

How to Transform a 'Place of Violence' into a 'Space of Collective Remembering': Italy and its Traumatic Past

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Abstract: *This paper seeks to analyse cultural trauma theories and their consequences as well as their potential applicability to cases of collective trauma where access to the legal arena in the rehabilitation process is not possible. When 'state terror' occurs, such as in Latin America, or, more arguably Italy, access to the legal arena is systematically denied through a variety of criminal strategies. In these cases, the cultural working through of trauma takes place on the aesthetic level. What are the consequences of this process both for the inscription of the crucial event in public discourse and for its relationship with justice? Moreover, how do aesthetic codes affect the public definition of justice and a collective understanding of what happened?*

Introduction¹

A new wave of international terrorism has emerged in the wake of the attacks of September 11, March 11 and July 7 affecting our common perceptions of risk, justice and everyday life. These attacks challenged existing ideas about the state, war, torture, prison, human rights and presented a host of new questions for intellectuals, social scientists, artists, politicians and common citizens to consider. The question of how to locate terror in the public space is a complex question but it can be analysed by considering the nature itself of the aesthetic codes used to transform a place of violence into a space of collective remembering. This process of transforming place is shaped by the performative nature of the narratives used in the different national contexts. The sensitive nature of these places can

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be analysed by looking at the social and public trajectories of the commemorative sites planned and constructed where the terror attack occurred. Cultural symbols and artistic codes become resources for articulating the struggles over the past that help shape national and collective identities, as Wagner-Pacifci and Schwartz's study on Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington (1991) has documented. In contemporary societies cultural codes are often asked to actively intervene in the public definition of "crucial events", such as wars, terrorist attacks, disasters. These events characteristically impact the social collective and usually requires a length period of public recuperation following such traumatic events. The cultural codes shape both the contemporary representation of a crucial event and its future public memory.

This article analyses cultural theories such as those offered by Alexander et al (2004). It will examine the consequences of these theories and their applicability to those cases where the access to the legal arena is not available for working through cultural trauma. Where there have been claims of "state terror", such as in Latin America and Italy, access to the legal arena is systematically denied through a variety of criminal strategies. In Italy, for example, there is a long history of state collusion between part of the government and criminal groups like the mafia and the camorra. This collusion has deeply affected the functioning of the legal system that normally represents the most important arena for the expression of collective trauma. When this mode of expression is denied, the expression of trauma is pushed outside the formal legal and political system and into an anti-system, historically artistic/cultural productions. In these cases, cultural elaboration of the trauma takes place on the aesthetic level and the memories culturally produced are very often counter-memories. What are the consequences of this process both for the inscription of the crucial event in the public discourse and its relation with justice? And moreover, how do the aesthetic codes affect the public definition of justice and the collective understanding of what happened?

Cultural Trauma in Theory

Over the course of the last two decades, the relationship between trauma and memory has been analysed by several scholars. (Caruth 1995, 1996; Laub 1995; Felman 1995)² *Cultural Trauma and*

2 The critique provided here of Alexander's cultural trauma model and the description of his theory provided here have previously been published in slightly amended form in: A L Tota, "Review Essay – Public Memory and Cultural Trauma," *Javanost – The Public* 13, no 3 (2006): 84-86.

Collective Memory edited by Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser and Sztompka (Alexander et al, 2004) represents one of the most successful attempts to draw a systematic theory that further investigates the relationship between memory, identity and public discourse. This work analyses the ways in which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic memories seek to serve as constitutive bases for the collective identity formation as well as the extent to which they succeed in doing so. Alternatively put, the cultural trauma model essentially concerns itself with how a traumatic past acquires meaning in the public discourse and can become a semantic resource for the definition of collective identities. Under what circumstances does this process occur? When and how does a traumatic event (such as a terrorist attack) forever mark collective memories and identities?

Along with *Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory*, Eyerman's 2001 study on the cultural trauma caused by slavery documents cultural trauma theories' relevance. It is Smelser, in his contribution to Alexander et al's work, who provides a useful formal definition of cultural trauma:

...a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation that is a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions. (Smelser, 2004: 44)

Alexander, along similar lines, argues that, "cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways." (Alexander, 2004: 1) When one examines *Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory* as a whole, two key hypotheses emerge. Firstly, there is the idea that collective trauma is a historical construct and not a naturally occurring phenomenon. The second hypothesis purports that there is a great difference between individual and social trauma. This latter point is something which is directly addressed by Smelser:

... a cultural trauma differs greatly from a psychological trauma in terms of the mechanisms that establish and sustain it. The mechanisms associated with psychological trauma are the intra-psychic dynamics of defence, adaptation, coping, and working through; the mechanisms at the cultural level are mainly those of social agents and contending groups. (Smelser, 2004: 38-39)

When it is argued that trauma is cultural, what does this truly

mean? There exists a gap between an event and its subsequent representation, a discrepancy or empty space, which can be conceived of as *the trauma process*. For trauma to grow beyond the individual level and emerge at a cultural one, a new 'master narrative' must be established successfully by a carrier group that, "projects the trauma claim to the audience-public." (Alexander, 2004.:12) There are four questions which must be addressed by a successful process of collective representation of the traumatic event: (1) The nature of the pain; (2) The nature of the victim; (3) The relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience and; (4) Attribution of responsibility. The cultural trauma model also identifies and describes six institutional arenas where the meanings of trauma are socially constructed: religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific, mass media, and state bureaucracy.

In short, the trauma process links to the creation of public memory from trauma. It is argued here that the trauma process influences collective memories and national identities, especially to the extent that the trauma is inscribed in public discourse. The analytical categories devised to analyse the functioning of the trauma process can also usefully investigate the formation of a public discourse around a traumatic past. Still, the cultural trauma theory also raises questions warranting further investigation. In some national contexts access to one or more key institutional arenas may be systematically denied leaving aesthetic codes are the only ones available to represent traumatic events (as we will see in the empirical studies mentioned in this article). What might be the consequences of such systematic exclusion of, for example, the legal or the media arena for the public sphere? What role does power play in this model? For Alexander, different social networks offer different levels of distributional access to material and symbolic resources. He argues, "the constraints imposed by institutional arenas are mediated by the uneven distribution of material resources and the social networks that provide differential access to them." (Alexander, 2004: 21)

Critiquing and Applying the Cultural Trauma Model to Italian Terror

One key remaining question is the extent to which the theory can be generalised for, "it would be a serious misunderstanding if trauma theory were restricted in its reference to Western social life." (Alexander, 2004: 24) Alexander offers the example of the rape of Nanking as a case where the collective memories never fully extended beyond China. The lack of recognition of traumas and the subsequent failure to inscribe their lessons in the public sphere depend in these

cases on:

an inability to carry through...the trauma process. In Japan and China, just as in Rwanda, Cambodia and Guatemala, claims have certainly been made for the central relevance of these 'distant sufferings' ... But for both social structural and cultural reasons, carrier groups have not emerged with the resources, authority, or interpretive competence to powerfully disseminate these trauma claims. (Alexander, 2004: 27)

But is it useful to analyse the lack of public discourse in relation to the rape of Nanking in such a way? Though Alexander describes his theory as 'middle-range,' his conclusion seems to contradict this claim:

Collective traumas have no geographical or cultural limitations. The theory of cultural trauma applies, without prejudice, to any and all instances when societies have, or have not, constructed and experienced cultural traumatic events, and to their efforts to draw, or not to draw, the moral lessons that can be said to emanate from them. (Alexander, 2004: 27)

The potential for application of this theory to non-Western societies remains uncertain. When looking at non-Western societies, and even some Western ones (such as South Italy), it may be misleading to speak of, "*The inability to carry through the trauma process.*" (Tota, 2006: 86) In order for the trauma process to emerge a carrier group needs also to have national and/or collective will in the public arena to deal with the public meaning of that trauma. For example, in some African societies the destiny of the entire population is decided outside the national context and depends on the international exploitation of the national resources. Would it be possible in this type of context for a carrier group of collective memory to emerge and successfully compete with the instigated amnesia provoked by the perpetrators of the trauma?

A useful example is the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Nigerian writer arrested and hanged in 1995 by the military government of general Sani Abacha. The collective work on this case documents the extent to which, and under what circumstances, civil society can (or cannot) intervene in Nigerian national public discourse. In 1996, Jenny Green, a lawyer at the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York brought forth a lawsuit against Shell to demonstrate the involvement of the multinational oil company in the execution of Saro-Wiwa. In 2009 Shell agreed, in an out-of-court settlement, to pay \$15.5 million (11.1 million euro) in compensation to victims' families. International solidarity facilitated collective work in this case. To summarise in other words, civil society cannot fully affect the public discourse in countries where violence and injustice prevail and citizens risk their life if they stand in

opposition to existing sources of power.

For a victim to become an active interpreter in the process of constructing public memory of trauma (taken to mean his/her discursive construction *within the public sphere*), he or she must first to stop being a victim. In other words, the specific trauma must be terminated, and the condition of victimhood must cease. Nevertheless, in some national contexts the level of violence is such that the victims of a particular cultural trauma continue endlessly to be victims. This happens not only in African countries, but also in the city of Naples. The violence has never stopped. In such circumstances, it is difficult to imagine that the victims can be usefully analysed by applying the concept of 'carrier group.'

According to Alexander this concept is one of the elements of the trauma process, the others being the audience and the situation. (Alexander, 2004: 12) The carrier group is the speaker in the trauma process and its main goal is "to project the trauma claim to the audience public," by using, "the particularities of the historical situation, the symbolic resources at hand, and the constraints and opportunities provided by institutional structures." (Alexander, 2004: 12) The fact that the theory falters when applied to these cases is a cause for reflection: it seems that the 'carrier group' can rarely emerge in such circumstances. This perhaps means that we are using a concept whose explanatory capacity varies according to the context in which it is applied. The effective processing of a cultural trauma entails the possibility of constructing public knowledge on that traumatic past. Public memory is the memory of the public sphere. But, is the concept of public sphere useful for analysis of the genocide in Rwanda or for the analysis of the relation between camorra and citizens in Naples? Only to the extent that we can say that democracy does not freely exist in there, that its civil society has been annihilated and its intellectuals exterminated. In short, a Habermasian public sphere is not only of little help in understanding what has happened in Rwanda, but also what has happened when mafia (or 'cosa nostra') and camorra are at work in South Italy.

The mafia is a criminal organization originating in Sicily to indicate an organised criminal network sharing a common code of conduct and organizational. In the 80s Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, two Italian magistrates who would both be murdered by mafia some years later, started a campaign against 'cosa nostra,' arresting Tommaso Buscetta, a mafioso who became an informant in

exchange for protection. Thanks to Buscetta's statements it was possible to document the infiltration of the mafia in the state and the Italian judiciary. In a second phase, 'mafia' has become a generic term for any organised criminal network with similarities in structure, methods and interests to the original Sicilian organisations. The camorra, on the other hand, is a criminal organization, very similar to 'cosa nostra' that originated in the region of Campania in South Italy. Naples, the capital of the region, serves as a hub of its activity. It is among the largest and oldest criminal organizations in Italy, dating back to the 18th century. Compared to the mafia, whose structure is pyramidal, the camorra's organization structure is more horizontal than vertical, with individual clans acting largely autonomously.

One of the main criminal strategies of the camorra consists of becoming the preferred interlocutors of local politicians and public officials. The camorra clans assist and protect their clients against the local authorities. Infiltration, especially within local government, is very deep. Due to the complexity of this context, civil society in Sicily or in Naples cannot intervene effectively in the public discourse because citizens are under threat. In intervention they risk their own life and that of their family. In very specific sub-national contexts such as urban Naples, which is dominated by the camorra, it is difficult to apply the cultural trauma models and the concept of 'carrier group' as pointed out in Alexander's theory. As a matter of fact, in this case violence needs to stop and victims need to stop of being victims in order to work through the trauma process. But here the camorra does not allow it and the consequences are the public denial of a collective trauma. In Naples the citizens who decide to engage in this public discourse of the past risk camorra retaliations. The cultural trauma theories in all other cases instead prove efficacious. In light of these considerations, a reasonable proposal seems to be that of having cultural trauma theory converse with part of the post-colonial debate, so as to avoid generalizations that, far from confirming this important theory, instead weaken it.

Terrorism in Italy

Since 1994 the inscription of cultural trauma in the Italian public discourse has been extensively studied in several pieces of qualitative research. (Tota, 2005a; Tota, 2005b; Tota 2010) In relation to the specific theoretical case proposed at the very beginning of this text, the inscription in the public discourse of a cultural trauma in cases where access to the legal and the political arenas is denied, two different

cases will be here considered: (1) State terror; and (2) Imperfect silence and the public denial of a terrorist attack. These cultural traumas have a direct impact on democracy, especially for terrorist attacks where the state is somehow considered guilty.

In earlier research I have offered a classification scheme for terrorist attacks which complements that of Tilly (2005). (Tota, 2005a) It is, on one hand, it based on the degree to which public representation of the state changes as a side effect of terrorist attacks. On the other hand it is based on the number and diversity of the contrasting versions of the event recounted by the public:

... the first variable may vary along the following public perceptions of the role of the state: a) state as guilty of not being able to defend its citizens; b) state as guilty of not being able to prosecute terrorists; c) state as guilty of having no political and institutional willingness to pursue the terrorists; d) state as mandatory of the terror attacks." (Tota, 2005a: 57).

The term terrorism can refer to a range very different situations, from September 11 to cases of State Terror in Italy (Tota, 2003) and Latin America. (Oliverio and Lauderdale, 2005) This highlights the fact, something stressed by Tilly, that models based in the 9/11 attacks cannot be considered inherently generalisable, for the bulk of attacks the world over do not share key characteristics with those particular attacks. (Tilly, 2005)

The second variable, instead, varies along this continuum: a) low conflict over the public version of the past (the case of September 11 2001); b) medium conflict (Madrid 11 March, first attributed to the Basque separatist terrorists (ETA) and secondly to Al Qaeda); c) high conflict over the public version of the past (the Italian attacks in 1980). The first variable makes us focus on the potential counter-memories (i.e. public memories constructed by and in society and contrasting with the "official version" provided by the state). The second one, instead, introduces the problem of the time perspective. (Tota 2005a, 57).

Here the focus is on the processes that can, and have, lead to the more or less official attribution of an attack to an identified group of terrorists.

The First Case: 'State Terror' in Italy (1969-1993) and the Hypothesis of CIA Involvement

The period of modern Italian history extending from 1969 to 1993 is characterised by a perception of the state as unable to defend its citizens, lacking the political and institutional willingness to pursue terrorists and, in some cases, as the instigating terror attacks. Violence

and terror were used during this period as political strategies with which to obtain political consensus in a process commonly referred to as 'the strategy of tension'. Access to the legal arena has been frequently denied and numerous terrorists have not yet been prosecuted. In many cases even after decades there have not been any convictions. Terrorist attacks have entered the public discourse only through their cultural depictions (films, theatre productions, exhibitions, public concerts). In light of Alexander's model (2004) it can be argued that the cultural process has been enacted in the artistic arena.

Terrorist organizations have been very active in Italy since 1970, with numerous attacks resulting in many deaths including mass casualties caused by bombings in railway stations, in the central squares of cities. There is a long list of such terrorist attacks, but most Italian citizens have forgotten this chapter in Italy's past. As Dickie and Foot emphasise:

The extent and duration of the period of the *stragi* in postwar Italy have no real precedent in contemporary Europe. The series of peacetime outrages that marked the 1969-84 period cannot be compared with the effects of various coups or civil wars in other southern European countries. Only in Italy did the "strategy of tension" last for so long and cause so much damage within a democratic system. Only in Italy do many of these outrages remain a mystery to this day. Few of the protagonists of the postwar *stragi* ... have ever been convicted. Many were not even tried. (Dickie and Foot, 2002: 46)

In the Italian case, 'strategy of tension' has come to denote the past three decades of internal terrorist attacks in Italy. Yet, as alluded to above, behind this veneer lies a strategy of terror and violence pursued by an extremist part of the 'democratic' state and secret services in order to gain and maintain a political consensus unobtainable through democratic elections. Surprisingly, despite the frequency of terrorist attacks, there has been a forgetting of this recent past. Numerous Italian citizens, especially younger ones, cannot remember key details of these tragedies – dates, victims, location. *Cuore*, a satirical magazine, published a series of student essays on the massacre in Piazza Fontana (Milan, December 12 1969) in 1992. It was evident that the majority of these students had no idea of what happened only twenty-three years previously (Foot, 2002).

Yet the real problem is not forgetfulness, because as Foot argues in his study on the explosion in Piazza Fontana, "you cannot forget something you have never learned." (Foot, 2002: 276) The Italian public lacks understanding of the country's recent history. Since 1970 these deaths and massacres have not been included in the nation's public

discourse. This absence of collective awareness has been the 'natural' consequence of various forms of amnesia instigated in the past and today. It is interesting to note that at the international level there is also a lack of awareness of there being any terrorism of this kind in Italy. In the international public debate on contemporary Italian history only the crimes of Red Brigades and mafia have been properly inscribed. Why is this the case? One hypothesis, often drawn but never proven, is that the 'strategy of tension' has been made possible in the Italian context due to a degree of cooperation between a deviant part of the Italian secret service and the activities of the international secret services, especially a deviant part of the American secret services (CIA). There would be an analogy between what happened in the 70s years in South America (for example, the case Salvador Allende in Chile) and Italy, even if in the Italian case the democratic state has been maintained. During the second term of office of Democratic President Bill Clinton, the CIA acknowledged having played a role in Chilean politics prior to the coup, but its degree of involvement is still debated. Perhaps in the future the CIA will also acknowledge having played a role in Italian politics during the strategy of tension.

Aldo Moro, Prime Minister of Italy from 1963 to 1968, was kidnapped from Red Brigades on March 16 1968 and assassinated after 55 days of captivity. In an extract from the report of the Red Brigades on their interrogation during Moro's imprisonment, he underlines the role of associate countries in the strategy of tension:

The so-called strategy of tension had the purpose, although fortunately not attained, to put Italy in the tracks of the "normality" "after the events of '68 and the so-called 'hot autumn'. It can be assumed that the associated countries interested in various ways to our policy and therefore interested in sponsoring a certain political address were somehow involved through their services. (Commissione Stragi, *Memoriale Aldo Moro*, 2, 360).

On November 14, 1974 Pier Paolo Pasolini, an Italian intellectual, writer, filmmaker and poet published a long article under the headline, "What is this Golpe? I know" in *Corriere della Sera*, one of Italy's leading newspaper in Italy. It has been considered his death sentence. Pasolini was beaten to death on November 2, 1975 on the beach at Ostia, near Rome. Giuseppe Pelosi, a seventeen-year-old hustler, was arrested. He confessed to Pasolini's murder. On May 7, 2005 Giuseppe Pelosi retracted his confession, which he said was made under the threat of violence to his family. This is the part of Pasolini's article, where he mentions the role of CIA in the Italian strategy of tension:

I know. I know the names of those responsible for what has been called a coup (and what was in fact a series of coups set up as a power protection

system). I know the names of those responsible for the bloodbath of Milan on December 12th 1969. I know the names of those responsible for the atrocities of Brescia and Bologna in the early months of 1974. I know the names of the group of powerful people who, thanks to the CIA's help ... have first created (besides failing miserably) an anti-Communist crusade, to buffer the '68 and later, again with the help and inspiration of the CIA, have recovered a fascist virginity to reverse the disaster of the 'referendum' ... I know the names of those who, between one church Mass and another, have given orders to, and guaranteed the political protection of, old Generals (kept in reserve, ready for a coup d'état), of young neo-fascists, or rather neo-nazis (to create a real base of anti-Communist tension) and lastly of common criminals ... I know all the names and I know what they are guilty of (attacks on institutions and public bloodbaths). I know. But I have no proof. I have not one clue. Probably - if American power will allow it - maybe deciding 'diplomatically' to grant to another democracy the same that American democracy has granted about Nixon - these names sooner or later will be revealed. I know because I am an intellectual, a writer who tries to follow what is happening, to read everything that is written, to imagine things nobody admits to knowing or things that are left unsaid. I link distant facts, I put together the shattered and scrambled pieces of a whole, coherent political picture that puts logic back where arbitrariness, madness and mystery seem to reign ... After all, it is not that difficult to reconstruct the truth about what has been happening in Italy since 1968... (Pier Paolo Pasolini, "What is this coup? I know," *Corriere della Sera*, November 14, 1974).

During the trial for Pasolini's murder Guido Calvi, lawyer of the prosecution, said:

Why did Pasolini cease to exist? Indeed, one does not need to be an intellectual or a storyteller to acquire the awareness that drove Pasolini's pen that day. Millions of Italians "know", and every day in city squares, factories, schools, everywhere, they express their dissent, fruit of their knowledge. In the same way, we know who are the real instigators and the "ideal" perpetrators of the assassination of Pasolini, as they stand behind the scenes of this apologue. And the crowd of romans full of anguish and rage who came to say their last goodbye in Campo de' Fiori, they knew. That crowd, so heterogeneous, so "roman", so popular and therefore so "unreliable", they knew and they know. But like us, they have no proof. Only a few clues. (part of the discourse held by Guido Calvi during the trial on April 24, 1976, published by www.pasolini.net)

Boschetti and Ciammitti (2010) in their book on the Bologna terrorist attack explicitly propose the hypothesis of there being a direct involvement of international secret services, mainly CIA. According to the authors, during the strategy of tension in Italy the NAR (Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari), a neo-fascist terroristic group found guilty for many attacks (including that in Bologna railway station on August 2, 1980 which killed 85 persons) have played a central role as point of connection between the Italian secret services, the CIA and a group of Italian politicians who wanted to prevail in Italy's right-wing political

parties, even through a coup.

On December 7 1970 there was a failed coup d'état in Italy known as the *Golpe Borghese*, derived from the name of the fascist Prince Junio Valerio Borghese who was its main organizer. It took until March 18 1971 for the coup attempt to become public knowledge, thanks to an article in the left-wing journal *Paese sera* entitled: "Subversive plan against the Republic: far-right plot discovered." It has to be noted that December 7 is the anniversary of the Pearl Harbour attack. (December 7, 1941) Probably the plan of the coup in its final phase envisaged the involvement of US and NATO warships on alert in the Mediterranean sea, but this remains a hypothesis.

The most detailed study on the role of NATO's secret armies and terrorism in Western Europe comes courtesy of Daniele Ganser, a Swiss historian who has investigated the role of a 'stay-behind' paramilitary organization with the official aim of countering a possible Soviet invasion of Europe. (Ganser, 2005) This organization has been called 'Gladio' and its origin can be traced in the alleged 'anti-communist NATO protocols' committing the various secret services of NATO member states to prevent communist parties from coming to power in Western Europe by any means. According to Ganser, CIA director Allen Dulles was one of the key people instituting Gladio with the CIA having financed most Gladio operations. During the Cold War era this paramilitary organization was charged with limiting Soviet influence within Europe.

In Italy the existence and the activities of Gladio were firstly revealed on October 24 1980 by Giulio Andreotti, an Italian politician of the Christian Democracy party. Andreotti, who died in 2013, served seven times as Prime Minister including during Aldo Moro's kidnapping and assassination by the Red Brigades. He also served eight times as Minister of Defense. On that occasion he defined Gladio as a structure of defense, information and safety. On his very controversial life a film has been devoted: "Il Divo" directed by Paolo Sorrentino (2008). This film documents the deep influence of Giulio Andreotti on the Italian recent past with a special focus on the strategy of tension and the relation between mafia and state. However, the existence of Gladio in Europe had been already revealed by William Colby (1978), CIA director from 1973 to 1975, in a volume dedicated to his life in CIA. This is the very complex national and international context that can be useful to better understand the terrorist attacks in Italy from 1969 until 1993. There are no direct proofs, but several clues that make

the hypothesis of CIA's involvement plausible. Perhaps the day of an official acknowledgement by CIA in relation to its role in Italy during the strategy of tension will soon arrive. American and European citizens deserve to know the truth.

In the following table the terrorist attacks of the strategy of tension period are listed. However, in this list the names of the perpetrators are missing. This is because in most cases they are still unknown.

Table 1: Terrorist attacks in Italy during the "Strategy of Tension " period, 1969- 1993

Date	Place	Number of Victims
12 Dec 1969	Milan (piazza Fontana)	16 dead, 84 injured
22 July 1970	Gioia Taura (train)	6 dead, 72 injured
31 May 1972	Peteano di Sagrado	3 dead, 1 injured
17 May 1973	Milan	4 dead, 76 injured
28 May 1974	Brescia (piazza della Loggia)	8 dead, 103 injured
4 Aug 1974	San Benedetto Val di Sambro, Italicus	12 dead, 44 injured
27 June 1980	Ustica Airplane, DC9	81 dead
2 Aug 1980	Bologna Railway Station	85 dead, 200 injured
23 Dec 1984	San Benedetto Val di Sambro, Train 904	15 dead, 267 injured
27 May 1993	Florence (Georgofili)	5 dead, 41 injured
27 July 1993	Milan (Palestro)	5 dead, 14 injured

But not all acts of terrorism have been forgotten in Italy. There are several differences in the ways in which these crucial events have been inscribed or, otherwise dealt with, in Italian public discourse. However, notwithstanding the marked differences, one discerns a common pattern that can be taken as a concise representation of what happened. In all cases, the trauma process (i.e. the gap between the event and its public representation) could not be carried out in the legal and in the political arenas, but only in the aesthetic ones, because the Italian secret services have systematically misled the investigation of the judiciary. When a magistrate was about to discover the truth, the trial was moved to a new city. So a new magistrate had to take up the case and in fact start the investigation from the beginning. This was, for example, the case of the investigations related to the bombing in Milan, Piazza Fontana (December 12, 1969). The trial was moved from Milan to Rome. Other magistrates were murdered because their investigations were too efficient and effective. For

example, neo-fascist terrorists murdered the Italian magistrate Mario Amato in June 23, 1980 (a few weeks before the Bologna massacre of 2 August 1980). When he was assassinated, he was investigating the role of the NAR (black/fascist terrorists) and their relationship with the Italian and international secret services. He died before being able to reveal what he had discovered.

This prompts the following question: what are the main consequences of this process for a democracy? The public gains its knowledge of the recent Italian past from films and exhibitions, such as the case with *Romanzo di una strage* a film related to the bombing in Piazza Fontana directed by Marco Tullio Giordana in 2012.³ In other words, in order to understand past events in their country, Italian citizens must go to theatre, museums or the cinema. However at the end of it all, they were 'just' at theatre or at the cinema or in a museum. Put otherwise, public knowledge of this particular past has been produced through the aesthetic mode of production. This public knowledge has a 'degree of truth' not comparable, for example, with that of traditional historical or political discourse. In the end, citizens will be induced to think that 'perhaps it tells the truth, but it is only a film.' Thus reaffirmed is 'a conspiracy narrative' in regard to those traumas, because the degree of reality produced through aesthetic codes is insufficient to compete with other narratives in the nation's public discourse. Moreover, in most cases, the cultural memories generated in relation to the terrorist attacks are 'counter-memories'. They are sometimes marginal voices, sometimes they can become hegemonic ones, but they are nevertheless counter-memories. (Foucault, 1977) When in a democracy a large portion of the recent past can only be recounted as 'counter-memory,' this is a fact which is likely to have a major impact on the collective identity of the entire nation.

However, despite all the limitations mentioned, commemorative rituals in Italy are opportunities for civil and political society to contribute to the values of democracy. They are also significant for the hegemony process, in that they literally make democracy possible. Because in Italy the cultural trauma process can be carried out *at least* in the artistic arena, it is possible to reaffirm the ideal of belonging to a democratic state. Hence, ultimately, notwithstanding the above-mentioned limits, the cultural forms of these controversial pasts contribute to making democracy possible in Italy.

3 The film *Romanzo di una strage* (2012) also outlines the hypothesis of the relationship between NATO, international secret services, Italian ones and the NAR (Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari).

Imperfect Silence and the Public Denial of the Event: The Christmas Attack, San Benedetto Val di Sambro, 1984

On December 23rd 1984 in the Appennine base tunnel, a bomb on the 904 express train from Napoli to Milan was detonated, killed 17 and wounded 267.⁴ The location of this bombing was close to that of the Italicus express bombing ten years previously (on 4 August 1974). This is a case of great interest because it is the only one in which the Supreme Court has recognised the mafia's and camorra's involvement. We can also define it as a case of 'imperfect forgetting'. In Italy it is remembered as the 'Christmas Attack' because it took place two days before Christmas, when many Italians were travelling from North to South Italy, or from South to North, in order to be with their families for the holidays. But those on the 904 express would not reach their final destinations. Initially 15 of them died, and the toll then rose to 17; the number of injured was 267. The Association of Relatives of the Victims of the Attack on Train 904, founded on 17 March 1985 in Naples, describes the massacre thus on its website:

Those who organized the explosion, aimed at killing innocent citizens. Everything was planned to cause the highest number of victims as possible: the Christmas holiday, the power of the explosion, the timer of the bomb regulated in such a way to blow up inside the tunnel in coincidence with the transit of another train on the opposite track. Only the prompt reaction of the driver who immediately stopped the line avoided a more dramatic disaster. The bomb on the Christmas train was an anomalous act of terrorism, where more clearly the extension of criminal logics, their reciprocal connections may be observed. It is a terrorist act where the shadow of the Mafia is behind the terrorist organization. The enemy is multilateral and hidden, based on many members both inside and outside the country. (Associations of Relatives of the Victims, Train 904, 1985, www.treno904.org)

Since 1984, the public remembrances of this massacre have not become a stable cultural form because of a lack of visibility. There are several complex reasons for this: (1) after almost three decades (1984–2013) there has been no serious endeavour to provide justice and truth to the survivors and their relatives; (2) the state has been deemed guilty of secretly mandating the attack, and (3) this past has been contested. However, the most significant feature of this memory has

⁴ The following two sections of text summarize the results of a study on the public memory surrounding the terrorist attack in San Benedetto Val di Sambro (December 23 1984) published previously in amended form in Tota (2005a). However, these date are here used to document the impossibility in the case of Naples to take for granted a free civil society and a free public sphere where to project the trauma claim. In other terms, this example is used to document the inapplicability of the cultural trauma model to these contexts where the democratic rights of citizens are suspended.

been its invisibility both nationally and locally. The massacre on Train 904 occurred only 29 years ago during a period of peace in a European democracy. How can it be forgotten? My earlier case study on the attack (Tota, 2005a) documents how an extremely powerful lobby jointly representing the camorra, terrorist organizations, and political powers has systematically disrupted public memory of this event. But there are additional reasons for the cultural amnesia, and they partly concern the fragmentation of the commemorative processes.

Since 1984, the victims of Train 904 have been commemorated in a highly disjointed manner: a number of ceremonies are held during the year and in different areas of the country. But instead of inscribing memory of the Christmas Attack firmly in the public national discourse, these ceremonies have generated ambiguity and confusion. The plurality of the ceremonies has unintentionally contributed to the event's invisibility because it fragments the nationwide attention to the attack. It is so fragmented that it is even difficult to be properly described. This fragmentation is linked to the fact that there are three different terrorist attacks partially commemorated together:

1. The Bologna Train Station Bombing: On the morning of 2 August, 1980 there was a terrorist bombing at the Central Station in Bologna. The attack killed 85 people and wounded more than 200. The attack has been materially attributed to the neo-fascist *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (NAR). It is commemorated on 2 August every year.
2. The *Italicus* Attack: In the early hours of 4 August 1974, a bomb exploded on The *Italicus* Express night train on which, killing 12 people and injuring 48. The train was travelling from Rome to Munich and it was near San Benedetto Val di Sambro when the explosion occurred at approximately 01:23. Former Primer Minister of Italy Aldo Moro was on the train on 3 August, but disembarked before the explosion. Here it is important to note that Aldo Moro was kidnapped some years later on March 16, 1978, by the Red Brigades, a Marxist terrorist organization, and killed after 55 days of captivity. This bombing is commemorated every year together with the bombing of Bologna on 2 August, with a train departing from Bologna immediately after the commemorative ceremony for the victims of Bologna.
3. The Train 904 Bombing/The Christmas Massacre: On December 23, 1984 a bomb detonated on the 904 Naples-Milan express while it was in the Apennine Base Tunnel. A total of 17 were killed and the attack wounded a further 267. The explosion

occurred quite close to the site of the Italicus attack ten years prior. The victims of the Train 904 are commemorated with the following ceremonies:

- a. August 2 (annually) – The anniversary of the 1980 Bologna attack, the Train 904 attack is commemorated together with this attack and the Italicus attack in San Benedetto Val di Sambro. This commemoration takes place at the railway station of San Benedetto Val di Sambro, the station nearest to the site of the explosion located 40 kilometres from Bologna.
- b. December 23 (annually) – Small ceremony at the railway station of San Benedetto Val di Sambro.
- c. December 23 (annually) – Small ceremony at the Central station in Naples, from which the train had departed.

There are several factors that can explain this fragmentation. First, the explosion occurred deep within the tunnel at a place very difficult place to reach on foot. As a consequence, the commemorative ceremony cannot be held in its most symbolic location but has had to be moved to San Benedetto, the nearest railway. Because many victims were residents of Naples, it seemed unreasonable to organize the ceremony somewhere so anonymous and distant for them (a small railway station in northern Italy) rather than at the central railway station in Naples. Yet this solution was problematic as well, because in Naples the camorra obstructs every attempt to commemorate the victims properly (as we shall see). Moreover, the San Benedetto commemoration ceremony on 2 August has produced only a sort of 'side' visibility, for it is a joint commemoration of three different attacks with national attention entirely concentrated on the victims of the Bologna attacks. These are victims who are remembered in their city in exactly the place where the explosion occurred, on the exact anniversary of the attack, and by exactly the same citizens who ran into the station after the explosion, gave first aid to the injured, and helped the firemen to extract the bodies from the rubble. As part of this commemoration, a special train leaves Bologna station for San Benedetto Val di Sambro at exactly 11:15. At the end of this 20 minute journey, wreaths are laid on those plaques dedicated to the memory of the Icarus and Train 904 bombings.

Train 904: The Commemorative Ceremonies and the Cultural Amnesia at Work

As mentioned, the attack on Train 904 is remembered during the commemoration of the Bologna bombing every 2 August. However, the focus here is on the two other commemorations of the terrorist attack on Train 904, those held on 23 December in San Benedetto Val di Sambro (the nearest railway station to the place of the explosion which occurred inside a tunnel) and Naples (the railway station from which the train 904 had departed that fateful evening in 1984).

The San Benedetto Val di Sambro Commemoration (23 December)

The annual ceremony in San Benedetto is held in the small square outside the station. A small plaque has been installed for the victims of the 904 Train massacre. The entire ceremony lasts twenty minutes. Every year with the voice of a railroad worker opens the ceremony. Amplified by a loudspeaker, the worker recalls the names of the victims of the bombing and invites those present to observe a minute of silence. A locomotive whistle is sounded to begin the moment of silence with a second whistle marking its closure 60 seconds later. The banners of the municipalities, which surround the monument to the Italicus victims, are raised in tribute to the victims. Soldiers present at the ceremony stand to attention, and each year the local priest of San Benedetto reads a different Bible passage in commemoration of the victims. Then the victims' relatives lay the wreaths near the plaque. Political and institutional representatives take part in the ceremony, yet they never address those present. The mayor of San Benedetto always makes the effort to attend, as do the presidents of the regional and provincial authorities, representatives of the Jewish community in Bologna and the presidents of the other victims' associations. The victims of Train 904 have been commemorated every 23 December since 1985. The ceremony concludes with a large buffet lunch offered by the mayor to all present and served in the station bar. In San Benedetto the only authority that speaks is the Church. Another distinctive feature of the Val di Sambro ceremony is the rhetorical device of the railroad worker's voice, which is broadcast from a loudspeaker to mark the beginning of the commemorative ceremony. At the specific request of the victims' families, the victims of the Italicus attack are also remembered in this ceremony.

The Naples Central Station Commemoration (23 December)

The participation by citizens in both ceremonies is invariably scant, but this is especially so in Naples. Local and national newspapers publish few reports on the event, with it never gracing the front pages. Since 1994 (a full ten years after the attacks), a commemorative ceremony has been held in Naples' Central Station. This is a brief ceremony and it takes place at the platform from which Train 904. However, until 23 December 2003 there were no symbols of the bombing within the station. For the first nine years of these ceremonies, there was little option but to lay the wreaths on the ground at the very end of the platform. After many difficulties, in 2002 the Victims' Relatives Association was able to finally manage to have a commemorative plaque installed at the Central Station. It was unveiled by Rosa Russo Jervolino, at the time the city's newly-elected mayor. After waiting for 19 years, this plaque remains the only tribute to the victims. It is also the only official symbol of the bombing granted to the victims and their relatives by the municipality of Naples.

There is evidence that the organization of any form of commemoration or any attempt to construct legitimate symbols of this memory in Naples clash with the Camorra's determination to have the bombings forgotten. Only seven people attended the mass celebrated to commemorate the victims on the third anniversary of the attacks. For the following year (1988), Riccardo Meschini, the president of the Victims' Relatives Association, who was injured alongside his wife in the explosion, attempted to organize a concert of sacred music in the local cathedral as part of commemorations. At first, Monsignor Graziosi assisted the association, but ultimately Cardinal Giordano called the concert off. At the time Giuseppe Misso, a prominent Camorra boss, was on trial in Florence for the attacks and there were fears of retaliation for the cathedral's participation, especially given that the cathedral borders the Forcella neighborhood controlled by Misso's clan. Though the Victims' Relatives Association sought the support of priests at other churches in different neighbourhoods around the city, they all refused to help. Among those churches approached were: San Gennaro Cathedral, San Francesco di Paola, San Ferdinando, Santa Maria degli Angeli, and San Giacomo degli Spagnoli. While there was never a concert, there were several articles published in local and national newspapers that accused Cardinal Giordano of collusion with the Camorra. When interviewed by a journalist, he denied the charge claiming that:

Personally I have never received any request from the Victims' Relatives

Association concerning use of the Cathedral for a commemorative concert, nor do I know of any request made to the parish priests of other churches in Naples . . . As regards the use of churches for non-religious purposes, the dispositions set out by the Pope are very strict . . . Obviously the decisions of the priests have complied with those criteria and any different interpretation of what happened is tendentious and bizarre. (// *Mattino*, 24 December 1988)

On 24 December 1988, one of the most important daily newspapers in Italy, the *Corriere della Sera*, published an article headlined "The Church is Afraid of the Camorra. The commemorative concert organised in memory of the dead on Train 904 will not take place because of the denial of the parish priests." // *Tempo* on the same day also published an article about the situation under the headline of "No church in Naples is willing to commemorate the attacks. Too much fear of reprisals by Misso's Clan." While it would be easy to misrepresent the Catholic Church's role in opposing both the camorra and the Mafia across much of southern Italy, it also needs to be remembered that over the past 30 years this courageous defense of the citizenry has led to the death of numerous priests at the hands of the camorra and similar organizations.

This is only one example, though an emblematic one. The list of individual decisions, events, and activities that over the past 30 years have constructed a situation of invisible memory is very long indeed. The catalogue of inaction by local institutions, silences and humiliates victims and their relatives, unequivocally demonstrating that 'imperfect oblivion' requires constant work: All initiatives must be blocked, all witnesses silenced and all symbols destroyed. On 5 March 1991, the life sentences given to Pippo Calò, Guido Cercola, Giuseppe Misso, Luigi Cardone, Giulio Pirozzi, and Alfonso Galeotta were suspended by Judge Corrado Carnevale. The municipality of Naples has remained silent, but numerous posters exulting Giuseppe Misso's release appeared on the streets.

There is another example which can be considered emblematic of the emergence of this cultural amnesia: the history of the plaque installed in Casoria, a town near Naples. Among the victims of the Train 904 attack was an entire family: Angela (33 years old), Anna (nine), Giovanni (four), and Nicola de Simone (40). Because Nicola worked at the National Electricity Board (ENEL), the ENEL trade union endeavoured for many years to organize commemorative occasions. Moreover, Angela's sister, Titta Calvanese, worked at the primary school, and the teachers of that school organised several initiatives. In late January 1985 (one month after the attack), the mayor of Casoria

unveiled a bronze plaque bearing the names of all the victims in the main square near city hall. By 2004, the plaque had become dirty and neglected. In interview with the author, Titta Calvanese commented, "Luckily the plaque is not on the ground; otherwise they would park on it." The 'imperfect' oblivion into which this attack has fallen cannot be blamed on other processes. It is due, not simply to the inertia of citizens but to their fear of retaliation following on from the logic of terrorism itself. In many cases of state-sanctioned terror, the battle against terrorism must be constantly fought in civil society. It is a war - a war of symbols and a war against a 'disculture' that must be changed.

Still, the most interesting case is related to that small commemorative plaque the Central Station in Naples previously mentioned installed in 2002. In August 2008, after having read Tota's article (2005) on the Train 904 attack, a group of Canadian students attending a summer school on peace and terrorism at the University of Siena in Italy who were interested in the bombing and its commemoration went with their Canadian professor Joseph Fletcher to visit the Central Station in Naples. When they arrived in Naples, they looked for the commemorative plaque but discovered that it had been removed. No one in the Central Station knew anything about the plaque or about Train 904. After finally finding a railway worker, he explained to the group that the plaque had been removed because the railway station was under renovation. Surprised the Canadian professor asked him where exactly the railway station was 'under renovation' because they could not see any workers inside the station. The railwayman replied, "Just that wall, where there was the plaque, was under renovation." Even, such a small commemorative plaque was a too powerful sign of commemoration for camorra and it had to be removed. However, now the plaque is again at its place in the Central Station and it represents with its few words a small tribute in memory of those citizens of Naples who lost their lives in the bombing.

Total cultural amnesia is at work in reference to the terrorist attack on Train 904. Its inscription in public discourse is almost impossible. All attempts to create symbols of memory have not succeeded. As it occurred less than 30 years ago, many of the survivors are still alive as are many of the victims' relatives. There are collective and individual memories of the event, but there is not any 'social memory', (Halbwachs, 1968), not any 'cultural memory', (Assmann, 1992), not any 'public memory'. (Phillips Kendall, 2004) As camorra is involved, the violence never fully stopped. The place of violence cannot be transformed into a place of collective remembering. It cannot be

reloaded with new meanings. In this case the cultural trauma process cannot be carried out in either the legal and political arenas, nor can it be carried out in the artistic ones. Coming back to Alexander's model (2004), it would be misleading to say that a carrier group able to work through the representation of the event is missing. The very problem here is that violence is ongoing and its cessation is a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for reloading the space of violence with new meanings. The carrier group cannot project the trauma claim to the audience, simply because they risk their own and families' lives. In this case the fact that something that most citizens know of (the terror attack) cannot be mentioned in the public discourse becomes the symbol of the power of camorra in that geographic area. The citizens' silence is the tangible sign of how camorra can be seen to be more powerful than the state in that part of the Italian territory.

While in the first case analysed in this article (state terror) the counter-memories ultimately contribute to making democracy possible, in ones of like the second case (Train 904) the public denial of the trauma is strategically used by camorra and mafia to reaffirm the power of the criminal organization in that region, forming a kind of 'counter-state'. The 'politics of regret' cannot be applied to this case. (Olick, 2007) The state does not have enough power. It does not have the territorial sovereignty. The question that arises is the following: who has the control over the recent Italian past? Who has the power to recall what happened and who lacks the opportunity to tell the truth?

In this second case there are still individual and collective memories, but any form of social memory (in Halbwachsian sense) is missing. But what will happen when the survivors and the victims' relatives die? Over time the individual and collective memories do not resist 'official' memories if they are not embedded and sustained through cultural forms (symbols, commemorative practices, etc). In this case, that past will become invisible. It will be latent, invisible, but will remain there as active agent, as active force to be prompted suddenly one day, to be rediscovered and reactualised. This is a strange quality of trauma. At what level and where do traumatic events continue to exist, even in invisibility?

Perhaps we could imagine that places where violent actions occurred have their own memory – a memory of the place and the space - where information is stored independently from the fact that some individuals remember them. Why do we say that we have to remember the past to avoid its repetition? Why does the invisible, the

forgotten past come back? What kind of relationship is there linking the past, the present and the future? These questions are very difficult to answer and they are open issues for future debate. The fact that they are difficult should not prevent us from further investigating them.

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