

# Bologna and the Trauma of March 1977: the *Intellettuali Contro* and Their Resistance to the Local Communist Party

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Chi ha lanciato un sasso alla manifestazione di Roma lo ha lanciato contro i movimenti di donne e uomini che erano in piazza.

These are the first lines of a public letter published in *La Repubblica* on December 16, 2010, written by author Roberto Saviano in the aftermath of a violent demonstration against Silvio Berlusconi's narrow victory in the vote of confidence of December 14, 2010, which brought back memories of the *anni di piombo*.<sup>1</sup> The letter condemned the aggressive instigations of the so-called 'black blocks,' and was an attempt to dissuade the students, who in those months were protesting against an educational reform, from resorting to violent behavior.

To some extent, Saviano's criticism recalls Pier Paolo Pasolini's famous reaction to the Valle Giulia clashes in Rome, on March 1, 1968, where he publicly sided with the police forces and against the students.<sup>2</sup> Nearly a decade later a new student movement arose, which not only reacted against authoritative manifestations of the state, but also turned against traditional left-wing parties and unions. According to Jennifer Burns, this period reflects a "withdrawal of [literary-political] commitment to macro-political, left/right-wing ideologies, in favour of micro-political, community-based initiatives."<sup>3</sup>

Although the relation between the alternative left-wing milieu and the political parties of the left had worsened throughout the 1970s, the death, in 1977, of a young activist constituted an important and decisive rupture. Francesco Lorusso was a student and sympathizer of the

former extra-parliamentary, left-wing group *Lotta Continua* (Continuous Battle, LC), and was shot during clashes between students and police in Bologna on 11 March 1977. While the police officer who shot Lorusso was never tried, many students were arrested for alleged and/or minor offenses, thus augmenting the climate of tension. Nevertheless, the ‘Movement of ’77’ received support from a group of French intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes, who expressed solidarity with the arrested activists and opened up a debate on the level of ‘repression’ in Italy. The debate culminated during the so-called ‘conference against repression’ held in September 1977 in Bologna.<sup>4</sup>

During the same period a number of local intellectuals turned against the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), disapproving of the way the party had handled the incidents of March 1977. They voiced their opposition by establishing a journal and an association which countered the official interpretation of the events. Drawing upon theories of ‘collective trauma,’ in this article I will investigate the impact of the clashes in Bologna on these local intellectuals, and analyze how they subsequently tried to regain a political identity.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE CONFLICT

In the second half of the 1970s, political, economic, social, and cultural transformations led to the eruption of a new protest movement in Italy. Indeed, although the catalyst of the protests was an education reform, the origin of the movement can be traced back to the economical crisis of 1973. High unemployment rates struck younger generations in particular, who were furthermore confronted with a politics of austerity and sacrifices that clashed with their evolving lifestyles and consumer attitudes. In fact, the ‘Movement of ’77’ was more concerned with existential and personal issues than with revolutionary, political ideals, and explicitly rejected the Communist Party’s traditional ideals of work and social sacrifice. It thus opposed itself — in contrast with the protest movements of the late 1960s — pretty much to the *entire* political class, including the parties of the left and the workers’ unions.<sup>5</sup>

A second crucial factor in the rise of a new protest movement in 1977 was the choice of the Communists, after coming in second at the national elections of 1976, to indirectly support the centre-right Christian Democrat government of Giulio Andreotti, thus pursuing the *compromesso storico* strategy PCI secretary Enrico Berlinguer had

launched back in 1973. This project foresaw an alliance between the two oppositional parties which was highly unpopular among younger generations of left-wing activists, and in the hope of some political turnabout, many of these voters opted for the Communists in the elections of June 1976.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising then that the PCI's choice to support Andreotti led to a sense of betrayal. In about the same period, the extra-parliamentary groups of the alternative left furthermore dissolved, and so there was a strong sense of political void among many young, disillusioned left-wing activists.

The rupture between left-wing youth and the Italian Communist Party was most evident in Bologna, the most successful Communist governed city at the time. The prosperous "red city" had an international reputation,<sup>7</sup> and was often referred to as an "isola felice." Any flaw in this perfect example of Communist leadership was therefore highly inappropriate in a period when the PCI was attempting to gain more political power.<sup>8</sup> Hence the increasingly severe reaction to incidents of social unrest, in early 1977, and despite the predominantly creative and peaceful character of the student movement as it manifested itself in Bologna.

A climax was reached in March: three days after an aggressive intervention of police forces during International Women's Day on March 8, police were called to intervene in a riot between members of Lotta Continua and Catholic students, at the university. In the clashes that followed, a police officer shot Francesco Lorusso in the back while he was running away. Outraged companions devastated the city center during a violent demonstration in the afternoon of March 11, and the university zone became a battlefield complete with barricades, until the army was eventually sent out to regain control.<sup>9</sup> These incidents marked a final stage in the ongoing conflict between the local student movement and authorities, and therefore represent a turning point in the history of Bologna.

Moreover, the police officer who shot Lorusso was never tried, and Lorusso's death was written off as a mere tragedy. Numerous requests to open a new investigation remained unanswered.<sup>10</sup>

#### COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND THE DUTY TO REMEMBER

What constituted the main shock, and subsequently, a strong sense of 'collective trauma' for the different local groups and political actors involved in the clashes, however, was the deconstruction of the positive

image of Bologna. If the concept of trauma is primarily a medical term that relates to a physical or psychological, *individual* injury, in more recent times it has been applied in a more metaphorical sense and with regards to collectivities.<sup>11</sup> In this perspective, a trauma disconnects the members of a community and disrupts a sense of continuity, provoking a negative form of change.<sup>12</sup> Given that the impact of an event, rather than the event in itself constitutes trauma,<sup>13</sup> the role of the media in the representation of traumatic events is key to understanding their repercussions on a collectivity.

At the same time, traumas may also create the basis for a new communality,<sup>14</sup> as Barbara Misztal explains when she observes that past sufferings have significance “as a source of categories through which a group constructs its identity.” Furthermore, present-day processes of globalization and decentralization enhance the employment of traumatic memories not only as “a source of group empowerment,” but also as a “means of readdressing past injustices.” In other words, collective traumatic memories not only help a community build up a new collective identity, but they may also become the “vehicle for establishing collective rights and voicing collective demands,” thus gaining an important political and *moral* role as well.<sup>15</sup>

Traumatic past experiences can then be used to create and promote ‘counter-memories’ that contest dominant political powers, which are produced by marginalized communities who feel they have been ‘left out’ of mainstream history.<sup>16</sup> This recalls Jennifer Burns’ observation regarding the rise of micro-political initiatives of commitment in post-war Italy: counter-memories are indeed community-based, small memories that represent a moral *duty* to remember traumatic incidents that have been *silenced* by the master narratives of dominant social groups.<sup>17</sup> This silencing of traumatic experiences that may compromise the authority of the latter is related to the general ‘unspeakability’ of trauma: those who have suffered trauma literally do not find the words to express what they have witnessed, and so their personal accounts cannot be acknowledged by the other members of their community. In other words, “[s]enza la possibilità di raccontare e di trovare ascolto, di trovare parole condivise per dire ciò che terribilmente è accaduto, il passato [...] pesa come una catena d’acciaio su di un futuro che non può liberarsene, non può *elaborarlo*.”<sup>18</sup>

Identity is, finally, “laden with responsibility and remembrance, the legacy of the unmasterable past,” and reconciliation therefore strongly

depends on whether or not a community accepts liability for the past by developing a critical reflection and self-enquiry, rather than enforcing false consensus.<sup>19</sup> In other words, if traumatic events are not dealt with in the present but ‘normalized’ through public commemorative rituals and for the sake of state stability and continuity, the chance that they are forgotten, and hence repeated, is very high.<sup>20</sup>

#### BOLOGNA AND THE RUPTURE OF 1977

A similar process of critical reflection marked the *impegno* of a group of intellectuals in Bologna in the aftermath of the incidents of March 1977. As mentioned earlier, the *fatti di marzo* had a great impact on the entire local community, and not just on Lorusso’s family and close friends: due in part to the highly alarming and tendentious reports in the local media, local citizens realized that Bologna was not an “*isola felice*,” untouched and untouchable by the social conflicts and political violence that occurred in cities such as Rome and Milan. Secondly, the death of Lorusso and the violence that struck the city in the following days served as a wake-up call for the local Communist Party, who failed to control the conflict and suffered a severe blow to its political identity.

This is exemplified by the case of a group of local intellectuals who took Lorusso’s case to heart and opposed itself explicitly to the official interpretation of the clashes, by distancing itself from the PCI and by promoting a ‘counter-memory’ of the events. As we shall see, these intellectuals were highly criticized for their ‘dissidence,’ and on some occasions even defined as “*intellettuali contro*.” This reaction must be placed in the Gramscian reading of intellectuals as fundamentally tied to a particular class and functioning as an ‘organic’ part of this class. Two key concepts in this vision are organisation and the political party: first of all, for Gramsci the ‘organic intellectual’ had a directive and organisational responsibility in producing knowledge and instilling it into others; secondly, it was “in the context of the political party that this [knowledge] becomes a historical force.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the intellectuals in Bologna clearly went against the traditional, communist concept of the intellectual in their refusal to be part of the ‘organic whole,’ and in their detachment from the process through which the PCI was trying to become a hegemonic party.<sup>22</sup> They did so, primarily, with a journal which criticized the Communist Party, the *Cerchio di gesso*, and by founding an association dedicated to Lorusso, which in a less explicit manner also functioned as a political statement against the PCI.

### WHITE CHALK CIRCLES

The *Cerchio di gesso* journal followed in the vein of the theoretical journal *Per la critica*, last issued in late 1976. Editor Gianni Scalia had decided to create a new journal with a highly theoretical approach and limited readership.<sup>23</sup> In the wake of the *fatti di marzo*, however, it was decided that this journal should have a more practical and political direction: it thus became an outright political statement against local authorities and their way of handling the student movement in Bologna. Hence, the intellectuals behind the journal clearly made the moral choice of a more direct engagement in society.

The conflict between the authorities and the intellectuals initiated with a public support letter from the latter in favor of *Radio Alice* on March 18, 1977. This local radio station, which functioned as the mouthpiece of the student movement in Bologna, had been accused of guiding the clashes on March 11, and was closed down during a violent police intervention the following day.<sup>24</sup> The support letter employed a highly rhetorical language and challenged the anti-fascist roots of the PCI, calling the closure of *Radio Alice* an “attentato alle libertà democratiche, conquistate dalla Resistenza.”<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, the Communist Party defined the intellectuals as “pseudo-intellettuali irresponsabili,” which recalls Gramsci’s view of the intellectual’s responsibility in the production and transmission of knowledge, and hence his educative place within a specific system. Nevertheless, in the first issue of the *Cerchio di gesso* the document was reprinted and accompanied by a commentary article highlighting the value of *Radio Alice* in contemporary society. Not surprisingly, the intellectuals received more negative reactions, and after only five published issues, the journal was forced to close down.<sup>26</sup>

The title of the journal also implies a clear stand against authorities: the ‘cerchi di gesso’ refer to the white chalk circles drawn around the bullet holes in the wall in via Mascarella, where Lorusso was shot dead (see figure 1). The front cover of the journal features a close-up of the wall, which is accompanied by a long subtitle that reads like a political statement: “Attorno ai fori, secondo il rito, un cerchio di gesso bianco calcola il numero delle pallottole. Dovrebbe essere semplice da capire: il potere diventa assoluto se manca l’opposizione al potere, se l’opposizione si fa potere o si compromette col potere, se il potere si produce e riproduce con il consenso dell’opposizione.” This is clearly a reference to the PCI’s ‘betrayal’ after its success at the elections of 1976, when the party decided to support Andreotti’s center-right government,

rather than remaining an oppositional party. This provoked the aforementioned political void among left-wing activists. The *Cerchio di gesso* was then first and foremost a tentative not only to denounce the role of the PCI in the *fatti di marzo*, but also to express a critical counter-voice to the PCI's national, political line of those years, as evidenced by Scalia's editorial: "A noi, qui, in queste pagine è dato (ma è tutto) dissentire: promettere a noi stessi e ad altri di *resistere*."<sup>27</sup> As former member Paolo Pullega observes, it was an attempt to "raccogliere l'adesione dei pochi intellettuali che in quel momento [...] vedevano nella modalità di cambiamento del quadro politico, con il passaggio del PCI nella maggioranza, una preoccupante ipotesi."<sup>28</sup>



Figure 1: The wall with the bullet holes in via Mascarella, covered by a glass plate. The graffiti reproduces a rhetoric slogan of the 1970s, and is a reference to the shooting, by Greek police, of an anarchist during the riots in Athens of December 2008. Photo by Andrea Hajek, 2008.

Indeed, the journal aimed at developing a general reflection on what was happening with the left in Italy and in particular in Bologna, "fuori dalla logica criminale e criminalizzante" that the PCI was applying to the incidents of March 1977 and with the aim of regaining a sense of belonging to a political community, as poet and librarian Roberto Roversi recalled in a 1997 interview: "Noi, col *Cerchio di gesso*,

cercammo di *capire*, non tanto per gli altri, soprattutto *per noi*.”<sup>29</sup> As we have seen, collective traumatic experiences often lead to the creation of new communities, who base their new identity on a commonly shared sense of trauma, which becomes a “vehicle for establishing collective rights and voicing collective demands.”<sup>30</sup> The *fatti di marzo* then represent a traumatic experience for this group of intellectuals, who no longer identified with the Communist Party’s social and political values, and who felt the need to regain a political identity by publically distancing themselves from the PCI.

The case of Roversi is exemplary of the worsening relationship between the local PCI and the intellectuals of the *Cerchio di gesso* journal.<sup>31</sup> A former partisan fighter in northern Italy, in post-war years Roversi increasingly distanced himself from the institutional left. Shortly after the incidents of March 1977 he publically denounced the Communist party organ *L’Unità* in a letter to mayor Renato Zangheri, which was published in the journal, for the way the daily had reported the events, i.e. equating the students to hooligans and fascists.<sup>32</sup> These (mis)interpretations played a crucial role in the creation of a collective trauma in Bologna, as we have seen earlier on.

Roversi repeated his criticism in a poem published in the first issue of the *Cerchio di gesso*, in particular with regards to the frequent references in the local press to the material damage caused by the students during the demonstration in the afternoon of March 11:

A che punto è la città? / La città si ferisce / camminando /  
sopra i cristalli di cento vetrine.  
A che punto è la città? /La città piange e fa pena.  
Poi elicotteri in aria / perché le vetrine son rotte  
Le vecchiette allibite / perché le vetrine son rotte  
Commendatori adirati / perché le vetrine son rotte  
I tramvieri incazzati / perché le vetrine son rotte  
Tutte le strade deserte / perché le vetrine son rotte  
Carabinieri schierati / perché le vetrine son rotte  
Sessantamila studenti / perché le vetrine son rotte  
Massacri di botte / perché le vetrine son rotte.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, Roversi was highly critical of the blindness of both authorities and mass media to social problems, which *were* indeed present in Bologna despite the predominant myth of the “*isola felice*,” as he recalled

in a number of interviews in *La Repubblica*. In 1987, for example, he denounced the way the media focused exclusively on the “studenti incazzati, [...] provocatori infiltrati, [...] intellettuali annoiati o frastornati,” and observed that “nuovi bisogni, nuovi baratri sociali [...] chiedevano (esigevano) di essere identificate, se non ancora appagati, almeno coinvolti nel processo di trasformazione del mondo in corso. Nulla invece nella sostanza è poi accaduto.”<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, in 1997 Roversi expressed himself on the:

[e]marginazioni nuove, alterità sociali, lontananze sorde: fenomeni che maturavano in tutte le città, ma da cui Bologna, tutta piena della sua completezza, della sua pienezza mentale, pensava di essere esente. E invece cominciavano a corrodere anche lei. Bologna non vide, non *guardò* i quartieri nuovi che crescevano ai suoi margini, fuori dalle mura che per Bologna sono sempre state il limite della città vera.<sup>35</sup>

In this same interview Roversi also denounced the way *Radio Alice* had been shut down, arguing that “Radio Alice [...] era una voce viva, che tutti dovevano ascoltare allora, credo che anche il cardinale lo facesse [...]”<sup>36</sup> The theme of the blindness of authorities recurred in another poem Roversi wrote for a monument that was located in a public garden dedicated to Lorusso in the 1990s, the *Giardino Pierfrancesco Lorusso*:

Nella cittadella che deve essere / della cultura, della giovinezza, della speranza / il nome dello studente Francesco Lorusso / abbattuto dalla violenza di un potere senza occhi / resterà negli anni a testimoniare / con sua voce sempre chiara e forte / la forza dell’impegno nelle azioni di ogni / giorno / e la vitalità esemplare delle idee difese con la vita.

All in all, the *Cerchio di gesso* journal, which originated as a reaction to the incidents of March 1977, and the impact these events had on a number of local intellectuals, served, firstly, as a denunciation of the factual events of 1977, and in that sense represents a moral duty to remember as well as a critique of the PCI’s local and national political line. Secondly, the journal fulfilled the need to make this trauma ‘speakeable’ and to reconstruct a collective, political identity.

THE ASSOCIAZIONE PIER FRANCESCO LORUSSO

A second way in which this group of intellectuals challenged the Communist Party's authority and expressed its dissent over the way the local 'Movement of '77' had been handled, was through the creation of the *Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso*, founded on February 28, 1979. The primary aims of the association were to help Lorusso's family in its attempts to have the investigations reopened and to create public awareness about the injustice the family felt had been done to Lorusso.

Contrary to the victims' families' associations related to the various neo-fascist bomb massacres of the 1970s, which were composed of family members whose personal involvement in a collective, traumatic event that was remembered (and thus shared) publicly gave them a special status, the association dedicated to Francesco Lorusso was composed of lawyers, university professors, judges and magistrates. In other words, people *not* related to Lorusso emotionally or by ideological conviction, but who held important positions within the local community and thus evoked a different kind of respect or authority. During an interview of June 19, 2009, the current spokesperson of the association and former friend of Lorusso Mauro Collina observed that the intellectuals were not contacted by Lorusso's family, but spontaneously came to the idea of creating an association:

Diciamo che è stato un insieme di concause che hanno portato a incontrarci: la volontà della famiglia, la volontà nostra e *in maniera totalmente autonoma* la disponibilità e l'offerta di tutta una serie di soggetti che, non essendo, come dire, dei rincoglioniti, avevano compreso benissimo qual'era... cosa stava succedendo, e quindi erano critici, per fortuna, a questo processo di criminalizzazione, etcetera.

Their presence was all the more significant given that many of them were former members of or sympathizers with the Communist Party, which, as we have seen, was strongly disappointed with the PCI's politics at the time. Thus, even though they had not been directly involved in the dramatic happenings of March 1977, and had no personal connections to Lorusso, the intellectuals felt the need to make a political statement, a move they would probably not have made if the situation had not escalated to this extent. As Collina argues, "Avrebbero magari [...] posto delle critiche, ma insomma, non avrebbero mai avuto questo

corraggio — come dire, intellettuale, morale, politico — di esporsi.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as historian Sandro Bellassai has noted, “[d]iversi intellettuali, in quel momento non solo vicini ma *interni* allo stesso PCI, esprimono dissensi anche decisi dalle posizioni e dalle letture prevalenti nel partito.” Similarly, a local university teacher explained that, after the incidents of March, “escono allo scoperto, sul campo, coloro che per la loro dissidenza dalla sinistra ufficiale erano rimasti confinati fino ad allora ai margini, rintanati, coperti.”<sup>38</sup>

In other words, the ‘collective’ trauma the intellectuals had suffered as a result of the violent intervention and one-sided interpretation of local authorities made it difficult to continue identifying with the PCI, forcing them to find a way of dealing, collectively, with this trauma, and to give it meaning. Besides speaking out against the PCI through the *Cerchio di gesso* journal, they accomplished this by creating an association that explicitly rejected the official interpretation of the facts, and their strength then lay not only in their public reputation, but in their previous connection with the PCI. Indeed, their ‘dissidence’ particularly embarrassed the PCI as it questioned the party’s authority and damaged its political identity, more so than if they had been ‘ordinary’ citizens.<sup>39</sup> This also explains why neither Lorusso’s companions nor his family joined the association officially: these memory groups were connected to Lorusso more by ideological and emotional ties, and might therefore have limited the effectiveness of the association in reaching out to the community and creating a legitimate, commonly shared and public memory of Lorusso’s death.<sup>40</sup>

#### CONTINUING LORUSSO’S IMPEGNO IN THE PRESENT

A first, official aim of the association, as stated in the Statute, was that of giving Lorusso’s death a meaning in the present and in the future. The association is thus ascribed the task of both remembering the ideals “che animarono in vita Pier Francesco Lorusso e il suo appassionato impegno civile e sociale,” and of offering “solidarietà concreta a tutti i giovani che assieme a Francesco Lorusso lottavano per i suoi ideali.”<sup>41</sup> Focus is therefore on the *ideals* Lorusso had worked for during his life, though these are not intended in strictly political terms, as was the case in a commemorative plaque Lorusso’s companions had placed in the street where he was killed:

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

The association rather aimed at ‘continuing’ his medical and social engagement, since Lorusso had studied medicine.<sup>42</sup> Yet, it contained hardly any members active in the medical or social field, and its activities were then not an outcome of any personal or professional interests of its members in these kinds of practices. This leads me to conclude that the association’s activities served, again, to give a public and moral counter-voice to the hegemonic PCI and its vision on the incidents in Bologna. In other words, pursuing projects with a moral and civic character *in the name of* Francesco Lorusso was a strategy to deconstruct the official discourse in which Lorusso was no more than a rebel and an extremist, thus evoking a sense of duty to remember the silenced memory of a dedicated and socially engaged student.

The association gave shape to this medical and social engagement by promoting “studi, ricerche, dibattiti e discussioni in materia medico-sociale, con particolare attenzione ai problemi sanitari e giuridici e al territorio bolognese ed emiliano.”<sup>43</sup> This translated itself into two initiatives: first of all, one of its members — a university teacher from Lorusso’s medical department — participated in the examination board which awarded an annual thesis prize dedicated to Lorusso and financed by the family. The prize was granted to students of the department of Medicine and Surgery who had graduated with a thesis relating to medical and social issues.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, in 1981 the association created the so-called *Tribunale dei cittadini per il diritto alla salute Pier Francesco Lorusso*.<sup>45</sup> Inaugurated during the 4th anniversary of Lorusso’s death, the *Tribunale* was set up in collaboration with another local association and sustained by a number of medical institutions, such as the *Centro per l’Alternativa alla Medicina e alla Psichiatria*, run by former college buddy Vito Totire.<sup>46</sup> Totire explains, in an e-mail message of April 1, 2010, that the association created this “strumento di protesta e di denuncia” with the intention of opening up an interactive “canale di critica” regarding the malfunctioning of the sanitary system in Bologna.<sup>47</sup> The choice of dedicating the *Tribunale*

to Lorusso was then motivated by the desire to remember “la figura del giovane laureando in medicina impegnato, con una generazione di studenti che insieme lottavano per i suoi ideali e per la trasformazione democratica della società, *a partire anche dalla specificità del suo essere medico.*”<sup>48</sup> Although the *Tribunale* was not destined to last long, it is a good illustration of the attempt to give Lorusso’s life a meaning in the present and future, as well as to use this memory in the establishment of collective demands.

A second aim of the association was the creation of a more commonly shared memory of Lorusso and the *fatti di marzo* through public debates on present issues that regarded both the nation and, as the years passed, the city of Bologna, but which could always be reconnected to the events of March 1977. Hence, apart from promoting Lorusso’s memory through medical and social projects as described above, the association also attempted to stimulate a public reflection on the trauma of 1977, making it, once again, ‘speakable,’ and hence attempting to come to some form of reconciliation with the local community.

#### CREATING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF LORUSSO’S DEATH

Between 1980 and 1987, the focus of the debates organized by the association was primarily terrorism. The presence of the family was most explicit in these years, as it often used these debates to repeat its pleas for a reopening of the investigations: it thus seems to have used the *Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso* as an instrument through which to gain public support for its legal battle and, subsequently, to give this (counter-)memory a place in the present. On the poster that announced a debate on March 11, 1980, for example, the absence of a trial in the Lorusso case was presented as the origin of the recent increase in political violence, as well as a warning for the future: “Tre anni dopo l’uccisione di Pier Francesco Lorusso non è stato fatto giustizia. *Da quel giorno sempre più* l’uso delle armi e il terrorismo hanno insanguinato il paese. Anche il rifiuto della giustizia, in questo come in troppi altri casi, apre la via alla violenza.”<sup>49</sup> Hence, the lack of justice in the case of Lorusso is presented as a symbolic cause of the degeneration of (left-wing) terrorism in Italy, a problem that regarded the *entire* Italian society, which illustrates that Lorusso’s death was not perceived as a private but as a public trauma.

Two years later, the *fatti di marzo* were reconnected to a major bomb massacre at the railway station of Bologna, on August 2, 1980: 85 people

died and 200 were wounded during the worst terrorist attack ever to strike the city.<sup>50</sup> The *Associazione tra i familiari delle vittime della strage alla stazione di Bologna del 2 agosto 1980* adhered to the initiative, and a connection was furthermore made with the recent legal outcomes in the Piazza Fontana and Brescia trials, two other cases of denied justice.<sup>51</sup> The Lorusso case was thus put on the same level as the neo-fascist terrorist attacks of the 1970s, in particular the Bologna massacre which had had such an important impact on the city. By ‘converging’ his memory with the (local) memories of these massacres, Lorusso’s memory was thereby made more ‘shareable’ or public.<sup>52</sup>

The issue of political violence recurred in a debate of 1983 about the law on ‘pentitismo’ and its functionality — as opposed to the option of amnesty — in the process of coming to terms with the *anni di piombo*.<sup>53</sup> In this period, issues such as amnesty and dissociation were heavily debated, as many former members of the student movement were still in prison. Thus, in 1984 a group of activists of the former *Autonomia Operaia* faction (Workers’ Autonomy, AO) — one of the most violent components of the ‘Movement of ’77’ — interrupted a debate organized by the association on the legal procedures for dissociated terrorists, contesting the fact that Lorusso’s death was commemorated in this way.<sup>54</sup> This raised questions about who ‘owned’ Lorusso’s memory: thus, if the association — as well as part of what was left of the student movement — in the early 1980s viewed Lorusso as a victim of violence *tout court* and promoted reflections that rejected the use of violence (whether perpetrated by the state or by terrorists), the former *Autonomia Operaia* rather considered Lorusso a victim of the state, and used his death as a symbol of its anti-institutional battle.

During the 10th anniversary of 1987, finally, a debate entitled “1977–1987. I giovani, la politica, lo Stato” was organized in collaboration with local authorities, again connected to the theme of terrorism.<sup>55</sup> The focus, however, seems to have shifted more towards issues of youth problems and discontent in Bologna. Two years later, for example, the association invited the local community to reflect on a disputed bill against drug addicts, moderated this time by a judge and by a University teacher: since the late 1970s, drugs had been a major problem among youth in Bologna.<sup>56</sup> In 1993, finally, a local daily reported a planned conference on the relation between youth, the university, and Bologna. Recently, the focus of the association has shifted from a national to a more local discourse on the (negative) legacies of 1977.<sup>57</sup>

All in all, if in the early years the debates were used to promote a counter-memory of Lorusso and gain consensus on a new investigation of his death, in the years that followed, his memory was transferred to the present and connected to general problems related to (national) terrorism and, subsequently, discontent local youth.

Over the years, the composition of the association has also changed: as the aging founders became less and less active in the public sphere, the association was taken over by former participants in the 'Movement of '77' in Bologna, most of whom were personal friends or political companions of Lorusso. Their priority was not so much to give Lorusso's *impegno* a practical shape in the present, or to reconnect the memory of March 1977 with current, political and social issues, but to promote a counter-memory of Lorusso's death, thus in a way continuing the original battle against the official interpretation of the events. In 2005, for example, the association applied for, but was eventually denied, public funds to sponsor an historic research project on 1977.<sup>58</sup> In 2007, the association proposed a conference on 1977. This conference was eventually organized by the University of Bologna and a local historical institute, but without the participation of the association, due not only to financial problems but also, and more importantly, to discordances regarding the extent to which the actual facts of March 1977 should be discussed.<sup>59</sup>

In 2011, finally, the association managed to organize an informal, two-day commemorative event, including a protest march through the city centre, imbued with nostalgic slogans and rhetoric: this demonstrates how different 'carrier groups' or 'memory choreographers' perform different types of memory work, and for different purposes.<sup>60</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to demonstrate how and why a part of the left-wing intelligentsia in the city of Bologna — the scene of a highly traumatic incident involving left-wing students and Communist authorities — distanced itself from local hegemonic power. Thus, both the experiences of the *Cerchio di gesso* journal and of the *Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso* represent an attempt to reconstruct a collective identity. The *Cerchio di gesso* changed from a theoretical journal for a limited readership into a journal of political and moral reflection on and denunciation of the events of March 1977, whereas the *Associazione* mostly tried to give Lorusso's death a meaning in the present by promoting,

among other things, public debates about topics related to current issues which could be connected to Lorusso. Thus, the intellectuals sought a more direct engagement with society so as to make the trauma of March 1977 ‘speakable,’ and hence to regain a political identity.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. She is also indebted to the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Warwick (UK) and the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, who supported the author at different stages of the writing and publication process. A special thanks, finally, to the staff of the *Centro di Documentazione Francesco Lorusso – Carlo Giuliani* in Bologna.

### Notes

1. *Anni di piombo* is the macabre nickname generally used to describe the violent 1970s in Italy (‘piombo’ or ‘lead’ is a metaphor for fire arms).

2. Pasolini wrote, among other things: “Quando ieri a Valle Giulia avete fatto a botte coi poliziotti, io simpatizzavo coi poliziotti! Perché i poliziotti sono figli di poveri.” Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Il Pci ai giovani,” *L’Espresso* 24, June 16, 1968, 13. The battle of Valle Giulia represents the first, violent confrontation between left-wing students from the 1968 student movement and police forces. Paul Ginsborg, *A history of contemporary Italy: society and politics, 1943–1988* (London–New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

3. Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of impegno. Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative. 1980–2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), 1.

4. Marco Grispigni, *1977* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 2007).

5. Grispigni, *1977*.

6. Grant Amyot, *The Italian Communist Part* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

7. Fabio Mussi, *Renato Zangheri. Bologna '77* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1978).

8. For an analysis of Bologna and its reputation in the 1970s, see also: Max Jäggi, Roger Müller and Sil Schmid, *Red Bologna*, transl. A. Clark (London: Writers and Readers, 1977).

9. Grisogni, 1977; Stefano Cappellini, *Rose e pistole. Cronache di un anno vissuto con rabbia* (Milano: Sperling & Kupfer Editori, 2007).

10. The police officer was dismissed on the basis of the notorious *legge Reale* of 1975, which legitimates the use of arms by police forces in situations of public disorder. Grisogni, 1977.

11. See, for example, Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. J. C. Alexander et alii (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2004), 1–30.

12. Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore-London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 183–199, 184, 198.

13. Ruth Glynn, "Trauma on the Line: Terrorism and Testimony in the *Anni di piombo*," in *The Value of Literature in and after the Seventies: The Case of Italy and Portugal*, ed. Monica Jansen and Paola Jordão (Utrecht: University of Utrecht Igitur Publishing and Archiving, 2006), 317–335, 319.

14. Erikson, "Notes on Trauma," 190.

15. Barbara Misztal, "The Sacralization of Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 1 (2004): 67–84, 68, 75, 80, 79.

16. Ann Rigney, "Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory," *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 11–28, 13. Foucault distinguished between traditional history as opposed to effective history; the former promotes continuity and the "permanence of the past", whereas effective history — or what he defined as 'counter-memory' — "introduces discontinuity into our very being" and refuses the "certainty of absolutes." Michel Foucault, *Language, counter-memory, practice. Selected essays and interviews* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 153–158.

17. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance. The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick-London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 58.

18. Paolo Jedlowski, "Memoria, mutamento sociale e modernità," in *La memoria contesa. Studi sulla comunicazione sociale del passato*, ed. Anna Lisa Tota (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2001), 40–67, 60.

19. William J. Booth, "Communities of Memory: On Identity, Memory, and Debt," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 2 (1999): 249–261, 254–255.

20. On trauma and reconciliation see also Ervin Staub, "Reconciliation after Genocide, Mass Killing, or Intractable Conflict: Understanding the Roots of Violence, Psychological Recovery, and Steps toward a General Theory," *Political Psychology*, 27, no. 6 (2006): 867–894.

21. Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (London: Pluto Books, 2002), 150.

22. Other than this specific group, there were several other local citizens who decided to distance themselves from the PCI, without participating in the initiatives of this specific group. That the PCI was not pleased with these ‘dissidents’ is illustrated by the account of a retired university professor, who recounted of several visits to his door by members of the PCI, after his decision to leave the local faction, in order to convince him to change his mind. Tito Saronne, e-mail message to author, January 28, 2009.

23. Paolo Pullega, “Il cerchio di gesso,” in *Atlante dei movimenti culturali dell’Emilia-Romagna 1968–2007 III. Arti, Comunicazione, Controculture*, ed. Piero Pieri and Chiara Cretella (Bologna: CLUEB, 2007), 17–22, 17.

24. N. a., “Documento per Radio Alice,” *Cerchio di gesso* 1 (1977): 17; Gianni Scalia, “Per cominciare,” *ibidem*: 3–7, 3. For more information on *Radio Alice* see: Bifo and Gomma, eds., *Alice è il diavolo. Storia di una radio sovversiva* (Milano: ShaKe edizioni, 2002).

25. N.a., “Documento per Radio Alice,” 17.

26. Pullega, “Il cerchio di gesso,” 20.

27. Scalia, “Per cominciare,” 3.

28. Pullega, “Il cerchio di gesso,” 18.

29. Michele Smargiassi, “Nel cuore di un libraio la coscienza della città,” *La Repubblica* (Bologna), March 11, 1997, my italics; Smargiassi, “La città in frantumi sotto le scarpe,” *ibidem*, March 10, 2007.

30. Misztal, “The Sacralization of Memory,” 80.

31. Michele Smargiassi, “La bandiera di Francesco,” *La Repubblica*, March 11, 1987.

32. Roberto Roversi, “Un cittadino di Bologna al suo sindaco,” *L’Unità*, July 24, 1977; Luca Morisi, “L’immagine del 1977 a Bologna nella stampa quotidiana” (BA thesis, University of Bologna, 1993).

33. Roversi, “Il libro paradiso,” *Cerchio di gesso* 1 (1977): 30–31, 30.

34. Smargiassi, “La bandiera di Francesco,” 38.

35. Smargiassi, “Nel cuore di un libraio.”

36. *Ibid.*.

37. Mauro Collina, e-mail message to author, June 19, 2009, my italics.

38. Sandro Bellasai, “Un trauma che si chiama desiderio. Per una storia del Settantasette a Bologna,” in *Gli anni Settanta. Tra crisi mondiale e movimenti collettivi*, ed. Alberto de Bernardi, Valerio Romitelli and Chiara Cretella (Bologna: Archetipolibri, 2009), 213–234, 228; Cesare Sughì, “Pietro Bellasi: ‘Il ’77, un doloroso, perdente appello alla felicità,’” *Resto del Carlino* (Bologna), March 11, 2007.

39. This is also why the party organ *L'Unità* had made such explicit connections between students and Fascists: by excluding the students from the presumably democratic community the PCI felt it represented, it reinforced its own identity.

40. On the concept of public memory see Kendall R. Phillips, "Introduction," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 1–14.

41. Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso, *Statuto* (1979), attachment A, 1.

42. Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso, *Statuto* (1979), attachment A, 1. The emphasis not on getting justice for Lorusso or defending his political views, but on his social *impegno*, in the Statute, was probably also necessary in order to give the association a legal status.

43. Associazione Pier Francesco Lorusso, *Statuto* (1979), attachment A, 4.

44. The award existed from 1979 to 2002, and was extended — in the mid-1990s — to students from different departments, probably because there were less and less eligible candidates for the award, and the family perhaps also wanted to make Lorusso's memory more widely known.

45. *Dichiarazione sostitutiva dell'atto di notorietà*, April 1, 1981.

46. The *Centro per l'alternativa* was dedicated to Lorusso in 1982, and was a sort of extension of the 'Collettivo operai e studenti contro la nocività', an initiative that had involved Totire, Lorusso himself and Lorusso's brother. Vito Totire, e-mail message to author, April 1, 2010.

47. N. a., "Riapertura del caso Lorusso chiesta dai giovani socialisti," *Resto del Carlino* (Bologna), March 9, 1980.

48. *Bozza di documento programmatico e di statuto*, n. d., 2. My italics.

49. Associazione "Pier Francesco Lorusso," 1980 [leaflet]. My italics.

50. The debate was entitled 'Giustizia negata anche a Bologna?' N. a., "Oggi l'incontro con i famliari," *L'Unità*, March 11, 1982.

51. On 12 December 1969, a bomb exploded in a bank in Piazza Fontana in Milan, killing 17 people and injuring 88. A neo-fascist terrorist group was eventually identified as the culprit of the massacre, but its members never received sentences. Luciano Lanza, *Bombe e segrete. Piazza Fontana: una strage senza colpevoli* (Milano: Elèuthera, 2009). The Northern city of Brescia was struck in 1974, when a bomb exploded during a union demonstration, killing eight and wounded 102. Again, no one has been convicted for this crime.

52. More recently, Lorusso's case has also been connected to the death of a young left-wing activist under very similar circumstances, during the clashes at the G8 in Genoa, of 2001. "Francesco Lorusso e Carlo Giuliani: verità senza Giustizia — Le inchieste insabbiate," March 8, 2002 [press release].

53. N. a., “L’11 marzo si discute d’amnistia. Movimento in corteo,” *La Repubblica*, March 10, 1983. ‘Pentitismo’ is when members of criminal or terrorist organisations collaborate with authorities by providing information that may lead to the arrest of other members of the organisation. In return, they receive a reduced sentence. Ginsborg 1990.

54. N. a., “Quali leggi per chi si dissocia dal terrorismo? Oggi un convegno,” *L’Unità* (Emilia Romagna), March 11, 1984; Roberto Canditi, “11 marzo 1984: sette anni dalla morte di Lorusso,” *Resto del Carlino* (Bologna), March 11, 1984; N. a., “Indagine bis su Lorusso?,” *ibidem*, March 12, 1984.

55. Cristiano Armati, *Cuori rossi* (Roma: Newton Compton Editori, 2008); Associazione “Pier Francesco Lorusso,” 1987 [leaflet].

56. Drugs were also one of the reasons the Movement of ’77 came to an end. N. a., “Dibattito e concorso di idee in ricordo di Lorusso,” *L’Unità* (Bologna), March 11, 1989; Associazione “Pier Francesco Lorusso,” “Un cappello pieno di droghe,” 1989 [leaflet].

57. N. a., “Fiori per Lorusso,” *Resto del Carlino* (Bologna), March 12, 1993.

58. N. a., “Lorusso, borse di studio sugli anni 70,” *Resto del Carlino* (Bologna), March 12, 2005; N. a., “Sul Settantasette nuovi contrasti con l’Ateneo,” *La Repubblica* (Bologna), March 9, 2006; N. a., “Dal Comune segnali flebili,” *L’Unità* (Bologna), March 12, 2006.

59. More precisely, the University did not want to limit its perspective to the incidents of 1977, and engage in any political discussions. Indeed, chancellor Calzolari specified that the University did not aim at understanding ‘chi avesse ragione e chi torto, ammesso che queste responsabilità possano essere individuate, ma comporre le componenti storiche di quel disgraziato periodo così da renderne possibile la ricostruzione’. Eventually only one out of 24 interventions was on the Lorusso case. Michele Smargiassi, “Il Rettore riaccoglie Lorusso,” *La Repubblica* (Bologna), March 12, 2007; Marina Amaduzzi, “Anche l’Ateneo ora vuole ricordare,” *Corriere della Sera*, March 9, 2007.

60. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma;” Brian Conway, *Commemoration and Bloody Sunday. Pathways of Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).