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Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media

Mobilising Mediated Remembrance

Edited by Samuel Merrill
Emily Keightley · Priska Daphi

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Editors

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PREFACE

As we were putting the final touches on this volume before submission our social media channels started to be punctuated with reports, videos and images of a protest on 30 June 2019 by hundreds of young Jewish people outside a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centre in New Jersey. Sparked into action by recent revelations of the inhumane conditions of ICE detention centres, the protestors echoed the claims made by New York Congresswoman and activist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), who on 17 June drew direct comparisons between the detention centres and concentration camps during a live stream on her Instagram channel. AOC, speaking to those people that were in her words ‘concerned enough with humanity ... that “Never Again” means something’, faced criticism on Twitter from Republican politicians, including Wyoming Congresswoman Liz Cheney, for invoking and trivialising the memory of the Holocaust through her references to concentration camps and the use of a slogan commonly associated with its remembrance. Despite a Twitter response that clarified her comparison by offering a definition of concentration camps and distinguishing them from death camps, AOC’s words were also denounced by the country’s Holocaust Memorial Museum, which released a statement on 24 June reading: ‘The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum unequivocally rejects efforts to create analogies between the Holocaust and other events, whether historical or contemporary’.¹ Connecting to a long lineage of debates regarding the exceptionality and the non-representability of the Holocaust, this statement itself was met with an open letter published in the *New York Review of Books* on 1 July

signed by over 200 academics—many of whom study the Holocaust and are prominent in the field of memory studies—which, partly out of concern for the ubiquity of the museum’s declaration, called for its retraction. The letter stated:

The Museum’s decision to completely reject drawing any possible analogies to the Holocaust, or to the events leading up to it, is fundamentally ahistorical. It has the potential to inflict severe damage on the Museum’s ability to continue its role as a credible, leading global institution dedicated to Holocaust memory, Holocaust education, and research in the field of Holocaust and genocide studies. The very core of Holocaust education is to alert the public to dangerous developments that facilitate human rights violations and pain and suffering; pointing to similarities across time and space is essential for this task.²

AOC’s comments not only triggered academic debate regarding the role of comparison in Holocaust research, they also found resonance with a group of young Jewish people who quickly formed the Never Again Action Group and partnered with the immigrant rights group Movimiento Cosecha. By late June, before its first demonstration, the group had already established a considerable internet and social media presence. Reclaiming the Never Again slogan and hashtag from its most recent high-profile appropriators in the American protest landscape—the March for Our Lives youth movement that has sought gun reform since the Parkland school shooting of February 2018 and other more recent shootings—members of the Never Again Action Group explicitly drew on their intergenerationally received memories of the Holocaust to declare openly that Never Again is Now. The group’s website stated:

As Jews, we were taught to never let anything like the Holocaust happen again. We refuse to wait and see—we know from our own history what happens next. Many of our ancestors narrowly escaped from conditions like what we are seeing today in concentration camps at the border and detention centers around the country. Never again is now. If you’ve ever wondered what you would have done if you had been alive in the 1940s, this is the moment of truth. This is time to put our bodies on the line because when we say never again, we mean never again for anyone.³

During a week of action that commenced with the demonstration at the ICE detention centre in New Jersey and saw thousands of protestors

mobilise at other detention centres across the USA, leading to numerous arrests, the Never Again Action Group's efforts spread via, and made use of, multiple digital media forms not least an array of social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. On their website a Never Again is Now Action Toolkit (in the form of an open Google Doc) informed activists how to organise their own local mobilisations while a series of hashtags, including #NeverAgainMeans, #JewsAgainstICE and #NeverAgainIsNow, linked their digital activism across spaces, times and media. The Never Again Action Group used these platforms to also forge connections with other movements against ICE, including the #NoTech4ICE movement composed of Amazon and Google workers campaigning against their companies' participation in ICE deportations. Drawing historical parallels between these concerns and the role that IBM technology played in the Holocaust via their Twitter channel, the Action Group inadvertently highlighted how the same digital technologies and media that supported their activism were also complicit in the injustices they hoped to end.

Although at the time of writing it is not clear what the longer-term implications of the Never Again Action Group's efforts will be and although its associated movement requires far more detailed scrutiny than is possible here, as one example of many it indicates the need for greater research into the interfaces between social movements, cultural memory and digital media. This volume is dedicated to establishing a foundation for such a task.

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NOTES

1. <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/statement-regarding-the-museums-position-on-holocaust-analogies>.
2. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/07/01/an-open-letter-to-the-director-of-the-holocaust-memorial-museum/>.
3. <https://www.neveragainaction.com/>.

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#ioricordo, Beyond the Genoa G8: Social Practices of Memory Work and the Digital Remembrance of Contentious Pasts in Italy

Lorenzo Zamponi

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2011, a group of Italian activists launched *Io ricordo Genova* ('I remember Genoa'), a project of commemoration on social media, using the hashtag #ioricordo on Twitter, designed to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the anti-G8 protests that took place in the Italian city during 19–21 July 2001. The anti-G8 demonstrations of Genoa were a transformative event in the Italian social movement landscape, and their tenth anniversary involved the interaction between the official commemoration of the 2001 protests by their original organisers, a new cycle of protest (the anti-austerity mobilisations) and an explosion in the popularity of digital social media. Around the hashtag #ioricordo ('I remember'),

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different individual and social actors contributed on Twitter to the construction of a kaleidoscopic image of the past, connecting individual and collective dimensions.

What is interesting, and will be addressed in this chapter, is the fact that this hashtag, in the following months and years, has become a rather peculiar framework for different commemorations on Twitter, and its use has gone much beyond the commemoration of the Genoa G8 protests. It has been used to commemorate the Holocaust and the tragedy of the *foibe* at the Italian-Yugoslavian border during the Second World War, the victims of the mafia and those of neo-fascist bombings in the 1970s, and so on.

The appropriation of the hashtag by actors that are interested in commemorating different events represents an interesting case of the diffusion of broader memory work practices in social media, which deserves to be analysed. Furthermore, the tweets posted with this hashtag provide a useful dataset by which to analyse this specific example of social media memory work in more detail. Through the coding of the 4949 tweets posted on Twitter with the hashtag #ioricordo from its first use, on 23 June 2011, until 30 March 2016, and through a qualitative analysis of a random sample of 500 of those tweets, this chapter aims to address three specific aspects of online commemoration: the diffusion of mnemonic practices; agency and the role of mnemonic projects; and the relationship between the individual and the collective components of commemoration in the context of digital social media. In particular, this chapter, other than describing the #ioricordo case and providing some interesting insight on memory work with social media, aims to shed some light on the relationship between the dynamics of social media and the known characteristics of movement-related mnemonic processes. Focusing on online mnemonic practices, the chapter aims to answer two main questions: how does the representation of different pasts take place in social media? And does the representation of movement-related memories maintain its peculiar traits in a social media context?

In particular, after a review of the literature (section ‘[Theoretical Background: Movements, Memory and Social Media](#)’) and a description of case, data and methods (section ‘[Case Study, Data and Methods](#)’), the empirical analysis will develop in three parts. In the fourth section, the analysis of the use of #ioricordo for the commemoration of different events or series of events will show that social media favours the diffusion of mnemonic practices across issues, events and actors. In the fifth section, the analysis will focus on actors, pointing out the different types of actors that engage in digital memory work and their respective role. In the sixth section, a typology of digital memory practices will be proposed,

shedding light on the fact that online and offline content are often intertwined. Furthermore, throughout the empirical part of the chapter, the specific traits of movement memories will be observed, pointing out how every mnemonic process takes place in a peculiar setting, with embedded political traits, and addressing specific communities.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: MOVEMENTS, MEMORY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Memories and Movements

In recent years, movement scholars have become increasingly interested in the role of collective memory in social movements (Armstrong & Crage, 2006; Baumgarten, 2017; Daphi, 2017; Doerr, 2014; Farthing & Kohl, 2013; Gongaware, 2011; Harris, 2006; Jansen, 2007; Zamponi, 2013, 2018; Zamponi & Daphi, 2014; Daphi & Zamponi, 2019). Mentioning collective memory in the context of the social research on contentious politics is not as unusual as it was only a few years ago. The increasing focus on the symbolic dimension of collective action that has characterised the field in the past two decades has favoured the inclusion of memory in the analysis of protest and activism. In this vein, the ‘cultural turn’ in social movement studies (see e.g. Baumgarten, Daphi, & Ullrich, 2014; Giugni, 1998; Johnston, 2009; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995) has meant that growing attention is paid to how activists make sense of themselves and their environment. The growing interest in memory that characterises the field of social movement studies is rooted in different components of the literature—from collective identity, in the construction of which memories are some of the ‘cultural building blocks’ (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 299), to narratives (Meyer, 2006; Polletta, 2006), from social movement continuities (Taylor, 1989; Whittier, 2004) to cycles of protest (Koopmans, 2004; McAdam, 1995; Tarrow, 1991, 1994)—in the context of a widespread effort to understand contentious politics as accumulative processes in which every new cycle is partially shaped by previous movement activities. In particular, the sociology of memory based on the seminal work of Maurice Halbwachs (Assmann, 2008; Halbwachs, 1992; Olick, 1999; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Schwartz, 1996; Zelizer, 1995; Zerubavel, 1996) has become a fundamental tool in advancing our understanding of social movements. Representations of the past produced and reproduced in the public sphere are the result of ‘memory work’ (Schwartz, 1996; Zelizer, 1995)

conducted by ‘mnemonic agents’ (Peri, 1999) that pursue strategic goals and projects and are constrained by path dependencies and by the limited malleability of the historical material. This makes different mnemonic projects differently apt to succeed in impacting the public sphere (Jansen, 2007; Spillman, 1998).

Bridging memory studies and social movement studies has been proven helpful for both fields. For what regards the former, it has helped overcome the traditional juxtaposition of official state-controlled memory and resistant popular memory as two monolithic blocks, pointing out how different fora of public memory act as different social frameworks of memory. Scholars have pointed out how the past, in order to become relevant in the field of public memory, needs ‘social appropriation’ (Harris, 2006), how a shared representation of the past is not the automatic outcome of protest, but the result of a specific ‘memory work’ (Jansen, 2007, p. 953), how the characteristics of certain events and social actors shape commemoration and appropriation (Armstrong & Crage, 2006).

Digital Memories and Social Media

The impact of social media on the dynamics of collective memory has been addressed by several points of view in the past few years. This strand of research builds on a pre-existing tradition interested in the explosion of mediated memory, which acknowledges that ‘facts and memorable events are represented again and again, over the decades and centuries, in different media’ (Erll, 2008, p. 392). The increasing use of the internet has interacted with this process, changing media consumption itself ‘from individualized and personalized media consumption towards consumption as a networked practice’ (Jenkins, 2006, p. 244). In this line of work, Hoskins has pointed out that digitalisation and networking have fostered the increasing mediation of memory (Hoskins, 2009a), blurring the line between personal and public memory (Hoskins, 2009b): ‘if the individual as consumer of media is complemented if not challenged by the individual as producer and user [...] then the relationship between media and memory is similarly transformed. Contemporary memory is principally constituted neither through retrieval nor through the representation of some content of the past in the present. Rather, it is embedded in and distributed through our sociotechnical practices’ (Hoskins, 2009a, pp. 91–92). In the last few years, researchers have been increasingly analysing the dynamics of online commemoration (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins,

& Reading, 2009; Hoskins, 2017a; Kaprāns, 2016; Van Dijck, 2007, 2011), focusing on different aspects, from the role of Wikipedia (Ferron & Massa, 2014; Pentzold, 2009) to the potential of the internet in promoting alternative representations of the past (Hoskins, 2007; Hess, 2007; Hughes, 2012; Marschall, 2013).

In this context, social media play a peculiar role, as has been discerned by those media scholars that have analysed activists' practices of digital storytelling on social media (Barassi, 2017; Vivienne, 2016). They have pointed out how social media tend to be heavily personalised (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Fenton & Barassi, 2011), fostering the transition from a politics of identity to a politics of visibility (Milan, 2015) and significantly impacting on the process of collective identity construction in movements (Kavada, 2015; Treré, 2015). Furthermore, researchers have shown that social media tend to organise information through filter bubbles and echo chambers, although such claims have been significantly problematised by more recent research (Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015; Flaxman, Goel, & Rao, 2016; Pariser, 2011).

Movement Memories in a Social Media Context

Research focusing in particular on the role of social media in mnemonic processes has pointed out how they 'complicate the remediation of the past, that is, they generate new participatory patterns that can be more inclusive than the participation provided by traditional media' and how they 'increase the role of agency, thus expanding the Halbwachsian (Halbwachs, 1992) conception of collective memory where an individual has a rather marginal status', although public discourse on social media is 'far from perfect' (Kaprāns, 2016, p. 3). Social media are understood as platforms that widen the options of storytelling and commemoration, while at the same time significantly shaping the forms of such commemorations (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014). According to Hoskins, 'the sudden abundance, pervasiveness, and immediacy of digital media, communication networks and archives [...] has re-engineered memory, liberating it from the traditional bounds of the spatial archive, the organization, the institution, and distributed it on a continuous basis via a connectivity between brains, bodies and personal and public lives' opening up 'new ways of finding, sorting, sifting, using, losing and abusing the past' (Hoskins, 2017c, p. 1). Digitalisation and networking, in his analysis, fos-

ter a hyperconnectivity that renders collective memory impossible: on the one hand, the transfer of huge amounts of information in potentially eternal digital archives threatens the selectivity of the past in the present that is the fundamental element of Halbwachsian collective memory; on the other hand, the continuous exposition to an unstoppable flow of information diminishes ‘the active human capacity of memory in the face of the distractions: the capacity to select, sift, discern, as overconsumers of post-scarcity culture’ (Hoskins, 2017b, p. 105). In the same vein, scholars have pointed out how the temporality of social media fosters peculiar temporalising practices (Barassi, 2015; Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014; Merrill & Lindgren, 2018; Prey & Smit, 2018), in which ‘personalized flow annihilates the collective and simultaneous experience and meaning production’ (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014, p. 1165).

As Smit, Heinrich and Broersma (2018, p. 3120) have pointed out, ‘[m]emory work is a discursive process—comprising practices, cultural forms, and technologies’, and thus, digital memory work needs to be analysed in the context of the specific affordances and logics of social media platforms. This chapter aims at exploring the peculiar traits of movement-related mnemonic practices in a social media context.

Activists are equipped with a *repertoire of memory*, a set of mnemonic practices that social actors put in place in reference to the past, that allows them to access different *repositories of memory*, the sets of products, both implicit and explicit, formal and informal, symbolic and material that act as objectified carriers of the past. In my previous work (Zamponi, 2018), I have shown the significance of the two main repositories of memory on which activists draw their representations of the past: on the one hand, the mass media forum of the public sphere (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002); on the other hand, movement culture, and in particular the ‘movement areas’ (Melucci, 1989) in which activists participate, that can be conceptualised as ‘mnemonic communities’ (Zerubavel, 1996), as social groups in which ‘mnemonic socialisation’ takes place. The goal of this chapter is to build on this knowledge in addressing the mediation of contentious memories in the social media, focusing on diffusion (section “#ioricordo, Beyond the Genoa G8”), actors (section “Authors: Digital Memory Activists, Digitally Networked Individuals, Mnemonic Project Activists and Digital Memory Brokers”) and practices (section “Content: Narratives, Counter-Narratives and Digital Memory Practices”).

CASE STUDY, DATA AND METHODS

Data and Methods

This chapter is based on the analysis of the tweets posted on Twitter with the hashtag #ioricordo from its first use, on 23 June 2011 (on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the 2001 anti-G8 protests in Genoa) until 30 March 2016 (when the analysis was started). All 4949 tweets were manually retrieved and a first analysis was carried out, coding author, date and issue of every tweet (section ‘[Authors: Digital Memory Activists, Digitally Networked Individuals, Mnemonic Project Activists and Digital Memory Brokers](#)’ is based on this analysis). Then, a random sample of 500 tweets was selected for a deeper qualitative analysis (on which section ‘[Content: Narratives, Counter-Narratives and Digital Memory Practices](#)’ is based), with the additional coding of the type of mnemonic practice carried on in the tweets and of narratives and counter-narratives. Almost 90 per cent of all tweets refer to five past events, or series of past events (Fig. 6.1): not only the 2001 anti-G8 protest in Genoa, but also the Holocaust, the terrorist attacks of the 1970s (the so-called *stragismo*), the *foibe*, and the killing of activists, judges and ordinary citizens by the mafia.

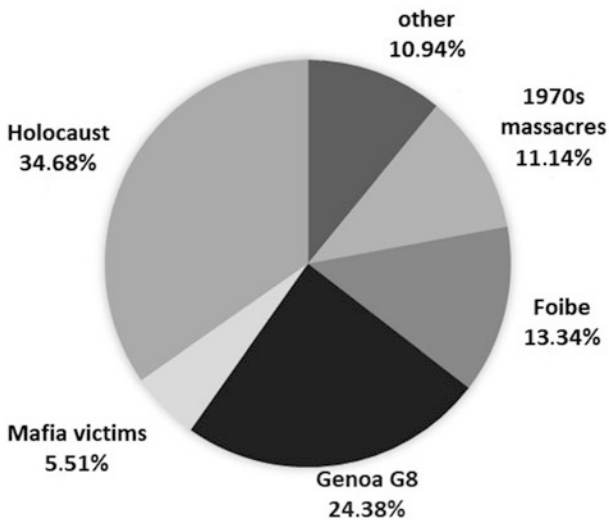


Fig. 6.1 Tweets posted with the hashtag #ioricordo

The contextual background for these events will be provided in the next section, while this section will focus on the memory project related to the anti-G8 protests of 2001.

The Genoa G8 and #ioricordo

The G8 meeting that took place in Genoa in 2001 was met by three days of massive protest (19–21 July 2001), in the context of the Global Justice Movement (GJM), the ‘diverse constellation of organizations, groups, and networks, working with varying degrees of cooperation on a broad range of issues—from the indebtedness of the world’s poorest countries, the inequities of the global trade in goods and services, international peace and environmental degradation, to the human rights of workers and immigrants, especially in less economically developed countries’ (Rootes & Sotirakopoulos, 2013, p. 517), which emerged in several countries at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Daphi, 2017; della Porta, 2007; Pleyers, 2010). In the evolution of the GJM in Italy, years of ‘collaborative efforts culminated in the protests against the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001’ (Daphi, 2017, p. 6), organised by an ad hoc coalition of around 800 different groups and characterised by the massive participation of Italian activists (Reiter, Andretta, della Porta, & Mosca, 2007). The violent escalation of the protests, culminating in the shooting of 23-year-old Carlo Giuliani by the police and the police raid on the ‘Armando Diaz’ school that housed some of the demonstrators, the night after the end of the protest, made the memory of Genoa particularly meaningful among Italian activists (Vicari, 2015). In her work on the memory of the GJM in Italy, Daphi noted that ‘[a]cross sectors, activists define the counter-summit in Genoa as the crucial GJM event, despite other protest events in Italy being larger, in particular the anti-war demonstrations in 2003 and the ESF in Florence in 2002’ and that ‘[t]he event in Genoa is regarded as a watershed moment in the sense of demonstrating the strength of the GJM in building broad coalitions and paving the way for further mobilisations against neoliberal globalisation, while also triggering later splits’ (Daphi, 2017, p. 38). The memory of the Genoa anti-G8 protest is still mainly a militant memory, deeply rooted in social movement and radical left milieus, with a strong generational component and a peculiar connection with the issue of police violence.

On the tenth anniversary of the anti-G8 protests, two Italian activists started the *Io ricordo Genova* (‘I remember Genoa’) commemorative

project, with a blog, a Facebook page and, above all, a Twitter hashtag (#ioricordo). ‘There are moments in history that remain etched in our memory. So much so that we take every detail with us: where we were, with whom, what we were doing’—the activists wrote on their blog—‘the Genoa G8 is one of those moments. Who was there, of course, but also for those who did not remember where they were, what they were doing. On 20 and 21 July 2001 something changed in our history: something has definitely changed, finished, begun’ (Io Ricordo Genova, 2011). It was an explicit mnemonic project, not aiming at establishing some historical or judicial truth on the events (‘We do not want to reconstruct the facts of Genoa: it has already been done several times, in the most suitable and in the less suitable locations, with results that anyone can evaluate’ the activists wrote), but instead, at experimenting with collective storytelling: ‘That weekend is for many a precise memory that we would like to share: we would like to collect all your contributions (stories, phrases, quotes, photos, videos) to reconstruct a collective story’ (Io Ricordo Genova, 2011). The initiative had a significant resonance, both in Italian social movement milieus and in the mainstream public sphere, with the stories ending up being reproduced in several media outlets (Bruno, 2011; Mosca, 2011).

#IORICORDO, BEYOND THE GENOA G8

As Fig. 6.2 shows, after its use linked to the mnemonic project to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the anti-G8 protests in Genoa, the hashtag was immediately appropriated by actors interested in commemorating other events: on 2 August 2011, it was vastly used in the commemoration of the bombing in the Bologna railway station of 1980; then, there were hundreds of tweets on the occasion of the ‘Giorno della memoria’, the official state-sanctioned day of commemoration of the Holocaust, on 27 January 2012; then, on the occasion of the commemoration of the *foibe* on 10 February 2012, and so on. There is an evident diffusion of mnemonic practices across issues, well beyond the original mnemonic project of #ioricordo.

Most of the tweets refer to five events or series of events: other than the anti-G8 protest of 2011, there is the Holocaust, the *foibe* (a series of massacres at the borders between Italy and Yugoslavia between 1943 and 1945), the terrorist attacks of the 1970s (the *stragismo*), and the killing of activists, judges and ordinary citizens by the mafia. Interestingly enough,

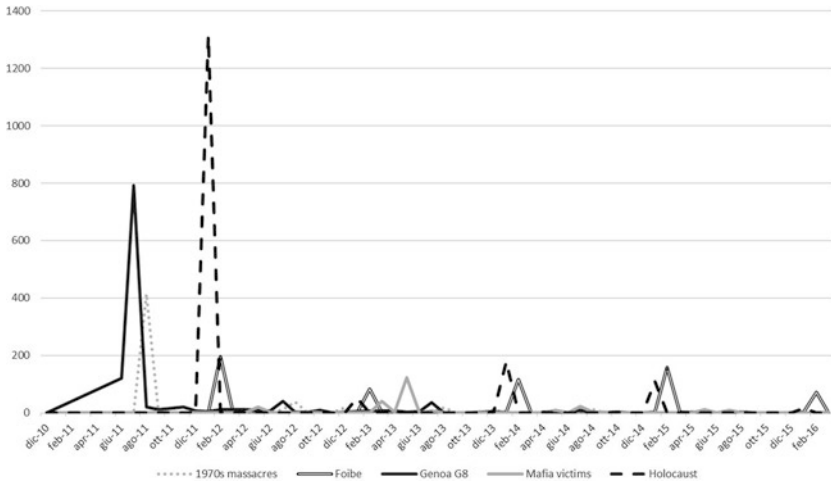


Fig. 6.2 Number of #ioricordo tweets by event and month

all the events took place in Italy, or, in the case of the Holocaust, saw a particularly tragic role of Italy. It would be wrong to generalise from the use of this hashtag to public memory in general, but it seems like the national space is still a significant setting for commemoration even in times of globalisation of memory (Phillips & Reyes, 2011). While the story of the Holocaust is universally known, the other events require some explanation, in order to provide a context for their relevance in the Italian public memory.

Bologna and the *Stragismo*, bridging memories

Between 1969 and 1980, a series of bombings took place, killing innocent civilians, in several public places across Italy, such as squares, railway stations and trains. Most of the bombings were carried out by members of clandestine neo-fascist militant groups, under the protection of elements of domestic and foreign secret services, as part of the ‘strategy of tension’: a project aiming to spread panic among the population, who would in turn demand stronger governments, paving the way towards the transformation of Italy into a fascist-military dictatorship such as those that characterised several Southern European countries (Portugal, Spain and Greece) until the mid-1970s (Albanese & del Hierro, 2016; Bull, 2007;

Ginsborg, 1990). This period, called *stragismo* (literally, ‘massacrist’)—and in particular its most dramatic events, such as the bombing in Piazza Fontana, in Milan, on 12 December 1969, and the bombing in the railway station in Bologna, on 2 August 1980—has been vastly represented in the media, including press, cinema and TV, being often conflated with the armed political violence by leftist militant groups (such as the Red Brigades), under the label *anni di piombo* (‘years of lead’) (Betta, 2009; De Luna, 2011b; O’Leary, 2009; Pezzini, 2009). Furthermore, the memory of certain events—in particular the one of the largest and bloodiest of these massacres, the bombing in the railway station of Bologna (2 August 1980)—has been the object of a long-lasting work of commemoration by victims’ relatives, and is strongly tied with the identity of the local community (Tota, 2003).

A few days after the tenth anniversary of the Genoa G8, on 1 August, on the eve of the anniversary of the Bologna bombing of 1980, one of the activists who had launched the #ioricordo initiative for the G8 protest, tweeted:

On 2 August 1980, I was too little, I don’t remember anything. What about you? If you have memories, I would like you to tell them with #ioricordo

The official account of the municipality of Bologna answered:

#ioricordo Great idea! Can we join and relaunch it also from our Facebook page?

The response was positive, and more than 400 tweets referring to the bombing, accounting for 73 per cent of all the tweets commemorating the 1970s massacre, were published with the hashtag #ioricordo in the two days that followed this exchange.

The *Foibe* and Their Commemoration

In Italian, the word *foiba* (plural: *foibe*) identifies a deep natural sinkhole, a depression typical of the karstic landscape of the Eastern Alps. In the public discourse, the *foibe* are symbolically linked to ‘the episodes of massive violence towards military and civilians, mainly Italians, unleashed in the autumn of 1943 and in the spring of 1945 in different areas of the

Julian March' (Pupo & Spazzali, 2003, p. 2). The context is a historically contested land, formed by the Julian Alps (with the cities of Trieste and Gorizia) and the Istrian peninsula, inhabited by Italians, Slovenians and Croats for centuries. The Julian March became part of the Kingdom of Italy with the First World War, and in the following years, was the main focus of the Italian nationalistic discourse, aiming at obtaining also Fiume (Rijeka) and Dalmatia and at eradicating the Slavic heritage in the area. This process accelerated during fascism, culminating with the Second World War. In this context, two series of massacres took place: the first one in the context of a popular insurrection against the Italian occupation in the rural inland of Istria (September 1943), the second during the purge of Italian fascist power operated by Yugoslav partisans after the taking of Trieste (May 1945). The killing of Italian civilians, some of whom had nothing to do with the crimes of the occupation, and the fact that many of the bodies were thrown into the *foibe*, has become, in the following decades, one of the foundation myths of Italian neo-fascism, as a nationalistic counterpart to the memory of the Holocaust and the anti-fascist Resistance. The narrative of the *foibe*, describing the massacres as a case of genocide or ethnic cleansing, has entered the mainstream public discourse during the post-1989 'memory boom' (Gallerano, 1995; Tota, 2007) and was officially sanctioned by the state through the law that established 10 February as the 'day of remembering in memory of the victims of the *foibe*, of the Julian-Dalmatian exile and of the events of the Eastern border' in 2004. The memory of the *foibe* is another militant memory, reproduced for decades in neo-fascist milieus and in the Julian, Istrian and Dalmatian exile community, that entered the mainstream public sphere in a context of general crisis of the anti-fascist framework (Focardi, 2012) and in an attempt to re-legitimise nationalism by the new post-1989 right (Zamponi, 2008).

The Memory of Mafia Victims

Finally, hundreds of innocent people have been killed by the different mafia organisations active in Italy: judges (e.g. the two public prosecutors that led the so-called maxi-trial of the 1980s, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, murdered by two massive bombings on 23 May and 19 July 1992), politicians (e.g. the Christian Democrat president of Sicily Piersanti Mattarella, shot and killed in 1980, and the leader of the Sicilian branch of the Italian Communist Party, Pio La Torre, murdered in 1982), anti-mafia

activists (e.g. radical left militant Peppino Impastato or Catholic priest Pino Puglisi, killed in 1978 and 1993, respectively), journalists (e.g. Pippo Fava, murdered in Catania in 1984, and Giancarlo Siani, killed in Naples in 1985), but also union organisers such as Placido Rizzotto, peasants that struggled for the ownership of the land they worked, policemen, business owners that refused to pay protection money, ordinary citizens who found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. The commemoration of these victims in several types of media is central in the construction of the public representation of the mafia in Italy (Adamo, 2015; Affuso, 2014; della Ratta, Ioppolo, & Ricotta, 2012; Margry, Sánchez-Carretero, & Puccio-Den, 2011; Ravveduto, 2018; Renga, 2013; Santino, 2001).

Anniversaries and Commemoration

How does the commemoration of these pasts work? The distribution of tweets across the months shows that in some cases, commemoration is concentrated in specific periods of time: almost 99 per cent of the tweets regarding the Holocaust have been posted in January, and almost 96 per cent of those regarding the *foibe* have been posted in February. This is a clear consequence of the fact that both events have official state-sanctioned days of commemoration dedicated to them. 27 January, the anniversary of the opening of the gates of Auschwitz by the Red Army, was declared by a law approved by the parliament in 2000 as the “Day of Memory” in memory of the extermination and persecution of the Jewish people and of Italian political and military deportees in the Nazi camps’ (Gordon, 2006, p. 169), and 10 February, the anniversary of the treaty with which, after the Second World War, Italy lost Istria and part of the Julian March to Yugoslavia, was declared by a law approved by the parliament in 2004 as the ‘Day of remembering in memory of the victims of the *foibe*, of the Julian-Dalmatian exile and of the events of the Eastern border’ (Zamponi, 2008, pp. 216–225). In these cases, the online commemoration strongly depends on official state-sanctioned anniversaries, confirming the known role of the state in canonising the memory of the past and its capacity to cross media boundaries and strongly impact on social media memory.

Nevertheless, this is not always the case: while the ‘day of commemoration and commitment in memory of the innocent victims of the mafia’, established by the anti-mafia network Libera in 1996 (Libera, 2018) and officially recognised by the state in 2017, takes place every year on 21 March, symbolically the first day of Spring, only 16 per cent of tweets

commemorating mafia victims have been posted in March, while more than 60 per cent have been posted in May (in particular on the occasion of the anniversary of the murder of public prosecutor Giovanni Falcone, killed on 23 May 1992) and almost 15 per cent in July (in particular on the occasion of the anniversary of the murder of public prosecutor Paolo Borsellino, killed on 19 July 1992). Furthermore, while, since 2007, the 9 May anniversary of the killing of the president of the Christian Democracy party Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades, is officially the ‘Day of memory dedicated to the victims of terrorism and of massacres of such kind’ (Turi, 2011, p. 160), 89 per cent of the tweets regarding the massacres of the 1970s have been posted in August (in particular on the occasion of the anniversary of the bombing in the Bologna railway station in 1980), somehow resisting the assimilation of all the different kinds of political violence of the Italian 1970s in the same narrative (De Luna, 2011b).

Thus, the role of the state in canonising memory in the public sphere is more effective in some cases than in others. This is particularly interesting in the context of the debate on the ‘days of memory’ that has been taking place in Italy in the last two decades: since 2000, other than those that have been already cited, several commemorations have been established by the parliament: ‘the ‘day of freedom’ on 9 November, in memory of the demolition of the Berlin Wall’, ‘the ‘day of remembering of the military and civilian fallen in the international peacekeeping missions’, ‘the day of memory of sailors lost at sea’, while several other commemorations were proposed by members of the parliament and never approved, from the ‘day of memory of African victims during the colonial Italian occupation’, of the ‘victims of crime’, of the ‘victims of communism’, of the ‘victims of tragedy caused by human negligence and natural disasters’, of the ‘victims of environmental and industrial disaster caused by human negligence’, of the ‘victims of duty’, of the ‘victims of work’, of the ‘Italian emigrants who died at work abroad’, of the ‘martyrs of religious freedom’ (De Luna, 2011a, pp. 19–20). According to historian Gabriele Turi, ‘[t]he proliferation of days of memory [...] reflects the deep ideological and political divisions of the country’ and ‘risks to flatten everything on the political-ideological struggle of many memories’ (Turi, 2011, p. 161), while Giovanni De Luna interprets it as a way by the state to confusedly react to its decreasing centrality in the field of public memory (De Luna, 2011a).

The analysis of the tweets posted with the hashtag #ioricordo confirms this interpretation: through state-sanctioned anniversaries, public institutions maintain a significant role in canonising, at least for what regards the

calendar, the memory of certain events, while in some cases informal anniversaries tend to play a much stronger role, signalling that state memory is only a component of public memory, although still significant.

AUTHORS: DIGITAL MEMORY ACTIVISTS, DIGITALLY NETWORKED INDIVIDUALS, MNEMONIC PROJECT ACTIVISTS AND DIGITAL MEMORY BROKERS

Who is participating in this type of online commemoration? In this section I will illustrate two distinctions: first, I will shed light on the difference between digital memory activists and digitally networked individuals engaging in online memory practices; second, I will further distinguish the former, in terms of, first, mnemonic project activists and, second, digital memory brokers.

Of the 2682 accounts that tweeted the hashtag #ioricordo during the studied period, only 35 posted 10 or more tweets. These 35 accounts represent *digital memory activists*, people that are to a certain extent committed to online commemoration, while the remaining 2647 are *digitally networked individuals*, people that have extemporaneously participated in online commemoration. What is interesting is that, although digital memory activists are only 1.3 per cent of the accounts posting on #ioricordo, they posted almost one out of every five tweets (Fig. 6.3). Thus, a small

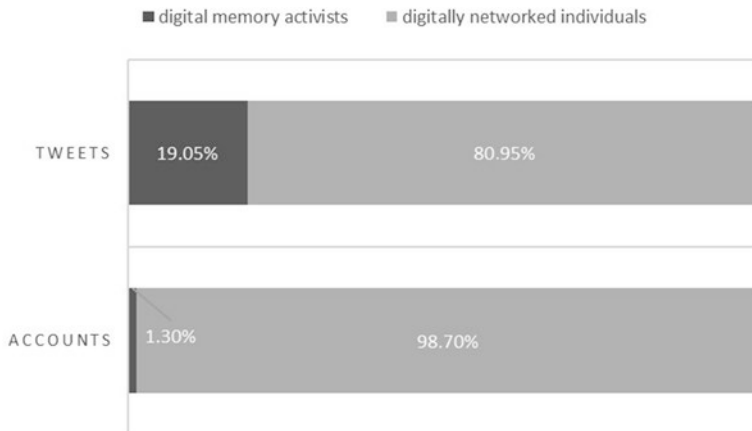


Fig. 6.3 #ioricordo's digital memory activists and digitally networked individuals

number of committed people were responsible for a significant part of the studied acts of commemoration on Twitter under *#ioricordo*. This does not make them automatically ‘activists’ in the traditional sense: as research has already pointed out, online commemoration can easily result in click-tivism (Merrill, 2017). What is interesting for the purposes of this analysis is the fact that they were much more active than others in online commemoration, and that their role was more significant in the case of the tweets regarding the anti-G8 protest in Genoa (in which they are responsible for more than 45 per cent of the tweets) than in the others (Fig. 6.4). Here the nature of mnemonic project of the original *#ioricordo* initiative emerges clearly: it was a specific project of commemoration promoted by a specific group of activists, and had a limited impact on the broader Twitter population, while less militant memories tend to be reproduced by individuals that occasionally participated to commemoration, without any clear commitment.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to strictly identify digital memory activists with mnemonic projects. Only 17 out of the 35 accounts that posted more than ten tweets on *#ioricordo*, in fact, focused 80 per cent or more of their tweets on the same issue, while the remaining 18 distributed

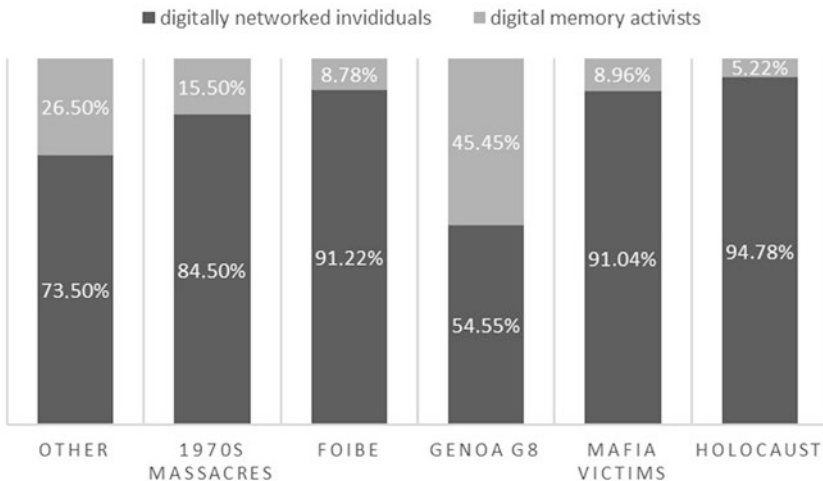


Fig. 6.4 Percentage of *#ioricordo* tweets posted by digital memory activists and digitally networked individuals across issues

their tweets across several issues. I call the former *mnemonic project activists* and the latter *digital memory brokers*. The two groups are rather different. Mnemonic project activists, in fact, tend to post on #ioricordo mainly regarding the specific memory in which they are interested. This is particularly true in the case of the *foibe*: there are three accounts that posted 12, 11 and 10 tweets, respectively, on #ioricordo, all of which regarding the *foibe*. They are three far right or radical right activists engaging in the promotion of a specific mnemonic project, and are not interested in online commemoration at large. But this is not an exclusive of the far right: although without arriving at the extreme level of posting 100 per cent of their #ioricordo tweets on the same issue, 9 of the 17 accounts of *mnemonic project activists* focus mainly on the Genoa G8. On the other hand, digital memory brokers use the hashtag #ioricordo to commemorate different pasts. These accounts are committed not only to a specific mnemonic project, but more generally to online commemoration at large. Interestingly enough, 7 of these 18 accounts post more than 50 per cent of their #ioricordo tweets focusing on the Genoa G8, while using the hashtag also for other memories: these accounts got familiar with the hashtag and with online commemoration through a specific mnemonic project, and then ended up using it also in reference to other pasts and engaging in online memory work in a broader sense. Among these, there are also the two people that started the #ioricordo project regarding the Genoa G8: even they ended up using the hashtag also with reference to other issues, showing that their project has not been hijacked, but rather, the mnemonic practices they used have been spread across a broader population, with their own active contribution. Once again, online mnemonic activism seems far from being a homogenous phenomenon: the typology that was proposed in this section may be useful for further research on this issue. What is interesting for the purposes of this chapter is the fact that different actors interpret their role in digital memory practices in different ways, in relation with the characteristics of the narrative that is being reproduced and with the mnemonic communities that are involved. Furthermore, as we will see in the following section regarding content, there are peculiar characteristics of the actors involved in the memory of the Genoa G8, pointing out the peculiar characteristics of movement memories.

CONTENT: NARRATIVES, COUNTER-NARRATIVES AND DIGITAL MEMORY PRACTICES

This last empirical section is dedicated to digital memory practices, and it shows, on the one hand, the visible interconnection between online and offline mnemonic practices, shedding light on the fact that digital memory work does not take place in a void, but, instead, is situated in a pre-existing context of long-established offline practices. On the other hand, it points out that different memories, for characteristics that are related both with the existing narratives of the events and with the different actors and communities involved in the process, are reproduced through different practices.

For what regards the content, the only variable that was coded for the whole set of tweets was a dummy which indicated whether the tweet was in line with the main narrative of the event promoted by the mnemonic agents involved in its promotion, or whether it proposed a counter-narrative. Examples of counter-narratives are denial in the case of the Holocaust, attacks against protesters by characterising them as criminals in the case of the Genoa G8, and so on. The cases of counter-narratives are extremely rare, and somewhat significant (2.62 per cent) only in the case of the *foibe*. In the vast majority of cases, tweets on the hashtag *#ioricordo* reproduce representations of the past that are in line with the narratives of that past promoted by the majority mnemonic community. This does not mean that these are all mainstream narratives: the narrative of the Genoa G8 that can be found in the tweets is rather different from the one reproduced in mainstream media. The narratives may be an alternative to the mainstream, but nevertheless, they tend to be homogenous, to represent a cohesive community, and to attract to the online commemoration mostly people and content that are coherent with the representation of the past that is shared and reproduced in that community.

The qualitative analysis of a random sample of 500 tweets among those published on the hashtag *#ioricordo* shows some recurring types of digital memory practices that tend to emerge in reference with different pasts (see Fig. 6.5). First of all, there are several occurrences of *online sharing of offline activism*. People promote on Twitter the activities and initiatives they are organising offline, they share their experience in participating in them, they post pictures, videos and short reports, and so on. This is a tweet published on 21 March 2013, by the account of a local chapter of an anti-mafia network:

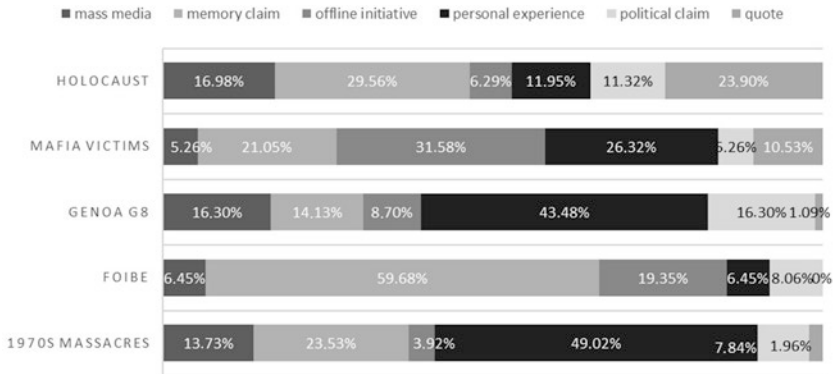


Fig. 6.5 Mnemonic practices across #ioricordo issues

Everyone ready for the #21marzo in #Novara? At 5.30pm we will be at the Broletto to read all the names of the innocent victims of the mafias. #ioricordo

In this case, commemoration takes place offline, and social media are used mostly as a communication tool to advertise what is happening, in order to call more people to participate in the offline activity or to let them know that it took place, providing a vicarious experience of participation. Nevertheless, there is a commemorative component in such practice: the submission of the offline event into the archive of social media.

Second, there are *references to mainstream media material*. People tweet on the hashtag #ioricordo, commemorating a certain past through the citation of material that has been produced outside social media, by mainstream media outlets, as in the case of this tweet, posted on 27 January 2012, and referencing a photo gallery on the Holocaust published by the mainstream magazine *Panorama* on the occasion of the ‘Day of Memory’:

#IoRicordo Shoah, 67 years later the pictures, in order not to forget— International—Panorama.it. <http://blog.panorama.it/mondo/2012/01/27/shoah-67-anni-dopo-le-foto-per-non-dimenticare/>

Once again, commemoration takes place partly inside and partly outside social media: the representation of the past is produced and accessed

through traditional fruition of mainstream media, but people feel the need to act on it and to share it on social media, participating in a shared online commemoration, although through words that have been produced elsewhere.

Third, there are *quotes and ritual cultural references*. Several tweets on the hashtag #ioricordo are mainly based on citations of authors that are traditionally associated with the past that is being commemorated. This is the case, for example, of a tweet published on 27 January 2012, consisting of a quote by Primo Levi, an Auschwitz survivor and one of the most famous Italian post-war writers:

There is Auschwitz, then there cannot be God. I cannot find a solution to the dilemma. I am looking for it, but I cannot find it. (Primo Levi) #ioricordo

As in the previous case, people participate in online commemoration, bringing into the realm of social media something they accessed outside. Citations seem to have mainly a performative role: people want to participate in the ritual of online commemoration, and to find something with which they participate, they draw on established repositories of memory, the content of which is reproduced in the social media.

Fourth, there are *personal biographies in shared commemorations*. People share personal experiences that are somewhat related with the broader past that is being remembered. A typical example is this tweet, posted on 29 June 2011, regarding the anti-G8 protests in Genoa of 2011:

I was 16. #ioricordo that I decided to be on the wrong side from that day on. I was in Cilento and I chose, I became a subject.

Different from previous examples, such memory is reproduced directly in the social media, and in fact, some of the most typical traits of social media fruition emerge: in this case, individual narratives are set in the context of a collective experience, and the significance of an event is measured through the transformative impact it had on an individual existence. The outside material that people bring to the shared commemoration is their own biographical experience, filtered through a sense-making process that is informed by a certain interpretation of the past.

Fifth, there is the appropriation of a certain memory of the past to advance or support *political claims* situated in the present. This is a typical

practice of social movement commemoration, in which the past is mobilised as a resource in present-day struggles.

The discourse against WTO, IMF and WB of ten years ago anticipated the crisis of democratic institutions. #ioricordo

Finally, there are *militant claims of memory struggles*. Some tweets are more a discourse on memory than an act of commemoration per se, more a statement in the context of a conflict about the past than a reproduction of that past, as in the case of this tweet published on 10 February 2012:

The #Foibe are a gash in the soul of our Nation. Not remembering them is worse than a simple crime, it is despicable. #Ioricordo

In this case, the social media context becomes a space of political struggle on memory, more than a place of commemoration. The content of some tweets focuses on the need for memory and on the duty to remember, more than on memory itself. These tweets participate in a shared commemoration, they are charged with political and moral connotations, calls for reflection and appeals to action.

If we look at how these different practices are distributed across the events remembered (Fig. 6.5), we see significant variation. Quotes, for example, are much more frequent in tweets referring to the Holocaust than in any other case, signalling the ritualistic way in which people approach the commemoration of 27 January, individually reproducing standardised material in relation to a collective memory that is strongly institutionalised and embedded in social and state practices. The memory of the *foibe*, instead, is the only one in which the absolute majority of tweets consist of memory claims: statements refer to the importance to remember what happened, to the establishment of a precise version of the events, to the need that everyone recognises that particular narrative of the past as the truth. As we have seen earlier, the narrative of the *foibe* is inherently characterised by this rhetoric of denied memory, of something that was forgotten and hidden by the anti-fascist consensus and reproduced only in far-right and radical-right milieus for decades, and the urge to mainstream this narrative, playing on the moral authority of the victims, is fundamental in the identity of the Italian radical right.

Both in the case of the Genoa G8 and of the 1970s massacres, more than 40 per cent of the tweets refer to personal experiences. On the one

hand, it is obviously easier to refer to personal biographies in the case of events that took place in 2001 (such as the Genoa G8) or in 1980 (such as the bombing in Bologna) than in the case of events that occurred during the Second World War. On the other hand, this does not seem to explain this difference, given that, for example, most of the publicly commemorated mafia murders took place during the lifetime of many Twitter users (Pio La Torre in 1982, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in 1992). It seems like the original #ioricordo initiative referring to the anti-G8 protests in Genoa and the commemoration of the 1970s massacres (in particular in the case of the bombing in the train station of Bologna) have a much more considerable capacity to stimulate tweets in which people tell their own personal stories in the context of a collective aggregation. As we have seen in the previous section, the Genoa G8 and the Bologna bombing are the cases in which there was a specific initiative behind the use of #ioricordo, someone explicitly stimulating people to share personal memories through the hashtag. These initiatives tend to work differently, and the type of mnemonic practices people put in place in their context is different from the ones that are used when commemoration is stimulated through an official state-sanctioned and media-celebrated anniversary, as in the case of the *foibe* or the Holocaust.

The memory of mafia victims and the memory of the *foibe* are the two cases within which the presence of offline initiatives of commemorations is most significant: this seems to have a lot to do with the fact that those memories are strictly linked to the identity of specific organisations (the radical right party Fratelli d'Italia in the case of the *foibe* and the national anti-mafia network Libera in the case of mafia victims) that organise commemoration activities offline and publicise them on social media. The relationship between this and the relevance of personal experiences in the cases of the Genoa G8 and the Bologna bombing is particularly interesting: what seems to be at play here is the different mnemonic communities in which commemoration takes place. In the cases of the *foibe* and of mafia victims, there are institutionalised mnemonic communities, built around collective actors such as Fratelli d'Italia and Libera, that organise their commemoration activities offline and use Twitter as a space of propaganda for them. In the cases of the Genoa G8 and the Bologna victims, instead, the mnemonic communities are constructed online through the initiative of commemoration itself, as an aggregation of different individual (but publicly shared, and in the context of a collective initiative, establishing relationship with others) acts of commemoration.

Furthermore, the tweets concerning the remembrance of the Genoa anti-G8 protests are those that are most significantly characterised by the presence of political claims. The anti-G8 protests are the only events, among those indexed by #ioricordo, that explicitly refer to an episode of mobilisation, and are most frequently appropriated as a political element in the present. Once again, there seems to be a strong relationship between the mnemonic practices carried out using social media and the mnemonic communities in which they take place. Memories are not neutral; their practices depend both on the characteristics of the narrative of the past that is reproduced and on the characteristics of the actors of commemoration: a mnemonic community of social movement activists, even if, as in this case, of social movement activists from ten years earlier, will more likely than other communities, symbolically appropriate the past and use it politically in relation to present issues and struggles.

CONCLUSIONS

The case of *#ioricordo* provides a rather complex and multifaceted depiction of the ways in which memory activism finds a place in social media. The analysis conducted in this chapter, although not exhaustive, allows to draw some interesting conclusions on the relationship between memory and social media, in particular in the case of movement-related memories.

First, the analysis of the *#ioricordo* case point out that social media favours the diffusion on mnemonic practices across issues, events and actors. The capacity of activists equipped with a certain repertoire of memory to access both the mainstream media repository of memory and the one situated in movement culture seems to be significantly increased by social media: the case of *#ioricordo* shows that social media provide a favourable context for mnemonic projects, and tend to facilitate the diffusion of mnemonic practices beyond those projects.

Second, regarding actors, the chapter proposes a typology of the different types of actors that engage in digital memory work based on their respective role. The framework aims to analyse the different roles interpreted by actors in social media commemoration, distinguishing between digital memory activists and digitally networked individuals. It points out that there is a peculiarity of mnemonic activism that is different from the occasional participation in online commemorations; then, the analysis delves more deeply into digital memory activism, proposing to distinguish between mnemonic project activists and the digital memory brokers, to

underline the presence or absence of attachment to a specific narrative. Interestingly enough, brokerage is less common in the case of movement-related memories, that seem to follow the logic of activism much more than they comply with the logic of social media.

Third, the analysis of the different digital memory practices that were put in place in this case sheds light on the fact that online and offline content are often intertwined. Furthermore, digital memory practices seem to strongly depend both on the narrative that is being reproduced and the actors involved in commemoration. Not all memories are reproduced through the same practices. For example, there seems to be a significant difference between more institutionalised and canonised memories, such as the memory of the Holocaust, celebrated by a state-sanctioned day of commemorations, and memories that are more contentious and controversial, as in the case of the commemoration of the Genoa G8. Furthermore, narratives that are reproduced in the framework of structured and established mnemonic communities tend to be reproduced online mainly as mirrors of offline commemorations, while more informal and scattered communities tend to be formed directly online through the sharing and aggregation of personal experiences. This peculiar element needs further research to investigate the interplay between the individual and the collective dimension of memory that takes place when a personal element is publicly shared in the framework of a collective mnemonic project. In this context, memories that refer to episodes of contention and mobilisation, and that are mainly reproduced in social movement milieus, are more likely to be the object of political appropriation in present struggles than others.

More generally speaking, it seems that social media are spaces for collective memory work, whose outcomes need to be assessed through further research. In social media, memory is shared, and this undeniably shows a collective component of commemoration. Nevertheless, it is often shared in such an ephemeral way to make one doubt its truly collective nature. On the one hand, the *#ioricordo* mnemonic project on the anti-G8 protests in Genoa clearly shows the potential of the social media as a space for collective memory work, and for situating the individual stories that typically characterise Twitter in a broader context of a shared narrative. On the other hand, cases in which the majority of tweets are posted by digitally networked individuals are illustrative of how little actual connection there is between individual participants in online commemoration. In these cases, online commemoration seems largely structured and shaped

by actors such as the state and mainstream media, which provide not only the temporal setting of commemoration (institutionalised anniversaries) but also a significant part of its content (mainstream media material and cultural references).

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