

Francesca Cappelletto

Public memories and personal stories: recalling the Nazi-fascist massacres

Paper prepared for the Conference on Memory of War (Boston, 24-25 January 2003)

Draft

This article is the product of research on the narrative memory of communities that have been the scene of extreme violence, conducted among survivors of massacres committed by the Nazis in Central- to Northern- Italian villages in 1944.

Elsewhere I have analysed some the mechanisms of transmission of these public memories considering them from the point of view of their social patterning and of their emotional quality (Cappelletto, forthcoming). The focus was on the transformation of remembrance into shared memories, the social actors' modes of perception of events of a historical past, and the process through which the story acquired a form beyond the identity of the individual teller, how the experience of others was incorporated in a given narrative and presented as if it were the narrator's own experience. Why did some informants recount events they had not witnessed as if they had witnessed them? Tonkin (1992) identified one crucial aspect. The narrative reformulation of past experience is a form of symbolic representation and has to do with the process through which we internalise the outer world. Starting with the assumption that the narratives shared within a group are a way of thinking about the experience, I argued that the visual images that are formed in the inner world become socialised in the outer world and represent a vehicle to communicate the memory of that group (Cappelletto, forthcoming).

In the present article, I will focus on the structure of community memory of the massacre and its mechanisms of transmission, describing the ways of representing now a past that will not pass and therefore gives form to the present. Story-telling sessions, when members of the community gather together, are current events characterised by sharing and repetition of the recollections; they are events in which past and present melt together.

The paper deals with the narratives at the level of ideological representation of the massacre as it has unfolded in time and, in particular, on the interlacing of ways of representing the massacre and political rhetoric. I consider the oral documentation, bypassing the vexed question of the 'truly historical' as opposed to the subjective oral to contribute to the study of the cultural moulding of

testimony from an anthropological perspective. The narratives are examined not only because they help to reconstruct what happened but also for the significances that events are given and for the ways in which they are represented by the social actors. Of interest are the subjective aspects and how these become socialised, the emotions, the suffering, the reflections of those who were witnesses and victims of an event. 'We reintroduce the emotionality, the fears and fantasies carried by the metaphors of memory' (Samuel and Thompson, 1990).

I first analyse some processes of group memory in the context of the current interest in and rethinking of those events. I then turn to consider how the 'story' has been represented through narrative in time, describing the social networks which form the agent of remembrance. The attempt is to understand how the memory of the massacre has, over time, become a 'cultural artifact', that is to say 'their own story', the one in which all the others – such as the genealogical story – converge. The analytical strategy takes account of elements deriving from the social actor's experience, that is the content of the narrative in terms of the speaker's lived life and his particular way of voicing emotional difficulties. The significance of that experience for the speaker and his particular way of remembering is an important element of each interview. I adopted a traditional qualitative approach. This has allowed me to use information gathered during in-depth interviews, in order to grasp what was the catalysing experience of their representations of the past.

As regards the methodology, I consider the passage from spoken to written language as problematic (Kohler Riessman, 1993), in that the interpretative voice of the author is in danger of superimposing itself on that of the subject. I have therefore viewed the telling experience in itself. For example, the way in which some aspects of the experience are expressed through metaphor, ordered in time and put in relation one to another. Narration is in fact both a way to understand past events and an event in itself. The past cannot be preserved as a coherent whole: "if narrative provides a homology to lived experience, it is only because the structure of narrative, like life itself, is built on suspense" (Mattingly 1998).

The fieldwork I carried out in the three Tuscan villages comprised ethnographic interviews. The research methods were as follows: survivors who still lived in the villages were interviewed there; I also interviewed survivors who had emigrated to other parts of Italy after the massacres and the children or other relatives of survivors. Of the total of 68 interviews, some were with individuals and others were with groups. Interviewees were of both sexes, various ages, and different social classes. The interviews were with the following informants: a) 57 survivors, including eye-witnesses and non-eye-witnesses who are members of these communities, directly touched by the tragedy; b) 11 people from later generations in the three villages who had heard the story told over the past fifty years. Group interviews were carried out with participants in narrative sessions about the massacre, most of which took place at these villages around the anniversary. I have used people's initials or Christian names rather than pseudonyms. Finally, in my research I also refer to written testimonies by survivors and to video-recordings produced by the Museum of Sant'Anna.

Premise

In the last two years of World War II many mass murders were committed by German troops in Italy, mainly along the so-called 'Gothic Line', where the German troops prepared a barrier to resist the Allied advance. Many of these killings were not done one by one but in groups, and, among these, some involved entire communities. Between March '44 and April '45, the number of civilians killed in Italy by Nazis and Fascists as a result of acts of 'resistance' has been estimated at a minimum of 7,500 (Klinkhammen, 1997).

The study focuses on three Tuscan villages in which the German objective was the extermination or mass killing of all the local male population. The extermination followed a macabre ritual which was similar in all three villages. According to authoritative historians (Pavone, 1991; Klinkhammer, 1997), one of the strategic objectives of the German occupying army was to hold the civilian population responsible for partisan actions. The same author maintains that 'the population itself had to be called to account for the partisan presence...terrorising the civilian

population was thus a means – ruthlessly employed by the German military – of fighting the partisans. Its scope was twofold: on the one hand, the Germans hoped that it would stir up hatred for the partisans in the civilian population; on the other hand it was supposed to serve as a pressure upon the rebels, who usually operated in their home regions’.

In the communities focused upon in this study – the Tuscan villages of Sant’Anna di Stazzema (about 500 persons killed) Civitella (150 persons killed) and Vallucciole (108 victims) – massacres took the shape of mass murder of unarmed civilians.

In Civitella, SS troops broke into the village in the early morning, rushed into the church where a service was being held, and forced the people to gather in the main square. Meanwhile, other soldiers broke into the houses, threw the occupants into the street, and set the houses on fire. Following a recurrent macabre ritual, they divided the men from the women and children, then they marched the men off the wall of the nearby school and shot them.

In Vallucciole, the SS shot all the men of the village, set fire to the houses and killed all the inhabitants, including women, children and elderly people.

In Sant’Anna di Stazzema, the massacre belongs to the kind of those perpetrated in the “preparatory phase of the incursion in an area ‘infested with guerrilla fighters’” (Franzinelli, 2002). The population was swollen by refugees from the Allied bombardment of Pisa and Livorno; the German had given an evacuation order, sending people to the commune of Serravezza, of which Sant’Anna was a part, because they wanted to form a line of resistance in that area. On the 12 August ’44, two days after the liberation of Florence by the Allies, an SS formation surrounded the village. When the alarm was given by some of the villagers, many of the men hid in the woods, afraid that they would be taken off to forced labour. Only these men and few others survived the atrocious slaughter, in which 110 children were taken from all the neighbourhoods of Sant’Anna and put to death. The SS combed the houses methodically, forcing the people out into the street or forcing many into one house then setting fire to it. In one house, the body of a pregnant woman was

found: her belly had been cut open and the foetus was lying on the ground, still attached to the umbilical cord.

Survivors of these tragic events are few, because the order was to shoot and kill everyone. To use the words of Samuel and Thompson (1990), the survivors 'bear overwhelming witness to an experience so extreme, so dark, that without their testimony it would be unimaginable'. The perpetrators have never been identified or tried in Italy or Germany. In fact, very few of those responsible for wartime massacres in general have ever been prosecuted and condemned.

Both the extent and intensity of the violence inflicted upon the victims have been huge. The survivors have been asked over the years to remember and transmit the memory of those events, not only for themselves but also for others. The story was formulated twice, internally and externally, the transmission of information being repeated either within the group or to people from outside. Nevertheless, their 'particular histories' had been 'left out' because of political reasons for about half a century.

Marzabotto, a village in the Appennines between Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, and Fosse Ardeatine, in Rome, where similar Nazi crimes had been committed, are nowadays national sacred sites. In fact, the refusal of this extreme violence became part of foundation of the Italian Republic. On the contrary, many other massacres had been forgotten in the self-conscious story of the nation. The trail for the massacre in Stazzema is one of several that have been 'temporarily shelved' for reasons of State by the Council of the Italian Military Court (Schreiber 2000). According to recent historical studies, the Allies had intended to stage an Italian Nuremberg, but in December '47 the Foreign Office and the War Crime Group decided to discontinue court martial trials (Pezzino 2001). In the second half of the forties the vertices of the military magistracy didn't do justice to war crimes: they set aside 695 trial dossiers against Germans, bringing only a dozen of proceedings to a close (Franzinelli 2002).

The sense of a lack of justice and their own powerlessness made the communities retreat into silence for long periods. They did not tell the story to outsiders, but within the communities themselves the narration continued: ‘those of us who are still here talk about it all the time... it has always been on our minds...’. While within itself the community continued to struggle against forgetting, and thus constructed a veritable community of memory, in its relations with the outside world the memory of the massacre has been characterised as discontinuous: moments in which it was impossible to articulate to the outside world were interspersed with moments of expression. For example, when the massacre became associated in the minds of the community with a national tendency to forget the village, because – according to the villagers – no one wanted to talk about this place in which many people blamed the partisans: ‘...Then there was the moral recognition... which was the sending of the gold medal... it never arrived!...’. And in fact the medal of military valour – not civilian valour, because the deadline for that had passed – was not conferred to S. Anna until ’71, 22 years after the Nazi-Fascist massacre in Marzabotto, which became over the course of time the altar of the nation.

One of the reasons why the remembrance became so tortured was the fact that it was a ‘divided memory’. The narrative heart of the stories of the massacres of Civitella and Stazzema – one might almost say the structure that sustained them – was the theme of the partisans’ guilt. Some people bitterly blame the partisans and claim a causal relation between resistance activity and SS reprisal; other narrators, however, make no such claim. In Civitella, the main accusation thrown at the partisans is that of exposing the local population to retaliation by killing German SS soldiers, without providing any form of protection for the local people and actually abandoning them after the event. In Stazzema, this aspect is given less emphasis, although it is certainly present. In Vallucchiole, the narratives rotate around Nazi-Fascists’ guilt (Cappelletto, 1998). Many stories implicitly or explicitly affirm that those ‘really’ responsible were the partisans. The Nazi-Fascists sowed death, but this was taken for granted, so to speak: they had to follow orders. The Nazis were the actual executors, but those who acted ‘freely’ were the partisans and the local Fascists, both of

which often came from elsewhere. They were the one who provoked the murderous madness; the main cause of the massacres was them.

An impossible history

The research was done over a period of years, during which I carried out oral historical interviews in three locations, Civitella, Vallucciole, and Sant'Anna di Stazzema. In the first two localities (not in Stazzema, in which my involvement came later), fieldwork was done in preparation for the Conference 'In Memory. Revisiting Nazi Atrocities in World War II' (Arezzo, June 1994). Besides many inhabitants of the area in which massacres took place, historians anthropologists participated to the international meeting devoted to the study of nazi massacres in the second world war (Paggi 1996; 1997; Contini 1997). The period of research began in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the massacres – when there were many official occasions and celebrations.

The Arezzo conference project was itself a challenge. After fifty years, the meeting provided the first occasion to compare different representations of that past, of the massacres. The theme of the partisans' guilt occupied a central place in the survivors' narratives, and this emerged at the conference to many people's surprise.

At a local memory – in contrast to master narratives – remembered history means divided memory. In all three communities, divided memory signifies that the recollection is trapped in the form of an impossible story, generating a sense of impotence that seems to arise from two convictions: the conviction that 'no one will ever write the truth' (but at the same time the memory of the massacres is considered a potential instrument in a search for the truth, so that the story can be transmitted to future generations); and the conviction that one's own story must be protected from outside intrusions, for example from people who are not members of the community but who nevertheless presume to write down and interpret the community's memory. The two aspects are woven together. In Sant'Anna, the survivors do not seem to recognise any 'historical' account: 'Anyway, no one will ever write the truth', they say. The truth cannot be tapped; there is an

insistence upon the singularity of the ‘true’ version (‘I tell the truth; I don’t know whether the others do’), and there is the myth of the ‘unspoken truth’, which someone knows but does not tell. It seems to be an impossible story, and the impossibility of it springs from the fact that the massacres are sins that even now have not been expiated. For example, the Germans that are presumed responsible for the massacre in Stazzema – Reder and Galler – have not paid for the crimes they committed: Reder was exculpated and Galler is dead. Of the Fascists who accompanied the Germans in their round of death ‘you know [who they were], but you don’t say’.

With the passing of years, despite the internal divisions that memory continues to produce, the group remains clustered, so to speak, in the mourning produced by diverse individual recollections. The episodic, factual elements of these recollections, as distinct from the semantic and interpretative, were recomposed in a communal version (Cappelletto, forthcoming). Time has emphasised the component of lived autobiographical experience, centred upon the mourning of one’s own family (‘everyone remembers his own relatives’), in which the ethical-political dimensions of the experience are attenuated. At the interpretative level, the memory has continued to reproduce internal divisions in the very attempt to overcome them: they would like to be able to remember differently, and yet they want to preserve this memory.

At first, I noticed a certain suspiciousness of the research I was doing. Often the people of Stazzema asked me if it really was ‘that’ I wanted to know, that is to say ‘whose fault it was’. That was the aspect of the narrative that most interested ‘those who came from outside’. It was a relief to them and to me when I explained that I was interested in something else: I wanted to know how that past history was lived over the years and in the present, and what were the networks of social relations that sustained the narrative.

In Civitella and Stazzema, over the course of more than half a century since the massacres, there have been many points of tension and friction between the outside and the inside world with regard to the political representations of the massacre. The memory did not move unchanged through time: the memory itself has a history, and this too was something I wanted to reconstruct.

Oral historians have argued that the recollection of an event unfolds in time and should be studied as a phenomenon in itself. The recollection is not limited to describing, to exposing the things that happened in the past, but is also itself a thing that happens (Tonkin, 1992; Portelli, 1999). The errors of narrators in their reports of the facts - exaggerating or belittling them, recounting events that never happened – can teach us a lot about ‘what the person wanted to do, believed he was doing, or now believes he did’ (Portelli, 1999).

The variability of stories told in the more than fifty years that separate us from the massacre is manifest also in the difference between the community itself (considered as a homogenous unit) and the outside world, that is to say between the group memory and that formulated by politics. Gradually, the Resistance to Fascism assumed a central role in the founding discourse of the Italian Republic and became integrated into the national history. However, the hostility of part of the population of these three villages towards the partisans did not appear to weaken, neither were they appeased in the intermittent periods of tension between the local community and the national institutions. The partisan memory (of those partisans who were despised in the villages because villagers regarded them as those indirectly or even ‘truly’ responsible for the massacre) tended to become the general memory, ‘encircling, so to speak, the three communities from the outside’ (Contini, 1997). Thus the dissonance between autobiographical memories and public representations tended to become ever more apparent.

At the 1994 Arezzo conference, one of the ways in which people dealt with these tensions was by expressing them explicitly, and the result was a network of narrative relations which itself formed a sort of new story there re-lived as performance. What could be properly defined as a local drama of memory consisted of a confrontation between a leading woman from the village of the massacre and a delegate from the National Association of Italian Partisans. Some speakers claimed that the history written by professional historians was superior to the ‘spontaneous memory of the community, which ends up bending the reconstruction of the past to the political needs of the present’ (Contini, 1997). Eric Hobsbawm underlined the importance of distinguishing between

historical facts and representations. In an article on the public responsibilities of the historian, which appeared later, he maintained that memory and history are different ways of preserving the past, but it is necessary to evaluate the villagers' narratives on the basis of documents and a critical approach to sources in order to gauge the influences of the sense of belonging and of identity on memory (Hobsbawm, 1994).

My reading of the memory of massacres is thus located in a context of discourse which is the current rethinking of a historical period. The narrative memory is here considered from a theoretical standpoint that is neither the naive empiricist-mimetic position (in which the narratives are a simple reflection 'of a world that was lived in before it was narrated') nor the anti-mimetic position (which emphasises the 'fictional quality of ethnography' in which 'narratives construct a world, rather than refer to one') (Mattingly, 1998). Rather, I ally myself with a position that unites ethnography and history, a position at the intersection of the subjective/experiential/existential dimension and the social dimension of reconstruction and knowledge. While considering the passage from spoken to written language as problematic, I adopted a traditional qualitative approach. This has allowed me to use informations gathered during in-depth interviews, in order to grasp what was the catalysing experience of their representations of the past.

Emigrants' and immigrants' memory

In all the narratives that I heard there is a mixture of recollections from an individual's past life and the memory of the massacre retained by the group.

As I have demonstrated in an earlier essay (Cappelletto, forthcoming), the present memory of the massacre of Stazzema allows us to understand the mechanisms of passage from individual to social memory. The villages were divided into various parts, and any given narrator only witnessed events in one of these, so the individual versions of the event were necessarily partial and monofocal. It emerged from all the interviews that each narrator gives more weight to what he or she lived through and witnessed first-hand ('I remember my experience') but always includes

summaries of the experiences of others, based on first-hand accounts. Descriptive representations are at the heart of the testimonies on the massacres. Memory has become clustered around the visual, and the continuity of telling has been associated with the continuity of reliving. According to the daughter of one who escaped the massacre: 'They need to relive the details, even those born afterwards ... Then my dad told me, my mum... the experiences of those who directly saw this drama'. Regardless of whether it is direct or mediated, the 'true' knowledge is a knowledge of the particular, which must be relived to be understood.

This task of weaving and sewing together explains how one can speak of actual construction of memory and of recreating experience. The affirmation 'Not all the episodes were seen, but they were seen' is apparently a contradiction, but it makes perfect sense. It means that all the episodes may not have been empirically observed, but they were all experienced emotionally.

In the narratives of emigrants - those who left the village after the massacre – this component of re-living is less apparent. The events are recounted in much the same way as they are by survivors who stayed in Stazzema. The difference lies in the fact that the semantic component is more accentuated, associated with 'general world knowledge' (Tulving, 1972). The interpretation is different, and the theme of the partisans' guilt is hardly there at all: their experiential memory is given less emphasis compared to the more abstract and declarative form of memory. Frequently these emigrants maintain that the guilt lies with the war and the Nazis and that we must find out who gave the order to kill everyone.

Emigrants' narratives confirm Bloch's assertion about the memory of episodes in the revolt of 1947 in Madagascar that reevocation of past events is not like remembering (Bloch, 1995). An experience is condensed into a memory which is subjected over time to reformulation, is retold. Such reformulation is not of the experience itself – which is no longer available to consciousness – but rather of the traces of the experience, which are mnemonic rather than verbal. It could be a re-evocation of things that others – not the narrator himself – have experienced. The memory is a preliminary formation – a crystallisation – of the experience. It can then become the object of

multiple reformulations, revive emotions in others, and become part of their autobiographical experience. This helps explain how individual and group memory are formed and maintained.

The memory of the emigrants is more like that of the children of survivors. Both are removed from the events, in time (children) or in space (emigrants). Emigrants have come in contact with different societies and have mulled over their trauma in places far from that in which the massacre happened. Emigration is an 'obstacle to the maintenance of memories': 'in general, those who remain in the places they were born can better recall themselves and their lives' (Bettizza, 1999). The children of the survivors have also mulled over the remembrance, often compounding their temporal distance from the event with spatial distance, because they moved away from the village.

On the other hand, the immigrants ('those from outside') 'know the story like everyone else'. The 'foreigners' who move there (and among them are the new spouses of those who were widowed) 'learn the story'. A process of acculturation takes place, and the massacre is at the centre of this. These people express the desire to speak and tell the story like everyone else. Learning the story is part of the process of absorbing the local culture; becoming a fellow-villager includes this narrative training, which consists of the learning and actual retelling of the story. Autobiography and history here coincide.

How 'the story' is represented through narrative: aspects of genealogical memory

Today, the villages in which the massacres took place seem pervaded by a cult of death. In them, the living speak of the dead. The village of Sant'Anna seems to have transformed itself into a museum of memory. When you go there, the first sensation is that those sites are pervaded by an almost sacred atmosphere: a small village where the main street has been renamed 'The Street of Remembrances', and at its end the church in front of which 130 bodies were burnt. There you find the museum of the martyrs of the resistance, which is square, severe, and made of cement, in much the same style as modern Italian urban cemeteries. Suddenly you feel alone, and you turn to the only public meeting place, a little shop run by a talkative man, an inhabitant of the village who has

what is now recognised as ‘ the social identity of the survivor’ (Wieviorka, 1999) and was about twenty years old at the time of the massacre. He is a part of that mnemonic community which is no longer defined by spatial boundaries (in that many members of it have emigrated) but rather by the duration of the story through time. In the villages that were victims of Nazi-Fascist massacres, the survivors have continued to tell what they consider ‘their story’, that is the story of the events that destroyed the world as they had known it – a veritable golden age – from the ashes of which a new reality has slowly risen up. The survivors still form a society that remembers, in which individual and public memories intertwine and melt together.

Occasions for narrating include the story-telling sessions, when members of the community gather together, and the repeated narration to outsiders. The narrative sessions are a form of socialising process and memory practice which allows us to see the linkage between the individual and the collective components of war memory. They are a prominent form of social interaction that takes the shape of commemorative celebrations, where commemoration has to be regarded as ‘an intensified remembering’ (Casey, 1989). At these sessions, the atmosphere is intense, and in them the massacre is seen as a sacred and almost mythical event. Taking place today mainly on the anniversary of the massacre and within the network of relationships among neighbours, relatives, and friends, narrative sessions are a sort of group mnemonic technique that involves elements of traditional repetition (Cappelletto 1998). Survivors conceptualise memory as commemoration, which is double-edged. It involves an intensified narrating about past tragic events and pilgrimages to the places of the massacre, as well as forms of devotion practised in the homes. Memory of the massacres appears as an ‘absolute memory’ of words and actions that dominate all others contents of memory. A woman showed us around her house; the walls were covered with photographs of the many relatives she lost in the massacre. She said that the photographs had made her daughter grow up ‘an old woman’: it was as if they had trapped her in the time of the massacre, a time that never passes, an ‘intransitive memory’ (Todorov, 1995). But the mother too was trapped in that past that

never went away since the day of the massacre. She told us: 'I have seen them cry... always telling the story... the 12 August, even the first years were one long cry and ...a terrible thing!'

Neither the survivors nor their children can get away from it. Continuity in time is, in fact, the central element of memory that takes the form of actions and narrations: 'The story - one woman said - was told and retold forever'. The interruption of continuity created by Nazi violence is overcome through the continuity of telling the tale over and over again. The principal dimension of living this continuity is the attempt to survive past atrocities. It is as if that story, repeated within the group, reassured them that they had in fact escaped the tragedy (Cappelletto, forthcoming).

The network of people who remember functions as a support to the story. In the story-telling, 'those who are left' refer to one another continuously in a network of relations:

'Everyone has told me this'. 'A. from Bambini [a neighbourhood of Sant'Anna] said: "Get out and hide"'. 'My mother always told me, everyone was hanged from the poles'. 'From what they told me, this Pietro and his son Amos and this Salvatore have told me the story a thousand times!'. 'This Ettore... and then you will see if Federico remembers, but he must remember even better than I do because they were his relatives... they raised him by the belt, and he played dead'. '... Enrico can answer that; he was left in the pile of dead people... and, at Vaccareccia, Milena can answer because she was there...'

The narrator identifies the loved ones he lost in the massacre by calling them by name, and in doing so he reminds others of their own lost loved ones. A salient characteristic of this interweaving is the formation of a liminal dimension, on the border of past and present. The dead do not seem to be really dead (they are 'called'), and the living are in part already dead ('it has always been a spent life'). It is as if they were still trying to establish a firm nexus between the living and the dead. Sant'Anna seems to have experienced a prolonged death, a sort of living death, because 'we lived with death for a long time. In fact, in the years after the massacre, the dead lived physically beside the living'.

'In the very first years - 1945, 1946,' said one person who was a child at the time, 'I became... I wasn't afraid of anything... I found cadavers in the woods, but it had no effect on me at all... Those who were killed in the woods were then buried there, but afterwards, naturally... the animals dug, and you could see bits sticking out... legs, feet, skulls.... They are the living dead, who produce terror, terror... then I didn't go out anymore, especially when it got dark...'

As in other communities where massacres were perpetrated, for many victims, burial was in most cases only symbolic because it happened years after the massacre in which the bodies had been destroyed, obliterated altogether. At Sant'Anna, those who were about to be burnt took out photographs of themselves in a last heart-rending hope of being recognised afterwards. This gesture was, of course, rendered futile by the flames. Very few men, women, and children were recognised after the killings and buried in the cemetery; a few others were buried in the place their bodies were found and tombstones are there as a memorial to them; most were thrown into a mass grave in the piazza in front of the church. This lack of a body impeded the grieving process. 'To bury the body,' observes Portelli, recalling De Martino, 'means to make it "pass" for us, to transform the loss into value, to overcome the crisis of mourning'. To use the words of the same author, we might argue that at Sant'Anna the burial 'began with its opposite', that is with the exhumation of the bones and their transferral to the charnel-house in 1948. Since then, every year the commemoration is marked with an intensity of emotion that makes it seem like a true funeral rite. These are also the times when the members of the community gather together and recount 'their story'.

In fact the tireless narration gives form to the present time. The commemorations are experiences in themselves; they are memory lived in the present as it is understood in the three villages, not just a monotonous and endless rehashing of the traces of the past. As Elizabeth Tonkin has observed with regard to the literature on memory and time, narrative is not to be conceived as a sort of instrument of memory: 'telling and remembering are themselves events, not only description of events' (Tonkin, 1992).

In the process of construction of memory that takes place at the community level, the transmission of memory through words takes two directions: one is horizontal, among groups of equals ('even the kids told the story, each one told his experience and his story', 'we swapped stories'); the other is vertical, from parents to children ('I first found out about it from my parents'). From the testimonies of those who were children at the time of the massacre, I learned that

fragments of aural memory are today the most important pieces of their personal memory: ‘The only thing I remember and it still makes me shudder... evening, the voices... calling the names out loud... because the corpses were unrecognisable... the hope raised by the men who returned, the hope that one of your own relatives, perhaps, had run away! The thing I remember is those names... being yelled out, and the valley.... Here there are echoes from one place to another... this calling out the names of loved ones... to see if they were still alive, if they would respond...’.

Transmission within the family provides those who were then children with a wider context of knowledge for their personal memories. For the children of survivors and, later, for those children’s children, the memory of the massacre was in fact a non-material inheritance received in infancy. Children were told about it very early in life, so that the knowledge and its emotional content formed a permanent part of their unconscious minds, which then fed upon the reiteration of the memory, the multiple re-evocations:

‘...I don’t remember seeing the soldiers, but I went to mass with my mama when I was little – I won’t say two or three years old, because I don’t remember, but certainly after that... We went to mass, then we came out... all of those who had survived had lost at least one family member, most had six, seven, eight, ten dead ... cousins, nephews, all related... And the cries!! But then I didn’t understand...’

And another:

‘So my first years of life... during the war, these soldiers came, but when you are little you don’t take it seriously, I don’t know if I thought it was just a story, a fairy tale... and afterwards I began to understand...’.

When the ‘fairy tale’ is ‘understood’, the person to whom the memory has been transmitted becomes himself a narrator, a bearer of memory, and from that moment on he too contributes to the reevocations: ‘I’m telling you the truth, just as they told it to me’. There are two criteria of truth: to have witnessed the events or to have heard them recollected.

The children take on the role of those who give voice to the memory of the massacre. Compare, for example, a story as told by a mother and by her daughter. The text below is the story as told by the mother (Museo di Sant’Anna, video-cassette). The parts underlined make up the story as told by the daughter:

‘On the morning of 12 August we got up early because we already feared that something was going to happen. I went to the end of the piazza and I saw M.B.[another woman from the village] running and looking frightened: “Run away! The Germans are in Compito” [Compito is a neighbourhood of S. Anna]. She had heard about it from someone else... but it was too late, because the Germans were already upon us. They took us there to the piazza, in the open space. They put us all against the wall. There were about twenty-five of us. Some of us had two children, some had three. I had a baby girl nine months old.... They put us there and brought out the machine-gun, closer than this [she indicates the microphone], and a commandant who had come from the hill cried “Raus! Raus!”. We all screamed because we were afraid... we had heard that they always said that word before they started killing. But instead they took us and made us stand in single file. One of them in front, one behind, and us in the middle. They were armed to the teeth! They made us walk through the flames, the fire, because they had already set fire to E.’s house, and then we went down to M.’s house, away from the flames.... They took us down. There were a company of them... I turned round to see if the others from the piazza were with us, and one of them struck me on the hip with his rifle. And I was left there by the big chestnut tree... now it is all overgrown, but then it was clear... I saw that the roof had caved in on my parents’ house, and my legs gave way. I couldn’t stand up anymore. The baby was heavy. They all looked at me as they passed. And I could already see the company [of SS]. And the last one who passed me said to me three times “Signora, go home, go home!”, but I didn’t go because I couldn’t stand up. I started to cry... and then I heard shots, then the mooing of the cows... I stayed there. Finally I heard a little voice, but after a long time... I cried a lot...” But where can I go? Where can I go?”... L. [the baby] was nine months old... I heard a little voice. I stood up and saw a hand going like this [beckoning]. It was like seeing God! But I didn’t even know who it was. “Come with me”, she said. It was D., a woman from Farnocchia. She’s dead now, but if I am alive I owe it to her. She came and took the baby from me. “I can’t!” “Come. We are down in a cave” We spent the morning in this cave. There was D. and her husband, who was ill. He said to me: “Signora, don’t let that baby cry, because if they kill me that’s one thing, but if they kill [the baby]...” N. was there and P. [two other women from the village], and I don’t remember exactly who else. We went all day without drinking, eating, or going to the toilet. We hardly breathed for fear!’.

Comparing the daughter’s account with the mother’s, we see that, in the daughter’s story, the more ego-centred elements are transmitted, those elements that refer to the daughter herself (‘the baby’ of the mother’s story). The daughter’s account gives centrality to her infant self: she who was to become the next bearer and transmitter of the memory. This means that even in the memory of one who was not a witness the accent falls on autobiographical aspects of the story.

Following Bloch’s reflections on the superimposition of the generations that characterises the two World Wars (Bloch, 1969), I might argue that here we see two contiguous generations for which ‘personal time’ and ‘social time’ have been united by the fact of being witnesses of the event. This fact has had the effect of extending the lives of the older generation and shortening those of the

younger generation, as we saw in the example of the mother who had made her daughter grow up 'an old woman'.

Local and national

The Arezzo conference was a moment in which the representations of the inside world raised various reflections in the outside world. Elements of continuity and of tension emerged which even now, after more than fifty years, are shaping the form of remembrance. For example, many in the communities are still reluctant to name the local Fascists responsible for the massacres, not just because they were part of the community ('How can we talk about...? There are relatives') but also because they are afraid of the possible consequences ('I don't want complications: there are still Fascists, you know...'). Today divided memory also means this setting yourself apart, this avoidance of narrating the memory in public. As W. Sofsky has clearly shown (2001), the exercise of mass violence induces silence in those who witnessed it: 'Those who commit violence invite admiration: they want to impress their followers, demonstrate their strength, intimidate other enemies, paralyse the survivors with fear. The death of one is a threat to others'.

The motifs that run most pervasively through the recollections are fraught with tensions. They turn upon the theme of responsibility, of understanding at least how and by whom (if not why) an act was committed that still today seems a senseless slaughter. For example, the motif of the masked woman and the words spoken by Italians who accompanied the Nazis is present in almost all the stories. For those who survived, it was difficult to recall these 'hidden' presences (the covered faces, the altered voices), above all because they made it impossible to think of the massacre as an atrocity committed solely by people from outside, from far away: ('If there had been no Italians, involved it would not have been so awful').

The story of the struggle against forgetting in the community of Sant'Anna is not uniform in time, because remembering, as historians love to say, is an activity anchored in the present, not simply a reconstruction of the past but a weapon of the present (Todorov, 1995; Watchel, 1986). It is difficult to run through the story of these narratives, their sedimentation in various 'layers', to use

Shama's geological metaphor (Shama, 1997). As Fentress and Wickam maintain (1992), there is no perception of the process of change, because this process is 'cancelled out the moment it takes place'.

The memory of the killings has in any case passed through diverse political positions. In the immediate post-war period, mourning was the dominant concern. In the village of the massacre 'talking about it went on for years', until the early 1950s, the period of the 'reconstruction of the family'. Then the need for 'active' memory was attenuated ('The families were out of it', explained one inhabitant of Sant'Anna, 'and perhaps they did not want to hear it spoken of too much'). In the 60s, however, it revived again, but attention then was focused on discussions and explanations from outside, that is to say on the interaction (and entangling) of local memory and national memory.

The theme of the partisans' guilt has undergone a similar temporal transformation, and its changes through time make significant comment on successive periods of Italian history. The tendency to blame the partisans gained ground during the Cold War: 'we villagers criticised what we had seen with our own eyes'. In the '70s, the theme of the partisans' guilt was still relevant. That was the period in which people from outside – such as the right-wing author Pisanò – began openly to manipulate the information provided by the villagers. The villagers felt used and refused to give further interviews. 'In the '70s, you could not say that there were also Italians [among those responsible for the massacre]. More than the Germans, it was the Italians [who were responsible]: where there were only Germans, they [the villagers] were allowed to run away, but where there were Italians and Germans, they killed them all.' Villagers maintain that the possibility that Sant'Anna would be honoured with the gold medal created pressure among the villagers to keep silent about Partisans' guilt theme: '[My fellow-villagers] pressured me not to say that there were Italians allied with the Germans at Sant'Anna, because if not nothing would be done [i.e. if I spoke, Sant'Anna would not receive the gold medal]... [even] if you said the partisans were to blame, nothing would be done...'. Today we are seeing a revival of interest, triggered by what Portelli (1999) calls a climate of 'revisionism and crisis of memory in the '90s.' In the group of survivors,

many seem reserved, reluctant to state their position clearly, and convinced that the truth will never be told but rather that it will always be obfuscated by the political agendas superimposed on the testimony.

If we try to understand how the memory has been experienced over time, two things emerges clearly: the villagers are wary of discussions and explanations of the event that come from outside; and the survivors have a negative opinion of the fact that the memory of Sant'Anna has never been incorporated into the national memory. The dissonance between personal memory and public representation is painfully apparent in the story of the group remembrance. Our own presence in Sant'Anna, nearly sixty years after the massacre, was judged in itself as the confirmation of a long abandonment. The villagers think that it came too late to 'harvest' their memory, and that means that their dead have not been honoured: '...in Marzabotto... there they managed things better, there people reconstructed the memories straight away, they knew straight away... the honour that should have been given them!' According to those who escaped the massacre and their children, the past should not be removed, it should be told. Moreover, it must be shown, it must be incorporated in commemorative gestures and objects: 'This year [2000] at the charnel house, the priest wore a red chasuble, red finally! He said he had put on this chasuble... which represents the martyrs, but it took sixty years... for him to put it on!!!' The gold medal is a commemorative object that testifies to the link between memory and moral order. And that too arrived too late.

Over the years the villagers came to the knowledge that they were doubly victims: victims of the massacre and then victims of the abandonment by the public authorities (the road connecting the village to the plain, which everyone had wanted, was never constructed). They say that after the massacre everyone wanted to forget the village: the right-wing wanted to forget for obvious reasons; the left-wing wanted to forget because many at Sant'Anna blamed the partisans. The events of '44 put the village in contact with a wider reality, but, paradoxically, at the same time they excluded it from that reality.

For the inhabitants of Sant'Anna, being abandoned means absence of memory, that is above all dialogue, as Namer (1987) reminds us in his rereading of Halbwachs. By extension, one can say that memory equals honour. The historical interpretation that the villagers gave to their experience was that of being denied the opportunity to tell their own 'truth': 'These [history] books are already there, they are in the library... But they don't tell the reality... about what we say...'. The internal memory of the group is represented as a memory of resistance to abandonment and to the diverse truths of the experience: 'What we lived through, that is the most vital memory...both those in the piazza and those in the houses...as to the rest – how many Germans there were, where they came from...[matters little]'

In the three communities, all victims of atrocity, that have been the subjects of this study, the current way of representing the past highlights the impossibility of metabolising the past. Many tensions seem to derive from the relationship between the local community and the national past as it is enacted by the sovra-local institutions. The local drama of memory has shown, as has the re-lived context of the Conference, that the partisans have been perceived as representatives of that outside world that could not understand – because in half a century it had never understood – the internal drama of the community. In fact, the conference of Arezzo was the climax of a tension between local and national agencies of remembrance that had been felt intermittently over the past sixty years. At Civitella, over the years these moments of tension found their expression particularly in the events commemorating the massacre, when the national ceremonials imposed themselves on the local way of cultivating the memory of the past. The local way consisted of either completely refusing the commemorations or going through them in a secluded fashion, closer to silence than to speech. The Arezzo Conference was perceived by the survivors as a public commemoration, and thus potentially as a distasteful experience. At Stazzema, on the other hand, the dissonance between local and national was crystallised in the resentment about being abandoned and in the local community's struggle against forgetting. One of the ways in which this struggle expressed itself was in the establishment, in 1971, of the Association of the Martyrs of Sant'Anna; another was the

Committee for Honours, established in 1991. The history of these two associations, founded by the villagers to commemorate their dead, shows how they are permanently divided by disagreements about the organisation of commemorative events.

‘Our own story’

The narrative representation of the massacre seems to be a symbolic form that acts as a catalyst to aspects of individual and social memory. One survivor emphasises the complexity of this point of juncture: ‘...here it is all a muddle, to understand [just as we must understand how the memory took this form over time] the resentments accumulated over the years... They used to build houses far from each other to avoid arguments...’. The struggle against forgetting is divided against itself in that it reproduces mechanisms of the sociality of the larger village, which included (and to a certain extent still includes) resentments and competition about many aspects of communal life.

There is a fundamental ambivalence in the memory of the massacres. The villagers have a desire – which has remained unfulfilled – to be recognised by the national institutions. For example, they would appreciate the presence of national authorities at commemorative events. At the same time, they dislike the intrusion of anonymous forces from the political world and the larger society into what they call ‘our story’.

In all these communities that were victims of massacre, the anthropological analysis of narratives shows how ‘the story’ is felt as ‘our own story’ with a cultural value that should be protected from outsiders’ intrusions and exploitations. The heart of this memory is represented by a relentless struggle, experienced as both private family mourning and as mourning by a mnemonic community of survivors. At Sant’Anna, the official commemorations are organised by the Committee for Honours. Members of this Committee include the mayor of Stazzema and representatives of the following organisations: the Association of Martyrs, the National Association of Italian Partisans, the Provincial government (Province of Lucca), and some communes in Versilia (the neighbouring province). Many of the villagers accuse the Committee for Honours of having reduced the memory of the massacre to a political fact, which more or less amounts to

polluting the memory, depriving it of its universal quality. The public political dimension in itself represents a desecration of mourning, which can only be fulfilled in the private domain. The historical reading of their experience is also perceived as a wounding intrusion, almost as a truth imposed from outside which differs from the internal truth of their experience. The massacre seems to be a memory-event, to which one clings in the mourning of individual memory and around which is drawn the circle of group memory.

They are afraid of being dispossessed of their own story. This fear grows out of the feeling that the memory of the massacre is their own property, intimate and communicable only within the group of survivors. It is 'the story' in which all others converge, including the genealogies. The story is passed on within the group and recounted to people from outside. The story begins with the changes that the family suffered because of the massacre, through a recognition of the individuals who died. The structure of the genealogy is used as the framework for the story, so that those who have disappeared can be placed in the family network: they are 'our' dead who are 'called'. The remembrance has therefore a significance as private mourning, it is a story of the family and of the mnemonic community whose ties are based precisely upon this battle not to forget and not to be forgotten. The acts of remembrance restore this fundamental dimension: the intimate and almost sacred. The members of the community share the basic feeling of being united in so far as they know of unique events, which they transmit them in narrative form within the group. Theirs is a 'truth' that is inter-subjective, experiential, communicative. And it is also an endless rite, as witness the fact that today they are thinking of restoring the church in which many of their fellow-villagers died to its appearance then, after the massacre in which part of it had been burnt.

The act of remembrance of this event appears to be part of that which anthropologists call 'the sense of belonging to a group'. The memory is an 'object' with an evocative force: "our own story", in fact, reflects the feeling that they too have a history. The group uses this cultural representation as part of the usual way of identifying itself, protecting and not exhibiting that possession. It is this story that has to be protected – as an important cultural value – from the

anonymous forces of politics and society. In all the victim-communities, the idea that the story of the massacres should belong to them alone entails the recognition that other stories should belong to those other communities in which they happened. For example, some villagers have shown an attenuate interest to the massacres of neighbouring communities, because none of these was conceived so dramatic as 'their story'.

The story of massacre is a myth and a commemorative rite endowed of its own ideological structure. According to the local view, the massacre is a sort of watershed, a dividing line which makes it possible to speak of a 'time before ' and a 'time after': the surviving population was largely forced to migrate to the cities and thus the massacre marked the passage from the 'domestic' and familiar world to an unknown and alien one (Cappelletto 1998). The massacre has severed traditional ties, giving birth to new social processes. It is not simply the past that is remembered but ('the we'): the communal consciousness that is constructed around that crucial event. The mnemonic community constitutes and maintains itself around the guardianship of this cultural artifact. Weiner has elucidated how "inalienable possessions" function as catalysts which cause the awakening of an ethnic identity in a group. (Weiner 1992). Like Weiner's 'inalienable possessions', the memory of the massacre is an inheritance passed down from one generation to another, which must be "authenticated by an authority perceived as external to the present" and is connected to sacred sites.

At the same time, the acts of remembrance are history. The teller feels himself to be the protagonist of an event because he experienced it (and no one else can testify as he can) and because, from his standpoint, he can not only 'confess' but also 'accuse': there really are strong ties between 'narrative, memory and moral order' (Antze and Lambek 1996). For example, the Park of Peace is a project for a permanent exhibition of testimonies coming from nations in which there have been victims of Nazi regime, to 'let all the world know about the village that suffered martyrdom'. At the same time, the village can become a court that judges the world, as witness the establishment in 2001 of the Committee for the Judgment of Nazi Crimes. This memory makes you

‘part of history’. But paradoxically it is precisely this story that these communities must defend from the world, because the world would like to appropriate it.

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Paola Calamandrei for her indispensable help in carrying out fieldwork, and to Dorothea Barrett for the editorial assistance. This study was made possible by funding from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., New York (Grant GR6504).