. *La Repubblica*, March 13.
35. Interview with Virginio Pilò, March 17, 2010.
36. Cardone, A. 2002. Lorusso e Giuliani, un unico dolore. *L'Unità*, March 12.
37. Favale, M. 2003. Oggi la celebrazione della morte di Lorusso. *L'Unità*, March 11.
38. Interview (email) with 'Mario Precario', March 25, 2010; emphasis added.
39. English translation: 'We won't forget Carlo and we won't forget Genoa. We shout that Francesco and Carlo live on in our battles'. From a photograph by 'Mario Precario'. Interview (email) with 'Mario Precario', March 22, 2010.
40. Similarly, the antagonist local group *Crash* continues the legacy of the protests of the late 1970s, by appealing to a variety of aspects of the Movement of '77, from the radical practices of *Autonomia Operaia* to the creative innovations in communication technologies of the 'ala creativa'. Hajek (2012).

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