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# MEDIA COMMUNICATION, NEWSPAPERS AND THE RE-ELABORATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORIES OF THE WAR

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# Today's conversation

- Ricoeur's (1998) similarity between mourning and collective re-elaboration of war memories
- Different kinds of "collective memories" of the war
- Entire cycle of ordinary people's re-elaboration of meaning of war violence
- Two exploratory researches on newspapers' language and "constellations of collective memories" (Halbwachs, 1950) when describing an episode of in-group victimisation
- Conclusions

# Similarities and dissimilarities between mourning elaboration and collective re-elaboration of memories of the war

- Collective re-elaboration of war memories is similar to the elaboration of a mourning (Ricoeur, 1998)

- Mourning is a personal process

- Collective re-elaboration of war memories has multiple levels of explanation (Doise, 1982): intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, inter-group.

# Similarities and dissimilarities in time

- The re-elaboration of memories of the war held by ordinary people is, as in the case of a mourning elaboration, very slow   BUT


- Collective re-elaboration of war memories  lasts even more than a single individual lifespan, encompassing at least three generations.

# Similarities: ambivalence

- Memories of the war, as well as mourning processes, are full of ambivalent or contradictory passages.

# Similarities and dissimilarities: the central theme of loss

- The prevalent meaning of loss in personal elaboration of a mourning:

  - death of another person

  - failure of a life project

  - damaging of a personal resource (as, for instance, beauty or health) (Freud, 1946; 1946b).

- In the case of collective re-elaboration of war memories, changes in the meaning attributed to the central theme of loss signal the passage to a different phase of reconciliation processes

# Development of inter-group reconciliation processes in time

- Three main moments of collective re-elaboration of war memories (Leone, in press)

    - the conflict moment;
    - the moment immediately after the signing of a peace treaty;
    - the long phase when generations change, until the death of all direct witnesses of the war

# 1. Loss elaboration during the conflict

- In-group members can act as victims or perpetrators in episodes of inter-group violence

- Ordinary people have to cope with the fear and sadness of these episodes

- Loss emerges as a waste of human lives (Leone, Mastrovito e D'Errico, 2008)

## 2. The signing of a peace treaty

- The peace treaty changes ordinary people's priorities

- Ordinary people have to cope with damages that the violence, done and received, had irretrievably caused:
  - visible, material damages
  - emotional damages: moral indignity, for the group labelled at the end of the war as the perpetrator one; shame for inability to defend oneself, for the victims' group (Nadler e Shnabel, 2008).

# 2. Loss elaboration after the signing of a peace treaty

loss of a valuable social identity.

- self-conscious emotions : pride or guilt for perpetrators, shame for victims (Nadler e Shnabel, 2008);

- in any case, challenge for Self image (Lewis e Haviland, 1993);

- due to a loss in the value of the in-group identity.

# 3. The long phase when generations change ("mature" reconciliation)

the prevalent meaning of loss refers to the marginalization of the enemy image (Kelman, 2006)

- the majority of ordinary people could recognise the enemy image as a propagandistic tool and as an ideological artefact;

- only minorities, also in the very middle of the conflict (Leone e D'Errico, 2007; Leone e Mastrovito, 2008; Leone, Mastrovito e D'Errico, 2008; Leone e Mastrovito, in press), recognise enemy image as a protective shield, used to save a delusory positive image of the in-group.

# Loss elaboration at the stage of "mature" reconciliation

generational changes

- The "loss of the enemy" free the new born generations from unreal "debts" or "credits" that could be psychologically linked to the memories of remote wars (Leone, 2007).

- Reconciliation, as any other kind of important historical shift, is based first of all on the birth of new individuals, that gradually replace the old ones (Arendt , 1978 )

# Different meanings of "collective memories of the war"

- on a more general level, the meaning evolution of the idea of loss,  applied to a collective re-elaboration of war, refers to a re-elaboration of the meaning of inter-group violence

- Simone Weil (1941): violence and blind force are the real topic every war is all about and the only lasting meaning, survivors have to come into terms with.

# "Collective memories of war": who are the subjects of the processes?

- direct witnesses of war violence;

- people belonging to groups fighting a war, but with no direct experience of violence;

- people born after a war fought by their group, that received a narrative of autobiographical memories of war violence by direct witnesses;

- people born after a war fought by their group, that received their knowledge about this war from sources having no direct experience of war violence.

# Which contents are we examining?

- when we refer to "memories" of direct witnesses we are already speaking, in truth, of narratives (Portelli, 2008).

# What is a "real memory" ?

"It's a book (Proust's book) extremely real, well equipped to fake (by reminiscences) the involuntary memory that is, in my opinion, although Bergson does not make here a distinction, the only real. Voluntary memory, memory of intelligence and of eyes, gives anything to us of the past but some facsimile, that is no more similar to it than a painting of a bad painter is similar to a springtime view. Then, we cannot trust that life is real because we cannot represent it; in the same way, (if) we believe we do not love any more our dears that are dead, because we do not remember them, we see suddenly an old glove and we burst in tears"

(Halbwachs, mars 1925, quoted in Namer, 1997)

# War memories as narratives

- When direct witnesses' generation is about to disappear, family memories (Halbwachs, 1925), in which these narratives of direct experiences of war are usually framed, tend to be more and more flanked by mediated narratives :

  - informative (e.g. the audio-visual archival organised by director Spielberg, collecting narratives from witnesses of Shoà)
  - entertainment (e.g. movies based on various kinds of dramatisation of WW2)

# Media narratives

- "ideal audience" (Mininni, 2004)

- professional goals

- infotainment

# Narratives of war and family memories

- a "private treasure" that refers to " the more or less mysterious symbol of the common ground from which they all originate their distinctive characteristics" (Halbwachs, 1925, it. ed. p.35)

- protective factors

- "lived History"

- "affective armour"

- war memories: sharing of resilience experiences

# "Collective war memories" referred to remote historical periods

- "Imagined community" (e.g. the national community: cfr. Anderson, 1983).

- Social use (and abuse) of historical memories (Todorov, 1995)

- It is not the simple, linear temporal distance that makes these contents more or less easy to recollect; but the similarity with the central core of current representations of inter-group relations, socially presented as benevolent or hostile .

- "Constellations of collective memories" (Halbwachs,

# The role of media

- More frequently, functional to the social construction of enemy image (Herman & Chomsky, 1998):   symbolic exclusion from moral community that announces and justify the use of violence (Ravenna, 2004)

- Less frequently, functional to the social resistence to enemy image construction during the conflict and to the social de-construction of enemy image after the war

# Media and war

- New media originate often from military research
- In war times, the communication battle is crucial
- In modern wars, the higher ratio of victims is among civilians
- Media explain war violence to ordinary people

# The false overlapping between war and conflict

- War is the institutional justification of violence

- Conflict is crucial for social innovation (Moscovici, 1976; 1984)

- Reconciliation is not the absence of social conflict, but an active refusal to use violence to assess inter-group balance

# Newspapers and social discourse on war

- Although important new media are accessible today, newspapers' analysis plays a fundamental role in the making of social discourse (Mazzara, 2008)
- Expecially when in-group wars are fought in a far away "war theater"

# Communication studies and socio-psychological studies

- Communication studies: prescriptive, based on a dichotomy between war journalists and peace journalists (Galtung, 1986; 2002)

- Socio-psychological studies: descriptive of effects, maximazed by an explicit trade-off (Ghiglione, 1988) on "truth, if it's possible"

# Empirical evidences

# 1. Speaking about "our" victims and "their" victims

- Differences in media coverage of conflict
- In contemporary narratives of war, "the victim has taken the  the place of the hero"  (Huyse, 2003)
- Media resistance to violence justification can be kept distinct from propagandistic use of media, by examining:
- words' use in narratives about victims
- association of the in-group victimization episode in a "constellation of collective memories" supporting or undermining the enemy image

# The research: media coverage of ingroup and outgroup victims

- <u>Episode</u>: Nassiriya attack against Italian soldiers in 2003, when 9 Iraqi people and 19 Italian soldiers were killed

- <u>Corpus selection</u>: 4 different Italian mastheads, oriented towards "ideal readers", either generalist (Panorama, L'Espresso), or involved in peace movements (Carta, Mosaico di Pace)

- Period: 2004-2005

# Method

- Quanti-qualitative computer assisted analysis performed with TalTac2.5 a program for automatic lexico-textual treatment for content analysis [Bolasco et al., 2000].

  - specificities analysis
  - co-occurrence analysis
  - semantic categorization on the basis of lemmas specificities
  - detection of local contexts retrieved through a TFIDF index.

# mastheads oriented towards generalist "ideal

# Victimhood (generalist masthead)

| lemma | Masthead | N occ. | N sub-occ. | type of s. | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Andrea_NM | Panorama | 10 | 10 | spec_orig | 0,00 |
| Giuseppe_NM | Panorama | 16 | 16 | spec_orig | 0,00 |
| mortuary chapel_N | Panorama | 12 | 12 | spec_orig | 0,00 |
| Alessandro_NM | Panorama | 13 | 12 | spec | 0,00 |
| Bruno_NM | Panorama | 28 | 23 | spec | 0,00 |
| family_N | Panorama | 41 | 30 | spec | 0,00 |
| brother_N | Panorama | 24 | 20 | spec | 0,00 |
| husband_N | Panorama | 28 | 26 | spec | 0,00 |
| wife_N | Panorama | 29 | 25 | spec | 0,00 |
| memory_N | Panorama | 12 | 11 | spec | 0,00 |
| widowed_N | Panorama | 20 | 18 | spec | 0,00 |
| child_N | Panorama | 13 | 11 | spec | 0,01 |
| flag_N | Panorama | 16 | 13 | spec | 0,01 |
| mother_N | Panorama | 17 | 14 | spec | 0,01 |
| to cry_V | Panorama | 11 | 10 | spec | 0,01 |
| funeral_N | Panorama | 12 | 10 | spec | 0,02 |

"what remains, after one years, of the suffering that made the nation crying? […] There are children still suffering and women left alone. […]"


"Today my husband is considered an hero, but he has been always an hero for me"

# Mastheads oriented towards "ideal readers"

# Revealing of war horror

| lemma | masthead | N occ. | N sub-occ. | type of s. | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| war_N | Carta | 209 | 82 | Spec | 0,00 |
| battle_N | Carta | 24 | 12 | Spec | 0,00 |
| occupation_N | Carta | 22 | 14 | Spec | 0,00 |
| state_N | Carta | 21 | 12 | Spec | 0,00 |
| death_N | Carta | 51 | 22 | Spec | 0,00 |
| boy_N | Carta | 21 | 13 | Spec | 0,00 |
| people_N | Mosaico | 40 | 8 | Spec | 0,00 |
| armed_A | Carta | 34 | 16 | Spec | 0,00 |
| economic_A | Carta | 11 | 7 | Spec | 0,01 |
| Iraqui_A | Mosaico | 116 | 17 | Spec | 0,00 |
| to involve_V | Carta | 24 | 15 | Spec | 0,00 |
| define_V | Carta | 14 | 10 | Spec | 0,00 |
| to lose_V | Carta | 32 | 15 | Spec | 0,00 |
| to suffer_V | Carta | 14 | 8 | Spec | 0,01 |
| to demonstrate_V | Carta | 31 | 13 | Spec | 0,02 |
| to think_V | Mosaico | 52 | 22 | Spec | 0,00 |

"the Iraqi war is a confused clash that wounds people, society, cities"


"Racism? There is no other possible definition for the fact that they speaks only about western dead and never about the Iraqi ones."

# Conclusions

- Different uses of words when speaking about "our" victims and "their" victims :
  - Defensive/propagandistic mode vs. constructive mode
- Invalidation of the idea that media are intrinsically constrained to propaganda, when speaking about "our" victims in war times (Herman e Chomsky, 1998)

# Memory associations with Nassiriya episode

- Explorative description of newspapers' use of memory association in order to construct different "constellations of collective memories" (Halbwachs, 1950) for the in-group victimization episode

# The research

- <u>Episode</u>: Nassiriya attack against Italian soldiers in 2003, when 9 Iraqi people and 19 Italian soldiers were killed

- <u>Corpus selection</u>: 2 different Italian mastheads, one oriented towards "ideal readers", either generalist (Panorama), one involved in peace movements (Carta)

- Period: December 2003 - December 2005

- Method: content analysis

# Associations in Panorama

| associations | n. of articles |
|---|---|
| Gulf War | 3 |
| II World War | 1 |
| War in Vietnam | 1 |
| Massacre of Casablanca | 1 |
| Commemoration of the 2nd of June | 1 |

" "A veil of sadness will fall on the military parade along Fori Imperiali for the Republic celebration of the 2nd June" (Panorama, June 2005)

# Associations in Carta

| associations | n. of articles |
|---|---|
| Sit-in against war in Florence | 1 |
| Chimical weapons used in Falluja | 1 |
| Abu- Ghraib | 1 |
| Geneve Convention | 2 |
| Commemoration of the 2nd of June | 1 |

""A nation in war doesn't organize a military parade, it doesn't let the units to march in the capital city when has blood of other people on its conscience." (Carta, May 2004).

# Conclusive remarks

- Analysis, both of newspapers' language describing current wars and of their recollection of collective memories of past wars, framing today's inter-group relations, could deepen our comprehension of a specific facet of the overall process by which ordinary people manage to re-elaborate, although very slowly and hardly, the meaning of war violence.