Anna Cento Bull

Reconciliation through Agonistic Engagement? Victims and Former Perpetrators in Dialogue in Italy Several Decades after Terrorism

Abstract: *From the late 1960s to the early 1980s Italy suffered a prolonged period of political violence and ideologically inspired terrorist acts, which caused deep social wounds and led to a sharply divided memory. Numerous memoirs published since the end of the conflict by both former terrorists and victims aggravated the divide, until recently. This paper analyses some of the memoirs written by the victims and relatives of the victims and above all a recent dialogue between former perpetrators and victims through the lenses of different modes of remembering. The paper explores the motivations and stances of the victims and relatives of victims who took part in this dialogue and argues that they partake of both a cosmopolitan and an agonistic approach to memory and reconciliation. The latter requires former enemies to confront each other as ‘adversarial citizens’ with their divided memories and perspectives in an open-ended manner.*

What makes victims as well as relatives of victims of terrorism engage in dialogue with former terrorists several decades after the end of the violence? Or, to repeat a question put forward by the editors of this volume: “How would it affect our picture of the history of terrorism [...] if the contribution of survivors was regarded as a central feature in the social process of coming to terms with a conflict conducted with terrorist means?” This chapter addresses these questions with reference to the Italian case. As the author of this chapter has argued elsewhere, Italy has often been considered a role model for its pioneering “reward” legislation which accelerated the end of the violence and the reintegration of the terrorists into society.¹ However, as far as the memory of terrorism is concerned, the country continues to remain sharply divided at both the social and political levels.²

Reconciliation has not yet been achieved, either through retributive or restorative justice. While several judicial trials have failed to bring about justice

¹ Anna Cento Bull and Philip Cooke: *Ending Terrorism in Italy*. London 2013.

² John Foot: *Italy’s divided memory*. London 2009.

in the eyes of the victims, repeated attempts at healing the wounds made by various actors, including the Catholic Church, the media, such as cinema and television, and, lately, the political class, have also fallen short of aspirations. As Hajek argued, “the wound remains open and continues to resurface in public debates”.³ In recent years, however, a number of victims have opted to engage in a protracted and collected process of dialogue with the perpetrators, facilitated by three mediators. Lasting from 2009 to 2014, this dialogue has resulted in a collected volume, entitled *Il libro dell'incontro*,⁴ which records the motivations, reactions and perspectives of all participants to the dialogue. In the volume (and the ensuing public debates), the participating victims reassert their agency and reclaim the process of “reconciliation” on their own terms, which makes their stances especially worthy of analysis.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section provides an overview of political terrorism in Italy and the reasons why reconciliation has proved so difficult to achieve, while the divisive legacy of the violence has been so long-lasting. The second section discusses different understandings of, and paths to, reconciliation and the role memory plays in this process. The last section explores the contrasting position of the victims in relation to justice, truth and reconciliation and analyses the reasons why some victims opted to engage in a sustained dialogue with former terrorists, which recently culminated in the publication of the collected volume entitled *Il libro dell'incontro*. The conclusion discusses the wider significance of victims engaging in a dialogue several decades after the end of terrorism.

Italy: A Case of Non-Reconciliation after Terrorism

Several decades have gone by since terrorism came to an end in Italy, yet the legacy of the political violence which raged in the country from 1969 to the early 1980s has proved to be both long-lasting and all-encompassing, affecting politics, society and culture. Many factors have contributed to this inability to reach closure and achieve reconciliation. The complex nature of the violence, ranging from bombing attacks on innocent civilians to an “armed struggle” against the state carried out by extreme-left and right groups, and the murky political context in which it took place, dominated by the Cold War and the fear of Communism, left behind many ambiguities, unanswered questions and half-disclosed truths.

³ Andrea Hajek: *Negotiating memories of Protest in Western Europe. The case of Italy*. Basingstoke 2013, 173.

⁴ Guido Bertagna, Adolfo Ceretti and Claudia Mazzucato (eds) *Il libro dell'incontro*. Milan 2015.

This is especially the case with right-wing terrorism, whose bombing attacks were orchestrated in connivance with sectors of the state, as they were part of a wider “Strategy of Tension”.⁵ Successive trials, lasting well into the 2000s, have disclosed that the bomb which exploded in Milan on 12 December 1969, causing the death of 17 people and leaving another 88 injured, and the one that detonated in Brescia on 28 May 1974, killing 8 people and injuring 103, were designed to place the blame on leftist groups. This type of ‘false flag’ terrorism aimed at justifying a clampdown on civil and democratic liberties. Indeed, in the early 1970s the threat of a right-wing “coup d’état” was considered by many a serious and plausible one.

While left-wing terrorism followed a more linear trajectory, the kidnapping in March 1978 of Christian Democratic statesman Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades left a trail of unresolved issues and recriminations, amid suspicions that his death had suited many opponents of the policy of rapprochement with the Communist Party Moro had been pursuing. The Moro episode is still viewed by many as shrouded in mystery and the question of who was responsible for his death (apart from the Red Brigades) is considered an open one, in light of the dubious role of the Secret Services, the P2 Masonic Lodge, the Mafia, as well as foreign intelligence services.⁶

The ambiguous role of the state during the ‘years of lead’ has left a legacy of mistrust in the political class and institutions. As for the victims and survivors of the bombing massacres, they are still aggrieved for what they see as a lack of justice, since successive trials have largely failed to bring the culprits to justice. The ways in which terrorism ended has also been a contributing factor in the heavy legacy left behind by the violence. From the beginning of the 1980s, an end to the violence was gradually brought about by a two-fold strategy carried out by the state: through repressive and intelligence measures and, later, through reward legislation introduced as a supplement to the repressive strategy. This reward legislation envisaged a differential treatment of defendants, according to whether they became “pentiti”, and disclosed information to the police, opted to “dissociate” from violence, or remained faithful to their beliefs (“irriducibili”). Many

⁵ See Anna Cento Bull: *Italian Neofascism. The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Nonreconciliation*. New York 2007; Franco Ferraresi: The Radical Right in Postwar Italy, in: *Politics and Society* 16, no. 1 (1988), 71–119; Franco Ferraresi: *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy After the War*. Princeton 1996.

⁶ There are numerous works dealing with the Moro case. See especially Richard Drake: *The Aldo Moro Murder Case*. Cambridge 2005; Sergio Flamigni: *La tela del ragno. Il delitto Moro*. Milan 1995; Miguel Gotor: *Il memoriale della repubblica. Gli scritti di Aldo Moro dalla prigionia e l'anatomia del potere italiano*. Turin 2011.

prisoners, who wanted to rebuild their lives outside of prison, were thus able to benefit from lenient sentences and to re-enter society. This way of putting an end to violence focused on reintegrating the perpetrators, while no proper reparation process was put in place for the victims and their relatives. In general, the point of view of the survivors and relatives of the victims was marginalised, which caused them to undergo a process of re-victimisation.

Admittedly, the Catholic Church played an important role in promoting reparative encounters between perpetrators and victims.⁷ However, its main pre-occupation at the time was to put an end to the conflict and promote reconciliation through repentance on the part of the perpetrators and forgiveness on the part of the victims, something which many of the latter were not prepared to do. An early attempt to foster reconciliation took place also via the media, when a documentary series by Sergio Zavoli, entitled *La notte della Repubblica*, was broadcast by RAI2 between 1989 and 1990. In the programme, as Hajek argues, “Reconciliation is sought, primarily, through the juxtaposition of personal accounts by a variety of eyewitnesses, ranging from former right-wing *stragisti* to left-wing terrorists, *pentiti*, and political representatives”.⁸ As Andreasen and Cecchini have pointed out, the programme, while well-intentioned, was marked by a heavy imbalance in terms of how the perpetrators and the victims were represented, with a huge number of interviews with the former and only one interview with a victim.⁹ In the 1980s and in the following decade, many former terrorists were able to achieve a high degree of notoriety by publishing their memoirs, often proudly reasserting their justifications for taking up arms. By contrast, the few memoirs written by victims, such as *Colpo alla nuca* by Sergio Lenci,¹⁰ were unable to divert attention to their plight and constituted an exception. In general, the victims kept silent, feeling as if they had no voice or no sympathetic audiences.

Only much later, with the turn of the millennium, a “turn to the victim” occurred.¹¹ First and most importantly, a number of memoirs written by the children of the victims struck a chord with the public and created an aura of sympathy for

7 On the role of the Church, see Annachiara Valle: *Teresilla. Riconciliazione e carità*. Rome 2016; Annachiara Valle: *Parole Opere e Omissioni. La chiesa nell'Italia degli anni di piombo*. Milan 2008; Cento Bull and Cooke, *Ending Terrorism*.

8 Andrea Hajek: Coming to terms with terrorism. Sergio Corbucci's *Donne armate* and the trauma of the anni di piombo, in: *The Italianist*, 34, no. 2 (2014), 219–234 and 223–224.

9 Marie Andreasen and Leonardo Cecchini: From passive victimhood to committed citizenship, in: Karen-Margrethe Simonsen and Jonas Ross Kjærgård (eds.) *Discursive Framings of Human Rights. Negotiating agency and victimhood*. London 2016, 94–113, 101.

10 Sergio Lenci: *Colpo alla nuca*. Rome 1988.

11 See Ruth Glynn: The ‘turn to the victims’ in Italian culture: victim-centred narratives of the anni di piombo, in: *The Italianist*, 18, no.4 (2013), 373–390.

their pain and suffering. This was especially the case with the collected volume *I silenzi degli innocenti*, which comprised several testimonies by victims of both left and right terrorism.¹² The following year, Mario Calabresi, the son of Luigi, a police commissar killed by a left commando in 1972 in revenge for the “suicide” of anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli while in police custody in Milan under suspicion of planting the bomb in Piazza Fontana, published a book that became a bestseller.¹³ Secondly, the political class started to pay attention to the victims, with both reparative and commemorative measures. Thus in May 2007 Parliament approved a Law which established that 9 May, the day when Aldo Moro was found dead in Rome, was to be dedicated to remembering the victims of terrorism and the bombing massacres. Since then, the President of the Republic, incarnated first by Giorgio Napolitano and later by Sergio Mattarella, has officially presided over a solemn ceremony of commemoration, while acknowledging the continuing need to obtain truth and transparency in relation to the troubling past. At the 2009 ceremony, President Napolitano welcomed the widow of Commissar Luigi Calabresi, Gemma, and the widow of anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli, Licia, in a highly poignant encounter which for many represented a gesture of reconciliation between two opposing sides and two contrasting versions of the truth. Significantly, it could also be interpreted as a stance by two prominent victims not to allow their plight to be used in the service of biased and partisan reconstructions.¹⁴

Yet even these important developments did not mark closure with the violent past. At the political level, in fact, despite the end of the Cold War and the fall of the First Republic, Italy's ideological divisions and enmities had resurfaced under a new guise. On the one hand, Berlusconi created a new party and mobilised his supporters under the banner of anti-Communism, even though the Communist Party had officially transformed itself into a social-democratic party. On the other hand, those who opposed Berlusconi accused him of reproducing the old corrupt political system and of aspiring to establish authoritarian rule. As a result, the memory of terrorism remained bitterly divided, with each

¹² Giovanni Fasanella and Antonella Grippo: *I silenzi degli innocenti*. Milan 2006.

¹³ Mario Calabresi: *Spingendo la notte più in là. Storia della mia famiglia e di altre vittime del terrorismo*. Milan 2007.

¹⁴ In an interview made public in 2009, the writer Giancarlo De Cataldo, author of *Romanzo criminale* (Turin 2002) and other novels dealing with right-wing terrorism, expressed a view of the role of the victims shared by many. He stated that, “The victims have been used, and are still being used, by those people who do not want that the truth on that historical period is reconstructed in its entirety, but want only a partial, biased, watered-down reconstruction of those years”. Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O’Leary (eds.): *Sotto il segno della metafora: Una conversazione con Giancarlo De Cataldo*, in: *The Italianist* 29, no. 2 (2009), 350–365.

side accusing the other of having connived with the terrorists for subversive and anti-democratic ends.¹⁵ In this climate, many victims of terrorism were caught in the crossfire, with their grievances being used as a lever in order to attack political opponents.¹⁶ At the cultural level, after years in which cinematic representations seemed to foster reconciliation,¹⁷ a number of films and TV programmes were deemed to reflect “a cultural division that we may, if we wish, speak of as a kind of symbolic civil war”.¹⁸

In this context, tensions among the victims of terrorism as regards their stances on truth, justice, memory and reconciliation came to the fore and revealed a deep fracture, demonstrating that many victims still rejected reconciliation outright. In the same years, however, other victims embarked on a very different path, opting to engage in dialogue with former terrorists. Before discussing the victims’ stances and perspectives, the next section addresses the controversial concept of, and issues around, reconciliation, focusing especially on the role of memory.

Reconciliation after a Violent Conflict: The Role of Memory

Reconciliation processes are often controversial and fraught with tensions. Indeed, as Rosoux argued, “there is no consensus in the literature and among practitioners about the conditions necessary for reconciliation. For some, the core element of reconciliation is trust. For others, the key element is truth. Yet, others’ voices claim that the essence of reconciliation is a psychological process of transformation leading ultimately to an identity change”.¹⁹ Those who focus

¹⁵ See Anna Cento Bull: The role of memory in populist discourse: the case of the Italian Second Republic, in: *Patterns of Prejudice* 50, no. 3 (2016), 213–231.

¹⁶ In 2010 and 2011, for instance, the Berlusconi government refused to send any representatives to the annual commemoration of the 1980 Bologna bombing massacre, accusing the victims of having been manipulated by the left in its partisan campaign of hatred against its political adversaries.

¹⁷ See for instance Alan O’Leary: Italian cinema and the ‘anni di piombo’, in: *Journal of European Studies* 40, no. 3 (2010), 243–257 and Hajek, Coming to terms, 219–234.

¹⁸ O’Leary, Italian Cinema, 253. As he states, *Arrivederci, amore ciao* and *Attacco allo stato* (Michele Soavi, 2006) “both re-exclude the terrorist from the national family”, in contrast to previous films which had represented them as being partially reintegrated into it.

¹⁹ Valérie Rosoux: Reconciliation narrative: scope and limits of the Pax Europeana, in: *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 25, no.3 (2017), 325–339, esp. 327.

primarily on retributive justice believe that for reconciliation to occur the rule of law must be applied so that justice is achieved through a judicial process. Those who favour reconciliation through “restorative justice” advocate healing through a “victim-oriented process”. This consists of reparations and apologies to the victims on the part of the perpetrators, rehabilitation of offenders, societal empathy for the victims, practices of commemoration and remembrance.²⁰ There is also little agreement concerning the end goal of reconciliation. According to Rosoux, this varies from achieving simple coexistence between former enemies, to reaching a shared condition of mutual respect as fellow citizens, to establishing societal “harmony”.²¹

The role of memory is also controversial. While some continue to argue that forgetting the difficult past represents the best way to achieve reconciliation,²² nowadays the prevailing view is that the past must be confronted and “worked through”. However, what should be remembered is also contested. According to Brewer, reconciliation requires “recasting social memory as a peace strategy”. This means that what should be remembered is the suffering on all sides in order to promote a “unity of victimhood as an experience across the divide”. From this perspective, “sites of remembrance” can play an important role in bringing all victims together.²³ There is also the issue of whether reconciliation should strive to establish a “shared narrative of the past” or whether competing and contrasting representations should be able to coexist. As Manning stated, there is an underlying tension in the goals of reconciliation: “repairing social fabrics requires denouncing what ruptured them and the contrition of perpetrators; the liberal goals of peace and reconciliation foreground the importance of free speech and a public sphere in which competing narratives of the past coexist”.²⁴

20 On the pros and cons of restorative justice see for instance John Braithwaite: *Restorative Justice: assessing optimistic and pessimistic accounts*, in: Michael Tonry (ed.): *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Chicago 1999; Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft (eds.): *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*. London 2006; Gregory Shank and Paul Takagi: *Critique of Restorative Justice*, in: *Social Justice* 31, no. 3 (2004), 147–163.

21 Valérie Rosoux, *Reconciliation narrative*, 327.

22 David Mendeloff: *Truth-Seeking, Truth-Telling, and Postconflict Peacebuilding: Curb the Enthusiasm?*, in: *International Studies Review*, 6, no. 3 (2004), 355–80. There is popular support for this stance. See for instance Simon Jenkins: *Too much remembering causes wars. It's time to forget the 20th century*, in: *The Guardian* (9 Nov. 2017).

23 John D. Brewer: *Memory, truth and victimhood in post-trauma societies*, in: Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar (eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*. London 2006, 214–224, esp. 224.

24 Peter Manning: *Reconciliation and Perpetrator Memories in Cambodia*, in: *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 9 (2015,), 386–406, esp. 406.

This in turn raises the wider issue of the relationship between reconciliation and democracy. As Gibson argues:

To the extent that reconciliation generates pressures toward consensus, pressures that delegitimize difference and differing points-of-view, then reconciliation does not serve democracy. In a democracy, people do not have to agree with one another; they do not even have to respect the views of others. Instead, they must agree to disagree, they must accept a set of institutional and cultural norms that allow all competitors to enter the marketplace of ideas.²⁵

Finally, how the past is to be remembered is also a matter of controversy. Cento Bull and Hansen have distinguished between three main modes of remembering.²⁶ The antagonistic mode, often found in nationalistic or traditional political discourse, tends to be celebratory, glorifying or nostalgic. Victims and perpetrators are portrayed and remembered in binary and mutually exclusive terms. The cosmopolitan mode is based on the mutual recognition of the histories and memory of the “Other”, as it emphasises the human suffering of past atrocities and human rights violations in a reflective manner.²⁷ In doing so, however, this mode de-politicises and de-contextualises the past conflict, representing “good” and “evil” in moral and abstract terms, in many cases as an allusion to the ultimate evil of the Holocaust. Cosmopolitan memory therefore puts the emphasis on an ethical approach to memory as opposed to a politicised one. The agonistic mode of remembrance, by contrast, tends to avoid moral categories and addresses the underlying social and political questions of the unsettling past in a self-reflective and dialogic manner. In this mode, a multitude of perspectives is simultaneously taken into account and reflected upon, ranging from victims to perpetrators but also encompassing bystanders, spies and traitors.²⁸

Cento Bull and Hansen’s concept of agonistic memory draws on Chantal Mouffe’s theory of agonistic democracy which argues that conflict is constitutive of democracy.²⁹ A process of reconciliation inspired by agonism should therefore aim at transforming former enemies into adversaries as opposed to attempting to achieve harmony and consensus. Moving along these lines, Maddison and

²⁵ James L. Gibson: Overcoming apartheid: can truth reconcile a divided nation?, in: *Politikon* 31, no. 2 (2004), 129–155, esp. 151.

²⁶ Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen: On Agonistic Memory, in: *Memory Studies* 9, no. 4 (2016), 1–15.

²⁷ Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznaider: Memory Unbound. The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory, in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002), 87–106.

²⁸ Cento Bull and Hansen, Agonistic Memory.

²⁹ See Chantal Mouffe: *The Democratic Paradox*. London 2000 and *On the Political*. London 2005.

Diprose explicitly advocate that former enemies engage in “agonistic dialogue”. As they put it, “Key to this form of dialogue is proactively foregrounding the historical memory of violence, and allowing for the varied and multiple narratives and experiences of both individuals and groups (as well as the varied experiences of individuals within groups) to be expressed”.³⁰ This is not to say that consensus may not emerge from such encounters. However, “While dialogue may result in partially shared understandings and consensus on conflict narratives, this is not the objective. Agonistic dialogue engages conflict dynamics rather than repressing such dynamics and their relational aspects”.³¹

In short, remembering and the “turn to the victims” have taken on different meanings:

1. Remembering as part of a search for justice for the victims and punishment to the perpetrators
2. Remembering as a self-reflective ethical process based on the suffering of the victims on all sides, devoid of the historical context and depoliticised
3. Remembering as a self-reflective process that explores the unsettling past with its darker sides and socio-political struggles without aiming at a shared narrative

While the first type of remembering does not envisage any dialogue between victims and perpetrators, the other two types often promote rapprochement and dialogue, but the nature of the dialogue would be very different. In the Italian case, how have the victims positioned themselves vis-à-vis memory and dialogue? Why have some of them embarked on a process of working through the difficult past in dialogue with the perpetrators? The next section addresses these questions.

The Victims’ Stances

A number of victims and relatives of victims of terrorism reject any possibility of dialogue with former terrorists and any form of reconciliation. Indeed, they

30 Sarah Maddison and Rachael Diprose: “Conflict dynamics and agonistic dialogue on historical violence: a case from Indonesia” (21 Sep. 2017), in: *Third World Quarterly* 6, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1374837> (16 June 2018).

31 They state that “In this sense, we argue that agonistic dialogue processes provide important opportunities for divided groups to explore attitudes about the historical experiences that continue to polarise them, with potentially transformative effects”. See *ibid.*, 6.

continue to feel aggrieved for what they see as a lack of justice through the judicial process. Victims of left terrorism often berate the legislation that introduced lenient sentences for “pentiti” and “dissociati”, as it allowed many culprits to go free after relatively few years of incarceration. As for the bombing attacks, very few culprits have been brought to justice. Some of these victims have expressed their thoughts forcibly through their published memoirs and in public interviews. From this “antagonistic” perspective, the terrorists were criminals who killed without mercy and who deserve no pity or understanding. Thus Andrea Casalegno, son of a journalist assassinated by the Red Brigades on 16 November 1977, in a book published in 2008 portrays the former terrorists as devoid of any humanity, who do not deserve to be reintegrated into society or rehabilitated.³² In a very bitter memoir published in 2012, Massimo Coco, son of a judge killed by the Red Brigades in 1976, openly condemns the lenient legislation approved by the state in the 1980s and proudly reaffirms his hatred for the perpetrators.³³ Indeed, he goes further in his condemnation, as he accuses those children of the victims who engage in dialogue with the former terrorists of “betraying” their own side out of careerism rather than out of conviction. As he clarified in an interview, “I do not differentiate between red or black terrorism, mafia or common criminality. I do not believe in ideal justifications [for violence]: the law was broken and this is a matter of interest to the judiciary”.³⁴ The uncompromising stances of these victims are reinforced by the position adopted by the largest victims’ association in Italy, Aiviter, which was founded in 1985 by Maurizio Puddu, a Christian Democratic politician wounded by the Red Brigades in 1977. In 2015, to mark 30 years since its foundation, Aiviter produced a document in which it reassessed its role in promoting legislative and welfare initiatives in favour of the victims, and fostering a memory of the past centred around the experiences of the victims. While truth and justice appear prominently in the document, there is no mention of any possible reconciliation. Indeed the victims are defined in the document as “entrepreneurs of public memory”, whose narratives are in stark contrast and opposition to the memories of the former terrorists.³⁵

³² Andrea Casalegno: *L’attentato*. Milan 2008.

³³ Massimo Coco: *Ricordare stanca. L’assassinio di mio padre e le altre ferite mai chiuse*. Milan 2012.

³⁴ Donatella Alfonso: “Massimo Coco: ‘Nel mio libro il diritto al rancore’”, in: *La Repubblica* (15 Jan. 2013).

³⁵ Aiviter: “Trentennale dell’Associazione Italiana Vittime del Terrorismo e dell’Eversione contro l’ordinamento costituzionale dello Stato”. URL: <http://www.vittimeterrorismo.it/storia/> (12 July 2018).

These recent stances of the survivors and relatives of the victims appear to reinforce the argument, propounded by Caviglia and Cecchini in 2009, that the narratives and reconstructions of the past put forward by perpetrators and victims represent “a plurality of voices without dialogue”, and that “public discourse on terrorism, present or past, is in Italy plagued by monovocality”.

However, other victims have opted to remember in ways which open up to the “enemy side” and on this ground have embarked on instances of dialogue with former terrorists. Some encounters across the divide have taken place on an individual basis, but from 2009 to 2014 a sustained dialogue was carried out at group level, in an unprecedented attempt to engage in a collective form of restorative justice. The dialogue involved former left terrorists who had undergone a process of reflection and self-reflection concerning the violent past, victims and relatives of victims of both left and right terrorism, a group of guarantors drawn from judicial, cultural and media institutions, as well as a group of ‘third party witnesses’ representative of society at large and of the young generation in particular. The encounters were mediated by three experts, Guido Bertagna, a Catholic priest, Adolfo Ceretti, a criminologist and expert on reparative justice, and Claudia Mazzucato, an expert on penal law and mediation. This process culminated in the publication of a collected volume entitled *Il libro dell'incontro*,³⁶ in 2015, and in a series of public debates involving various participants to the dialogue which have taken place in schools, cultural institutes and religious venues.

Why have some victims engaged in this extended dialogue and decided to make it public? What did they hope to achieve through participating in a form of restorative justice? How do they view themselves and their role in society? How do they remember the past? As we shall now see, the positions adopted by the victims who took part in the encounters with former terrorists partake of both cosmopolitan and agonistic memory. However, their view of reconciliation seems to favour an agonistic understanding of society and democracy.

The cosmopolitan take on the dialogue has been best put forward by Agnese Moro, daughter of Aldo Moro, the Christian Democratic statesman kidnapped and assassinated by the Red Brigades in 1978. She met first privately and later in public with one of her father’s kidnappers, Franco Bonisoli. She then decided to

³⁶ The book comprises numerous, if relatively brief, considerations and reflections by the various participants to the dialogue, as well as much longer interventions by the mediators, who explain their approach to restorative justice and the role the dialogue they facilitated plays in this process. For a more detailed analysis of this volume, see Anna Cento Bull: Working through the Violent Past: Practices of Restorative Justice through Memory and Dialogue in Italy, in: *Memory Studies*, first published online on 3 August 2018.

take part in the group encounters, in the conviction that the judicial process had run its course but had left behind persisting feelings of pain and desperation. As she stated in 2016 in a public debate following the publication of *Il libro dell'incontro*, “penal justice does not cure the evil that was perpetrated [...] everything freezes and remains stuck in that moment”.³⁷ Reparative justice can help unfreeze this static position, allowing the victims to move on. This happens in two ways. On the one hand, the victim experiences at first hand a profound sense of pain and regret on the part of the perpetrators, and understands that pain and suffering are comparable across the divide. This creates a strong link between victims and perpetrators and makes the victims feel less isolated. Agnese Moro recalls that she “learnt about the pain of the others, those who caused it [...] also the pain of the innocents, children of victims and perpetrators”. On the other hand, the victim is able to recognise the humanity of the perpetrators and no longer sees them as monsters. As Agnese Moro stated, “I look at them and do not see the monsters that have populated so many years of my life, I see faces weighed by various emotions that I can understand”.³⁸ Similar sentiments were expressed by Giovanni Ricci, son of Aldo Moro’s bodyguards killed during his kidnapping, who also took part in the group dialogue.³⁹

Agnese Moro’s position recalls Brewer’s conceptualisation of reconciliation as a de-contextualised and de-politicised process. However, as various victims recall, during the dialogue a full range of emotions and passions were expressed, which went beyond feelings of pain, suffering and compassion as advocated by Brewer. As Giorgio Bazzega, son of a policeman killed by the Red Brigades, stated, during the encounters the former terrorists “let me vomit upon them all my hatred and my pain taking it on and helping me elaborate it, indeed for a long time they acted as a ‘punching ball’”.⁴⁰ In the book *Il libro dell'incontro*, the third party witnesses recall that they had listened to “words of pain and anger, silences, incomprehension”. Hence hatred and anger seem to be feelings shared by most victims, including those who took part in the dialogue. The inclusion of a

³⁷ See ‘Castenedolo...incontra’, part 1 of 5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2OBZNpSxhM>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Daniele Cambiaso: Recensione a ‘Il libro dell'incontro’ e intervista a Giovanni Ricci, in: *Atmosfere letterarie* (3 May 2016), URL: <http://letterarie.blogspot.co.uk/2016/05/recensione-il-libro-dellincontro-e.html> (16 June 2018). See also Giovanni Ricci’s intervention at one of the public debates on *Il libro dell'incontro*. URL: <https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/497801/presentazione-del-libro-dellincontro-vittime-e-responsabili-della-lotta-armata-a> (16 June 2018).

⁴⁰ See Bazzega’s comments to an article by Sciltian Gastaldi entitled “‘Il libro dell'incontro’: grande occasione mancata” [The book of the encounter: an important missed chance], in *L’Espresso* (27 Jan. 2017). URL: <http://anelli-di-fumo.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2017/01/21/il-libro-dellincontro-grande-occasione-mancata/> (16 June 2018).

full range of passions into the dialogue is in line with Mouffe's theory of agonistic democracy and Maddison's conceptualisation of agonistic dialogue. Mouffe has argued that: "the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions or to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere. Rather, it is to 'tame' those passions by mobilizing them towards democratic designs".⁴¹

The concept of democracy is a very important one in understanding the position of some of the victims in relation to adopting a dialoguing position. Manlio Milani, who lost his wife in the 1974 Brescia bombing and is President of the local House of Memory - formerly the association of the victims of the Brescia massacre -, epitomises the stance of those survivors and relatives who consider themselves citizens as much as victims. As Milani explicitly stated, "The victim [...] must not lose the dimension of being a citizen".⁴² In his view, the Brescia massacre concerns Italian society as a whole and not just the victims themselves. Similarly, reparative justice concerns everyone. This stance appears to stem from two main considerations. The first is that many victims of terrorism were targeted precisely because they were genuine and progressive democrats rather than conservative or reactionary politicians or civil servants. Survivors and relatives of the victims should therefore best pay homage to their victimhood by upholding democratic values. The second is that they conceive truth and justice as having a wider transformative meaning for the benefit of democracy and not just for their own individual benefit. In this context, as argued by Smyth in relation to Northern Ireland (2007, p. 177), truth recovery should not be seen as a process that satisfies primarily victims' demands and needs. Rather, it should be considered "a service performed by victims for the benefit of the broader society, often at some emotional costs to themselves".⁴³

Memory is also conceived in a broader sense than simply "the memory of the victims". While welcoming the recent "turn to the victims", Milani rejects the idea that the memory of the victims should replace that of the perpetrators. As Milani put it, "Memory is encompassing and everyone should have space to participate but in this space there should be a dialogue so that memory becomes public and acknowledged, albeit not shared".⁴⁴ The difference with those victims who refuse to dialogue with the former terrorists revolves around how the latter are conceptualised.

⁴¹ Chantal Mouffe: Politics and Passions: the Stakes of Democracy, in: *Ethical Perspectives* 7, no.2–3 (2000), 146–150, 146.

⁴² See 'Castenedolo...incontra', part 1 of 5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2OBZNpSxhM>.

⁴³ Marie Smyth: *Truth Recovery and Justice after Conflict*. London 2007.

⁴⁴ Interview with the Author, 11 Feb. 2011.

From an antagonistic perspective, the former terrorists are considered an irreconcilable enemy of the victims, whose voices should be silenced. From an agonistic perspective, it is possible to establish an adversarial confrontation with the former terrorists. On the other hand, an encompassing memory should not be confused with a shared memory. All the victims participating in the dialogue make it clear that their memories are irredeemably different from those of the former terrorists. Indeed from this perspective some victims openly rejected the term reconciliation in favor of the less charged term “recomposition”. This was acknowledged by the mediators to the dialogue. As Bertagna clarified in a public debate, the mediators initially proposed a draft document, which referred to the encounter as “a space of shared memory”. However, they soon realised that what was possible was achieving “a shared space for different and irreconcilable stories and memories”.⁴⁵ Again, this is reminiscent of an agonistic stance, since the objective of agonistic dialogue is not to achieve a consensus on conflict narratives. Rather, as we saw above, Maddison argues that agonistic dialogue should enable the free expression of “the varied and multiple narratives and experiences of both individuals and groups”.

Manlio Milani made a further important point in accounting for his participation in the dialogue. He explained that he wanted to understand why the terrorists opted for violence to change society whereas he, who used to be a member of the Italian Communist Party animated by a strong desire for radical social change, refused to embark upon that course. As he stated in interview,

The dialogue is difficult because many of them continue to justify their choices, hence they say, we are not criminals, we carried out a series of actions because we believed in certain ideas (which is true by the way). Hence, there must be a recognition that we acted in a specific historical context. However, I say to them: you have to explain to me why I, who lived in exactly the same period, experienced the same events, did not opt for the armed struggle while you did. And then they talk about ideology, which I only believe up to a point, in reality the issue which they have still not defined is the issue of the relationship with the state and of recognising themselves in the [democratic] state as such.⁴⁶

In the above mentioned public debate, Milani stated that participating in the recent dialogue reinforced his own belief in the positive value of democratic institutions, a value that has to be upheld even when those institutions are used for undemocratic ends. In my long-standing research on Italian terrorism, I found that Milani’s position was shared by other victims of the bombing attacks. As they were confronted by a growing realisation that sectors of the Italian state

⁴⁵ See ‘Castenedolo...incontra’, part 1 of 5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w20BZNpSxhM>.

⁴⁶ Interview with the Author, 11 Feb. 2011.

connived with the terrorists in the Strategy of Tension, they became even more determined to stand up for democratic values and institutions. The decision by Milani and others to confront the former terrorists on this issue strongly recalls Mouffe's concept of agonism. The transformation of former enemies into adversaries in fact requires, according to Mouffe, "a shared acceptance of ethico-political principles of liberal democracy".⁴⁷ This means accepting that even irreconcilable differences should not be resolved through the overthrowing of liberal institutions and the physical elimination of opponents.

A contrasting position, however, was adopted by Paolo Bolognesi, President of the Association of the Victims of the Bologna bombing massacre. As he stated, "there is no reparation without truth", and in his view the former terrorists have not told what they know about the bombing campaign or indeed about the assassination of Aldo Moro. There cannot be any dialogue unless the former terrorists first reveal everything they know.⁴⁸

It is interesting to consider also the position of those victims who, while adopting a dialoguing position, do not think that the dialogue should be restricted to victims and perpetrators. Thus Luca Tarantelli, son of an economist killed by the Red Brigades in 1985, explained during a public debate on *Il libro dell'incontro* that he started to participate in the group dialogue with the former terrorists but later decided that he did not agree with this particular form of restorative justice as far as Italian terrorism was concerned and gradually withdrew from the process. In his view, a dialogic process should involve many more participants from a variety of spheres than just victims and perpetrators.⁴⁹ A similar position was expressed by Benedetta Tobagi, who explicitly stated that she believed a reconciliation process had to involve "a much broader discourse than a relationship between victims and former terrorists, taking the form of a process of elaboration of the recent historical events, to allow us to regain a renewed sense of citizenship".⁵⁰ Nevertheless, there does not seem to be a fundamental fracture between these stances and those of the victims who took part in the dialogue, given that many of the latter also favour a broader process of

⁴⁷ Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 101–102.

⁴⁸ See Francesco Grignetti: *Terroristi e vittime al Senato. Scandalo e assensi per il dialogo impossibile*, in: *La Stampa* (19 Jan. 2017).

⁴⁹ See Luca Tarantelli's intervention at one of the public debates on *Il libro dell'incontro*. URL: <https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/497801/presentazione-del-libro-dellincontro-vittime-e-responsabili-della-lotta-armata-a> (16 June 2018).

⁵⁰ See: Benedetta Tobagi, Luigi Manconi and Guido Bertagna: *Le parole di Sonja*, in: *Una città*, no. 161 (2009), URL: <http://isintellettualistoria2.myblog.it/2012/04/20/benedetta-tobagi-luigi-manconi-guido-bertagna-le-parole-di-sonja/> (16 June 2018).

societal dialogue and view the encounter with former terrorists as but one step in this direction, as opposed to a self-contained practice.⁵¹

Conclusion

In light of the preceding discussion, it is now possible to attempt to address an important question raised by the editors of this volume. They ask what it would mean and what would change “if the contribution of survivors was regarded as a central feature in the social process of coming to terms with a conflict conducted with terrorist means?” It is possible to argue, in fact, that in the Italian case the public appearance of numerous memoirs written by survivors and relatives of victims of terrorism since 2000 and the process of dialogue culminating in the publication of *Il libro dell'incontro* have indeed moved the victims centre stage. So how is terrorism viewed through their lenses? Why have some of them embarked in a dialogue with former terrorists so many decades after the bloody events that affected them so deeply? What role do they play in the social process of coming to terms with terrorism?

To start with, we have to acknowledge that we cannot refer to “the victims” as a collective entity. Some victims, as we saw, view terrorism as a criminal phenomenon, which should not be “ennobled” with recourse to political, ideological or indeed utopian values and goals. From this perspective, they reject the idea of, and indeed the need for, a social process based upon “reconciling” or “coming to terms” with the violent past. The judicial process alone should deal with past crimes of a terrorist nature and ensure that the culprits are brought to justice. The Italian state was wrong to intervene politically in order to legislate for lenient sentences, a behaviour that in their eyes remains unpardonable. As for truth, it should be pursued and achieved through the Courts. Paradoxically, however, there are some points of contact between the stance taken by these victims and the position of the state. In fact, even though these victims view terrorism as a criminal phenomenon, while the state recognised its socio-political nature in the

⁵¹ A much more radically dissenting position, however, has been expressed by Antonio Iosa, a former Christian Democrat who was kneecapped by the Red Brigades in 1980. He explained in an interview that he withdrew from the group dialogue with the former terrorists in profound disagreement with the restorative justice approach adopted by the mediators, which, in his view, aimed primarily at giving credit to and legitimising “the noble ideals of the terrorists”. See Luca Guglielminetti: *Intervista ad Antonio Iosa su ‘Il libro dell’incontro’* (Dec. 2017). URL <http://casame-mori.amilano.eu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/1704-intervista-di-L.-Guglielminetti-Gruppo-per-Sciltian.pdf>. (16 June 2018).

ways it intervened to bring it to an end, in both cases we find a great reluctance, if not outright refusal, to promote and engage in a wide societal process of dialogue, debate and, arguably, reconciliation.

By contrast, those victims who adopted a dialogic standpoint in their memoirs and later took part in a sustained dialogue with former terrorists, place society, as well as individuals, at the centre of their understanding of what it means to “come to terms” with the past. At the individual level, encountering ‘the other’ opens up the possibility of unfreezing and re-humanising fixed and rigid identities which stand in relation of clear-cut contraposition (victims vs. perpetrators) without erasing persisting and profound differences. At the societal level, encountering ‘the other’ allows different and even contrasting narratives of the past openly to confront each other. More importantly, it also allows the emergence of an encompassing identity of (adversarial) citizens, above and beyond the other existing identities, which helps address the great fracture in Italian society caused by terrorism. This transformation of former enemies into adversaries who can legitimately share the same politico-institutional space and work through their divergent narratives of the past appears to stem from an acknowledgement of the persistently antagonistic and acrimonious nature of the memory of terrorism in Italy and it also seems to recall the concept of agonistic memory.

Finally, each position presents a different understanding of democracy and the democratic state. Those who advocate the rule of law and of the judiciary see the terrorists and terrorism as having broken the laws of the democratic state and therefore deserving appropriate punishment meted out by the Courts. They do not question the nature of the democratic state and its institutions nor do they see their role as that of defenders and upholders of those same institutions. Those who, regardless of whether they took part in the dialogue culminating in *Il libro dell'incontro*, advocate the need for confrontation, debate and exchanges, want to uphold the democratic state and institutions while simultaneously reclaiming the right to probe into their past and present flaws, distortions and manipulations. In this broader meaning, the truth cannot emerge purely from the judicial process alone, but requires a wider societal process of confronting Italy’s murky terrorist past, which should include representatives of the state and societal organisations.