Challenging the Myth of Italians as 'Good Fellows': Is Clarity About In-group Crimes the Best Choice When Narrating a War to Its Perpetrators' Descendants?

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The paper focuses on the interplay between generational transitions, social amnesia and mature reconciliation processes. In particular it explores the way different narratives of collective memories convey social representations of in-group history and address psycho-social needs that are at the core of reconciliation processes. An exploratory study was conducted to address the problem of narrating war crimes to descendants of the group of the perpetrators. We hypothesised that, compared to evasive narratives, detailed narratives (based on reification arguments) clarify unwanted self-images of the perpetrator to the new generation and promote more restorative behaviours. One-hundred and three young Italian participants read detailed or evasive narratives of war crimes committed during the invasion of Ethiopia by the Italian army. Results indicate that detailed narratives have more impact on participants, in terms of emotions and restorative behaviours. Participants' identification with the in-group and their level of agreement with the shared myth of 'Italians as good fellows' also show significant effects. Our exploratory results suggest that, when the in-group is responsible for

violence and crimes, the social sharing of an impartial truth – transmitted through detailed and reified arguments – is a necessary step towards mature reconciliation.

The general aim of our study is to explore how detailed vs. evasive descriptions of a war's violence might not only convey to new generations this relevant part of their own national history, but also enhance or slow down processes of reconciliation. We agree in fact with the classic theoretical position proposed by Hannah Arendt (1958) that, prior to social, cultural, historical, political, economic and/or psychological processes, all relevant social changes are first of all based on the biological change of generational transition. By this phenomenon of natality (to use Arendt's term) new human beings are constantly introduced into groups: Newcomers who may make it possible "that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings" (Arendt, 1958, p.177), and it is especially evident for reconciliation, which rebuilds intergroup relations anew, after the destructive effects of violence (Nadler, Malloy & Fisher, 2008).

Of course, it is not without difficulties that natality contributes to elaborating the violent past suffered by groups. On the contrary, we can expect that a heavy burden of emotional barriers comes down, as a kind of heritage, from the generations experiencing wars to the next ones, born after the end of direct violence (Tutu, 2009; Burton, 1969). When considering how descendants of groups that fought one another consider violence enacted by their groups before their own birth, we are therefore passing from studying reactions to a "lived History" (Halbwachs, 1950) to observing reactions due to narratives of collective memories: i.e. narratives conveying "series of Social Representations relative to the past that every group produces, institutionalizes and transmits through the interaction among their members" (Jedlowsky, 2001, p.33). In this process of transmission from previous to new generations, institutions play a fundamental role in keeping past conflicts alive, or in dealing with them and fostering reconciliation (Valencia, Momoitio, Idoyaga & Paez, 2011). In our opinion, this process of transmission reaches a critical turning point when three generations have elapsed since the peace treaty. At that moment, in fact, since the generation that directly experienced the war violence is close to disappearing, the symbolic struggle to search for the meaning of past violence can no longer avail of them as a relevant

source of information, to be compared with all the others conveying narratives of past violence (history books, TV documentaries, literature and the arts, movies, etc.). We propose that, at that moment, processes of reconciliation change, and therefore we propose to call them "mature" reconciliation processes, to be distinguished from those processes where witnesses of past violence may still play an active role (cf. Leone & Mastrovito, 2010).

Starting from this theoretical point of view, in this paper we intend to address the specific question of social and psychological consequences of clarity about in-group crimes in narratives intended for institutional purposes (e.g. school teaching, public speeches, commemorations, etc.) when narrating the war crimes of their in-group to perpetrators' descendants. In our opinion, for young adults born after the end of a war, the need to know and understand controversial aspects of their in-group's past is, in fact, an important feature of mature reconciliation processes that interacts with the coexisting need to protect one's own group identity (Leone, 2011).

Depending on the balance assigned to these two diverging needs, two different kinds of theory have been proposed by scholars working in the field of intergroup reconciliation processes.

According to a first kind of theoretical expectation, during a violent intergroup conflict a rough competition on cross-victimization occurs between enemies, since each group assumes itself to be the victim of the other's aggression (Bar-Tal, 2000). Although after the settlement of the conflict this competition is no longer accepted − the peace treaty having in some way assigned the roles of victims and perpetrators through its assessment of the conditions for ending war to be accepted by both groups − a certain amount of tension between different versions of past violence is nonetheless expected between the groups, since each group tends to go on defending its own moral image (Kelman, 2008). However, these attempts at self-defence alter with the settlement's definition of war responsibilities, since at that moment those recognized as perpetrators and those recognized as victims have to cope with different social and psychological needs: perpetrators need to avoid moral exclusion, while victims need to recover control over their destiny (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008). Each version of the narrative of past violence must therefore meet these different social and psychological group needs, leading to different interpretations of the same past events. In this first theoretical frame, then, the need to protect the in-group image is seen as stronger than the need to arrive at a shared knowledge of the past, and

reconciliation requires us to accept that groups of former enemies may have – to a reasonable degree excluding blatant negation of facts – different versions of past violence (Kelman, 2008).

On the contrary, another kind of theory gives more importance to knowledge than to the protection of identity. According to these other theoretical hypotheses, a space for intergroup reconciliation is opened whenever a "truth that is impartial – as signalled by its willingness to cast blame wherever blame is deserved – gains credibility" among ordinary people of the groups of old enemies (Gibson, 2006, p. 418). In this type of theory, the need to know and understand the past violence is therefore seen as somehow stronger than the need to mould the truth according to self-defensive biases.

In this paper, we take both these theoretical perspectives into account, as we observed the reactions of descendants of a group historically recognized as having perpetrated serious war crimes to two different kinds of narratives of these crimes: one more evasive narrative, choosing the protection of their social identity over truthfulness, vs. a more clear narrative, choosing to present an impartial truth over the protection of their social identity. We have chosen war crimes related to past events that occurred more than three generations ago, to observe these reactions in the frame of mature reconciliation processes, since we expected that at this moment of the group's life historical narratives might have reached a critical turning point, due to the disappearance from society of witnesses to these crimes, which makes this struggle between need for understanding and need for protecting one's own social identity even more difficult.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF PAST ATTROCITIES PERPETRATED BY THE IN-GROUP: THE ISSUES OF COLLECTIVE GUILT AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE

The socio-psychological consequences on newborn generations of knowledge of atrocities perpetrated by their in-group before their lifetimes have largely been investigated under the 'collective guilt' label (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004). Although very important in focusing researchers' agenda on a phenomenon that actually seems widely shared among descendants of perpetrators' groups, the collective guilt construct appears in ways to be controversial. For the aim of our paper, it would take too long to consider all the complexities of this issue. It seems

enough to remember that, theoretically, criticisms have been advanced in relation to the problem of applying such a label to emotions in relation to newborn generations, obviously free from any personal responsibility for past wrongdoings of their ancestors (Arendt, 1964). But also from an empirical point of view, inconsistencies and problematic interpretations arise in data related to collective guilt and its relationships with other relevant variables such as identification with the in-group (cf. Roccas, Klar & Liviatan, 2006).

Trying to capture another facet of this complex phenomenon of social and psychological consequences of past violence on descendants of the perpetrators' group, we decided to focus our attention on the issue of collective knowledge transmitted to new generations of the perpetrators' group. As we discussed above, for young people born long after the end of direct violence this need to know about the atrocities of past wars is important for coming to terms with in-group responsibilities – thus changing an idealised image of one's own group's past into a more realistic image, which forms the basis for mature reconciliation processes (Leone, 2011).

To meet these basic needs of knowledge, understanding and self-evaluation, we think that descendants of perpetrators and victims have to be exposed to a version of their collective memory that appears to be impartial and trustworthy. In this we agree more with Gibson's (2006) theoretical claim presented above, and with his idea that a historical truth may be signalled as an impartial one "by its willingness to cast blame wherever blame is deserved" (Gibson, 2006, p. 418).

In this paper, we suggest that this perspective be applied not only to contemporaries of a war's violence, but also to new generations, considering in more depth therefore, as we discussed above, the role of impartial truth in mature reconciliation processes (Leone & Mastrovito, 2010; Valencia et al., 2011).

The way in which war violence is narrated to newborn generations is, in our opinion, one of the more crucial aspects of these socio-psychological processes. We suggest the general assumption that the different kinds of narratives on war violence addressed to new generations, which contribute to either the perpetuating or challenging of social representations of national history (László, Ehmann & Imre, 2002; László, 2008), play a crucial role in shaping the overall direction of reconciliation processes, both of the victims' and of the perpetrators' groups (Leone, 2011). According to this general framework, in this paper we explore the more specific problem

of narrating war crimes to descendants of the group of the perpetrators. Before considering the different effects on these descendants of either a clear or an evasive narrative of their in-group war crimes, however, a more in-depth discussion is needed to further clarify how knowledge of war crimes may be distinguished from more general knowledge about past violence, and how it could play a crucial role in mature reconciliation processes.

WAR CRIMES OF THE IN-GROUP AS HISTORICAL FACTS

It is well known that, after atrocities that occurred during the World Wars, international agreements were signed: the Hague Conventions and the Geneva Protocol, which regulate the use of weapons in war, and in particular the use of bio–chemical weapons; and the Geneva Conventions which "form the cornerstone of contemporary International Humanitarian Law (IHL). They contain the essential rules protecting persons who are not, or who are no longer, taking a direct part in hostilities when they find themselves in the hands of an adverse party" (Dörmann, 2009). Though such treaties, of course, did not stop war crimes, they however established standards for humanitarian treatment of civilians and the boundaries beyond which military actions must be considered inhuman. International agreements also contributed to reaching shared historical judgements on wars. Such a clear-cut judgement may by now be expressed, for example, in referring to violence enacted by European countries during colonial wars.

However, a distance may be observed between historical judgements and shared social representations of national history. This discrepancy can be addressed in terms of tensions between scientific and everyday knowledge, i.e. between reified and consensual universes (Moscovici, 1988), and questions the presumption that dialogical communications have to always be preferred. In fact, although we agree that "the use of consensualization arguments has a more clear potential for achieving dialogical understandings" (Batel & Castro, 2009, p. 419), we propose that reification arguments may sometimes be more apt to reach other important socio-psychological aims, and that reconciliation is one example of this kind of situation. In particular, we think that when a clear-cut historical judgement has been reached, the choice to communicate to descendants of perpetrators in-group war crimes as historical facts rather than keeping on

negotiating over their meaning and contextual explanations may help to promote reconciliation. Although difficult, this communicative choice, in fact, meets some crucial socio-psychological needs of the descendants of perpetrators.

As we already mentioned, it is well known that, according to Nadler and Shnabel (2008), socio-psychological needs of perpetrators significantly differ from those of victims. Victims have to cope with the fact of their lack of control over their own lives and destinies. Perpetrators have to cope with their indignity, which excludes them from the moral community (Nadler & Shabel 2008). Within the theoretical framework discussed above, we propose that for both victims' and perpetrators' groups these coping processes last more than a single generation and reach a critical turning point when more than three generations have elapsed and first-hand witnesses are bound to disappear (Leone & Mastrovito, 2010). Therefore, they are inextricably intertwined with narratives of past violence transmitted from older down to younger generations.

Exploring the possibility of applying psychoanalytical notions to the level of collective memory and historical consciousness, Paul Ricoeur proposed that the core of narratives of a collective past is based on the acceptance of a loss: The facts remembered happened, and nothing may be done to mend them or make them disappear in the history of the in-group (Ricoeur, 2004). Merging this proposal of Paul Ricoeur with the already-mentioned theory of Nadler and Shnabel (2008) on socio-psychological needs of victims and perpetrators, we could expect that narratives meant for descendants of perpetrators have to accept the loss involved in remembering events that showed how their group was less morally valuable than they had hoped it to be. In the same line of thought, we could expect that narratives meant for descendants of victims have to accept the loss in remembering events showing that their group was less in control of its own destiny than they had hoped it to be (Leone, 2011). We think that both these socio-psychological losses may be better coped with when a shared knowledge of historical facts that made these unwanted self-images evident is rendered clear to the eyes of the young adults receiving these narratives. This clarity may in fact impede the tendency to avoid remembering collective memories that imply the moral indignity of the in-group (Pennebaker, Paez & Rimé, 1997) and that instead meet the need for an impartial truth to be told, casting the blame "wherever blame is deserved" (Gibson, 2006, p. 418).

In this sense, we expect that narratives clearly conveying historical facts on in-group war crimes may enhance intergroup reconciliation processes, making descendants of the group of perpetrators more aware of the burden that they have inherited. Of course, we intend this not as a personal moral burden – moral responsibilities being by definition personal – but as a social and emotional one (Burton, 1969; Nadler, Malloy & Fisher, 2008). We expect that this effect may be seen, therefore, both at the level of emotional reactions and of behavioural readiness. As regards emotions, we expect that a clear narrative of war crimes committed by the in-group may cause an emotional arousal in young people born long after the end of this violence, created to accommodate their social identity (Breakwell, 1993) to this new and significant negative information about their historical past. As regards behavioural intentions, we expect descendants of the perpetrators' group to be more ready to enact helping behaviours towards descendants of the former victims' group, intergroup helping being a behavioural choice particularly apt to restore the in-group social image threatened by the violence enacted (Nadler, Harpaz-Gorodeisky, & Ben-David, 2009).

The research that we present in this paper tries to apply these theoretical assumptions and expectations to a specific case study, exploring in more depth the effects of narratives, addressed to young Italian participants, which make more or less clear the picture of war crimes that occurred during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935-36) – events that occurred more than three generations ago and that undoubtedly signal to these young participants a loss in the moral dignity of their in-group. We decided in fact to conduct an exploratory study on effects of detailed vs. evasive narratives of Italian war crimes during the invasion of Ethiopia on a group of young Italian participants.

WAR CRIMES DURING THE INVASION OF ETHIOPIA: CHALLENGING THE MYTH OF ITALIANS AS 'GOOD FELLOWS'

The Case Study

We have chosen this case study for our research, because until today the vast majority of Italians keep on ignoring the grave violence enacted during this invasion and, more generally, during

Italian colonial wars (Pivato, 2007). Although the Fascist era was harshly debated in public arenas, and transmitted from older generations to younger ones as a controversial but crucial part of the Italian past, colonial wars and invasions were in fact kept silent, also because they are deeply incompatible with a widespread national myth, representing Italian soldiers as highly "humane" and unused to any cruelty. This idea is part of a more comprehensive social representation that describes Italians as a group incapable of any cruel violence, both generally and during times of war. As this social representation comes into conflict with historical facts of violence enacted by Italians in colonial wars, historians who study this phenomenon called it 'the myth of Italians as good fellows' (*italiani brava gente*) (Del Boca, 1995, see also Volpato et al., in press, and the special issue on Collective Memories of Colonial Violence edited by Volpato & Licata, 2010). Some studies we conducted on social representations of Italian history showed that while the Fascist era was frequently remembered across the generations – although in different ways by different generations – colonial wars and invasions were not referred to at all by any generation. Fascism proved therefore to be crucial to shaping the historical identity of participants of three generations, while colonialism appeared to have been suppressed among their collective memories (Leone & Curigliano, 2009). Since Italian colonialism was the last European attempt to exploit African resources using the overt aggression and rhetoric of a colonial war, and since the Italian Empire collapsed after only few years, it has been possible, in fact, to discharge collective responsibilities for the violence enacted during Italian colonial wars, representing this period as simply a meaningless "adventure", easily forgotten.

In spite of this myth of 'Italians as good fellows', historians studying Italian colonization have documented several grave wrongdoings that sometimes crossed the line of international humanitarian protocols. The events that we chose to have conveyed to our young participants either in a clear and detailed way or in a more evasive way were documented war crimes that occurred during the invasion of Ethiopia, which is an important part of the more general issue of Italian colonial times. Before discussing our research data, therefore, it is necessary to briefly describe the historical facts of this invasion.

In short, it should be noted that when in 1935-6 the Italian army invaded Ethiopia, both armies committed atrocities. Nevertheless, what this war is best remembered for is the fact that, among other serious war crimes, the Italian army successfully used chemical weapons, primarily

the blister agent sulphur mustard, forbidden by the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare of 1925 (Geneva Protocol), which fell under the mandate of the League of Nations. Roughly 2,500 bombs with poisonous gas were used, and the war caused roughly 200,000 Ethiopian civilian casualties.

To understand better some of the processes leading to the astonishing social amnesia of such significant war crimes (Pivato, 2007), in a previous study we explored how textbooks currently narrate the Italian invasion of Ethiopia to students attending the last year of Italian high school (usually aged 18). A quanti-qualitative analysis of 7 textbooks chosen by historians as particularly representative of present-day teaching showed that this topic was scarcely treated, and was related only to the Fascist era (in spite of the fact that Italian colonial interests in African resources originated long before the decision of Mussolini to attack). Also, the images used to accompany the texts were almost all taken from the archives of Fascist propaganda or from books of images meant for Italian children of the time, in which the colonial war was presented in a diminishing and childish way. But the most important observation was related to the kind of narratives used to communicate this knowledge to young students. Only a minority of texts, in fact, used detailed, matter-of-fact language, while the majority brushed over facts, presenting them in an evasive manner (Leone & Mastrovito, 2010).

Research Questions and Predictions

Following Leone and Mastrovito (2010), and the already discussed recent advances in reconciliation studies, we decided to explore whether different kinds of narratives of the war-crimes in Ethiopia might provoke different effects on young participants. Though keeping a generally exploratory attitude, our study nevertheless proposed some theoretical predictions.
First of all, we wanted to explore participants' reactions after reading unknown historical facts. We expected that, facing the unexpected, all participants would report significant emotional reactions, such as an increase in awareness and surprise, and a decrease in pride and positive feelings about the in-group.

We further expected differences due to the communication style, either detailed or evasive, used to convey this information. Specifically, we expected that a factual, detailed

narrative could be more effective than an evasive narrative (like those that we discovered in the majority of Italian textbooks) in causing an emotional uneasiness in our young participants about these past events.

Finally, we presumed the willingness to help the group of former victims would be stronger when participants were exposed to a detailed and factual narrative than when exposed to an evasive one.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 103 Italian students (of whom 75 were female; mean age 21.7) who chose to take part in this research as a part of their lessons on social psychology.

Design and Procedure

In order to compare intra-subject and inter-subject variations, the research followed a mixed design. First, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire that gathered information on their gender, age, knowledge about, and attitudes towards, Italian colonisation; and measures of identification with the Italian group, emotions evoked by the colonial experience, and agreement with the myth of Italians as good fellows.

After filling in the first questionnaire, participants randomly received either the detailed narrative or the evasive narrative about the Ethiopian war. Participants were given ten minutes to read the text, and the sheets were then taken back.

Participants were then asked to fill in a second questionnaire, which included the same psycho-social measures included in the first questionnaire, and questions regarding their willingness to help the group of former victims.

The design also included a long-term memory task conducted the following day, which will not be discussed in the present paper.

Materials

The questionnaires included several sections; in the present paper we take into account the following measures:

Knowledge and Attitudes. In order to evaluate the knowledge of historical facts and the exposure to family narratives, participants were asked to *"estimate the number of casualties caused by the Italian colonization in Africa"* (five response options, from "*between 1.000 and 10.000*" to "*more than 500.000*") and "*if any member of your family participated in the Italian colonial experience, describe their role and whether and how you have been told stories about this experience"*. The second questionnaire also included explicit attitude items such as "*During the colonial period Italians committed collective violence against colonised populations*" and "*The colonial experience improved the infrastructures of the colonized countries*", with which participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement as a manipulation check.

Identification. In the first questionnaire, participants were asked to complete a seven item scale of identification with the in-group (Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade, & Williams, 1996), as a unidimensional index of perceived belonging. Two examples of the items are "*I positively value the fact of being Italian*" and "*I feel attachment to Italians generally*" (seven point rating scale, from 1 = "totally disagree" to 7 = "totally agree").

Emotions. Both questionnaires included self-evaluation measures of emotions. The question was: *"How do you feel thinking about the Italian colonization in Africa?"* Participants were asked to rate their emotional state (see table 1 for the list of emotions) on a seven point scale, from 1 = "not at all" to 7 = "very much".

Agreement with the myth of Italians as good fellows. The myth of Italians as good fellows was operationalized through a set of items constructed on the basis of shared knowledge of this representation (Volpato et al., in press). Items included statements about Italian people in general "Humaneness is a distinctive trait of Italians" and "Italians have always been better than their rulers", as well as items specifically describing Italian behaviour during war: "Italians, during conflicts, have always behaved in a reasonable way" and *"Faccetta nera* [a Fascist song] is an indicator of the benevolence Italians always had towards Africans*"* (seven point rating scale,

from 1 = "totally disagree" to 7 = "totally agree") (for further details, see Leone & Sarrica, in press).

Intentions of restorative action. A distributive task was included in the second questionnaire: participants were asked to allocate 100 million euros among *Italian ex-colonies* or *Other developing countries* in order to build new schools or new sanitary structures.

As already stated, between the first and the second collection of data, participants received one of the narratives about the Italian colonial past. Both narratives (written in Italian[i]) were the same, except for the sentences describing Italian war crimes. These are the two narratives used (we report in bold the detailed narrative's phrases, and in italics the alternative versions of the evasive narrative):

> 'At the end of 1934, an incident on the border between Italian Eritrea and Ethiopia gave Italy the occasion to enter Ethiopia.
>
> In the preceding years, Ethiopia had made important advances, building a road network, a railway, schools and hospitals.
>
> It had, moreover, started the abolition of slavery and thanks to this decision it had entered the League of Nations.
>
> Some border clashes **gave Mussolini's Italy a pretext to break the international treaties to the detriment of Ethiopia** *(caused a diplomatic incident between Mussolini's Italy and Ethiopia).*
>
> Both countries turned to the League of Nations for assistance, but the League stalled.
>
> **Exploiting** *(In)* this situation of uncertainty, in October of 1935 **Italy attacked Ethiopia** *(Italy entered into war with Ethiopia),* which had no heavy guns, let alone an air-force.
>
> The League of Nations **rightly** *(---)* placed sanctions on Italy for having entered into war with Ethiopia, **breaking article XVI of the League of Nations itself** *(---).*
>
> England and France had no intention of fighting for Ethiopia, although their public opinion was indignant at the Italian aggression.
>
> Not even the Church opposed the action, in spite of an initial disapproval.

Italy used heavy bombing, from 1936 also **with poisonous gas, formally banned by international treaties** *(with non-conventional weapons);* **it soiled its hands furthermore with grave violence against the civilian population, breaking the Geneva Convention** *(the force of the fighting caused many victims, also among the civilian population).*

The Ethiopians fought for eight long months, but their army could not cope with an expedition force containing very many men and making use of tanks and aviation.

On May the 5th 1936, Italian troops entered Addis Abeba.

On May the 9th, on a warm Italian evening, from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia Benito Mussolini announced to the elated crowds "the reappearance of the Empire on the fateful hills of Rome" and offered to the King the crown of Emperor of Ethiopia.

Guerrilla warfare in Ethiopia went on for a while, but **was suppressed by the Italian army with summary executions, the use of gas, and bloody terrorist actions** *(the Italian army succeeded in restoring order).'*

RESULTS

Paired samples t-tests were conducted on emotions relating to the Italian colonial past in order to evaluate intra-subject variations. We then calculated a single index of emotion variation: before manipulation minus after manipulation (Emotion pre-post), so that negative values indicate an increased intensity after reading the text. Analyses of variance were then conducted to evaluate inter-subject differences along the psycho-social variables under consideration.

  The results of the preliminary questionnaire confirmed that participants, as we had expected, neither shared knowledge of the historical period of Italian colonial wars (percentage of wrong answers = 84%) nor had been exposed to family narratives on it (only five participants knew that their grandparents were somehow involved in the war but they didn't receive any family narrative about it; one participant declared she discussed with her grandfather about his

experience in the war and was thus excluded from the dataset), thereby confirming the hypothesis of a collective amnesia as regards this period of national history (Pivato, 2007).

Participants showed intermediate levels of identification with the in-group (M = 4.19, $SD=1.06$). After controls for the reliability of the measure of identification (Cronbach's alpha = .77), a median split was computed (*Median* = 4.29) in order to distinguish between respondents with lower and higher levels of identification. On the scale measuring agreement with the myth of Italians as good fellows, we further distinguished between a sub-scale called *Italians as good fellows always* (IGFa, for items describing Italians as good fellows in everyday situations) and *Italians as good fellows in war* (IGFw, for items referring explicitly to war situations). The means, standard deviations and reliability of the two subscales were: IGFa M= 4.53, SD= .76, alpha = .86; IGFw M= 3.18 , SD= .83, alpha = .84. A one sample t-test showed that the mean scores were significantly different from the central points of the response scales (p<.01). These results confirm the endorsement of the myth of IGF always, and, we believe, show that respondents have a modest but not total disagreement with the idea that Italians are good fellows in war. Median splits were computed in order to distinguish between respondents with higher and lower levels of agreement with IGFa (*Median*= 4.59) and IGFw (*Median*= 3.08).

Subsequent statistical elaborations compared participants according to a mixed inter- and intra-subject design.

Emotions

Our general prediction that emotions would be affected by exposure to the narratives is supported by the results of the paired sample t-tests on emotion. All the emotions, except for guilt, significantly vary after reading each of the narratives (Table 1). After reading the narratives, emotions such as indifference and pride had significantly decreased, while emotions related to anger and surprise had significantly increased.

Table 1. Changes in emotions after reading the story. Paired sample t test

	Mean (pre - post)	SD	t	df	*p <*
Furious	-.73	1.67	-4.374	99	.01
Indifferent	.46	1.16	3.924	96	.01
Angry	-.93	1.62	-5.755	99	.01
Involved	-.36	1.47	-2.443	99	.05
Struck	-.76	1.93	-3.862	95	.01
Surprised	-.94	1.84	-5.057	97	.01
Proud	.43	.91	4.672	97	.01
Honoured	.40	.91	4.399	98	.01
Furious	-1.04	1.53	-6.760	98	.01
Guilty	-.22	1.50	-1.472	98	*N.S.*

Note: Emotions were rated on a 7 point scale, from 1-not at all to 7-very much. Pre-post scores range from -6 to +6 (e.g. not at all involved before reading the story and very much involved after reading the story, 1-7= -6)

Both stories, therefore, proved effective in conveying information that caused an emotional uneasiness in their readers. In order to examine the different effects of the two versions (detailed vs. evasive) of the story and their interactions with different levels of identification and of agreement with the 'Italians as good fellows' representation by participants, a series of two-way analyses of variance were performed.

First, emotion pre-post scores were analysed using a two-way ANOVA with the two levels of message (detailed, evasive) and the two levels of identification with the in-group (high, low) as the inter-subject factors.

Few effects were statistically significant, when considered at the .05 significance level; nevertheless, some interesting tendencies may be noticed.

Message typology affects three emotions that are linked with personal engagement: Coinvolto (Involved); Colpito (Struck), Sorpreso (Surprised). The main effect of message typology yielded an *F* ratio respectively of $F(1, 96) = 13.5$, $p < .05$; $F(1, 92) = 7.4$, $p < .01$; and

$F(1, 94) = 4.2$, $p < .05$. Results indicate that, in this inter-subject comparison, the emotion pre-post scores proved significantly greater for detailed stories than for evasive ones (Table 2): respondents who had read the detailed story declared themselves to be involved, struck and surprised to a greater extent than those who read the evasive story.

Table 2. Changes in emotions by Typology of story

Emotion	Detailed story		Evasive story	
	Mean (pre - post)	SD	Mean (pre - post)	SD
Involved	-0.69	1.37	0.04	1.50
Struck	-1.25	1.94	-0.20	1.78
Surprised	-1.28	2.06	-0.52	1.44

Note: Emotions were rated on a 7 point scale, from 1-not at all to 7-very much. Pre-post scores range from -6 to +6 (e.g. not at all involved before reading the story and very much involved after reading the story, 1-7= -6)

Identification with the in-group affects three different emotions that are linked with self-esteem and guilt: Orgoglioso (Proud), Fiero (Honoured) and Colpevole (Guilty). The main effect of identification yielded an *F* ratio respectively of $F(1, 94) = 6.6$, $p < .05$; $F(1, 95) = 7.6$, $p < .01$; and $F(1, 95) = 6.4$, $p < .05$. Results indicate that the change in mean scores, related to the intra-subject comparison, was significantly greater for respondents with a higher identification (Table 3): respondents with higher levels of identification felt less proud and honoured and more guilty after reading the story than respondents with lower identification with the in-group.

Table 3. Changes in emotions by Identification

Emotion	Low identification		High identification	
	Mean (pre - post)	SD	Mean (pre - post)	SD
Proud	0.20	0.64	0.67	1.07
Honoured	0.16	0.62	0.65	1.09
Guilty	0.16	1.53	-0.61	1.38

Note: Emotions were rated on a 7 point scale, from 1-not at all to 7-very much.

Pre-post scores range from -6 to +6 (e.g. very much proud before reading the story and not at all proud after reading the story, 7-1= 6)

Similar results emerge from a two-way analysis of variance with two levels of message (detailed, evasive), and two levels of agreement (high, low) with the shared myth describing *Italians as good fellows*. According to different items composing this part of the first questionnaire, we divided them into two main categories that we named *Italians as good fellows always* (for items describing Italians as good fellows in everyday situations) and *Italians as good fellows in war* (for items referring explicitly to war situations). Referring to the items of *Italians as good fellows always - IGFa* (Table 4), a main effect emerges of IGFa on the differences between the emotion of being proud, honoured and guilty, declared before and after reading the story. These differences yielded an *F* ratio respectively of $F(1, 90) = 4.7$, $p < .05$; $F(1, 91) = 6.6$, $p < .05$; and $F(1, 91) = 8.0$, $p < .01$.

Table 4. Changes in emotions before and after the story by agreement with IGFa

Emotion	Low IGFa		High IGFa	
	Mean (pre - post)	SD	Mean (pre - post)	SD
Proud	0.22	0.65	0.64	1.11
Honoured	0.20	0.64	0.67	1.10
Guilty	0.14	1.51	-0.71	1.36

Note: Emotions were rated on a 7 point scale, from 1-not at all to 7-very much.

Pre-post scores range from -6 to +6 (e.g. very much proud before reading the story and not at all proud after reading the story, 7-1= 6)

Analysis of variance including the two kinds of narrative (detailed, evasive) and the two levels of agreement (high, low) with the items composing the shared myth of *Italians as good fellows in war – IGFw* indicates that *IGFw* has a main effect on the two items related to feelings of pride (Table 5), respectively $F(1, 90) = 8.5$, $p < .01$ and $F(1, 91) = 5.8$, $p < .05$; and $F(1, 95) = 6.4$, $p < .05$.

Table 5. Changes in emotions before and after the story by agreement with IGFw

Emotion	Low IGFw		High IGFw	
	Mean (pre - post)	SD	Mean (pre - post)	SD
Proud	0.15	0.51	0.68	1.10
Honoured	0.17	0.56	0.63	1.12

Note: Emotions were rated on a 7 point scale, from 1-not at all to 7-very much.

Pre-post scores range from -6 to +6 (e.g. very much proud before reading the story and not at all proud after reading the story, 7-1= 6)

Even if similar patterns of interaction are observed on almost all emotions, except for the emotions of feeling proud and honoured, the only significant interaction effect was on feeling

involved by the story, $F(1, 92) = 5.44$, $p < .05$ (Figure 1). Participants showing a high level of agreement with the idea that Italians act as good fellows in war situations seemed to decrease their involvement after reading the evasive story on Italian war crimes during the Ethiopian invasion; on the contrary, participants showing a low agreement with this same myth seemed to increase their involvement after having read the detailed story on Italian war crimes.
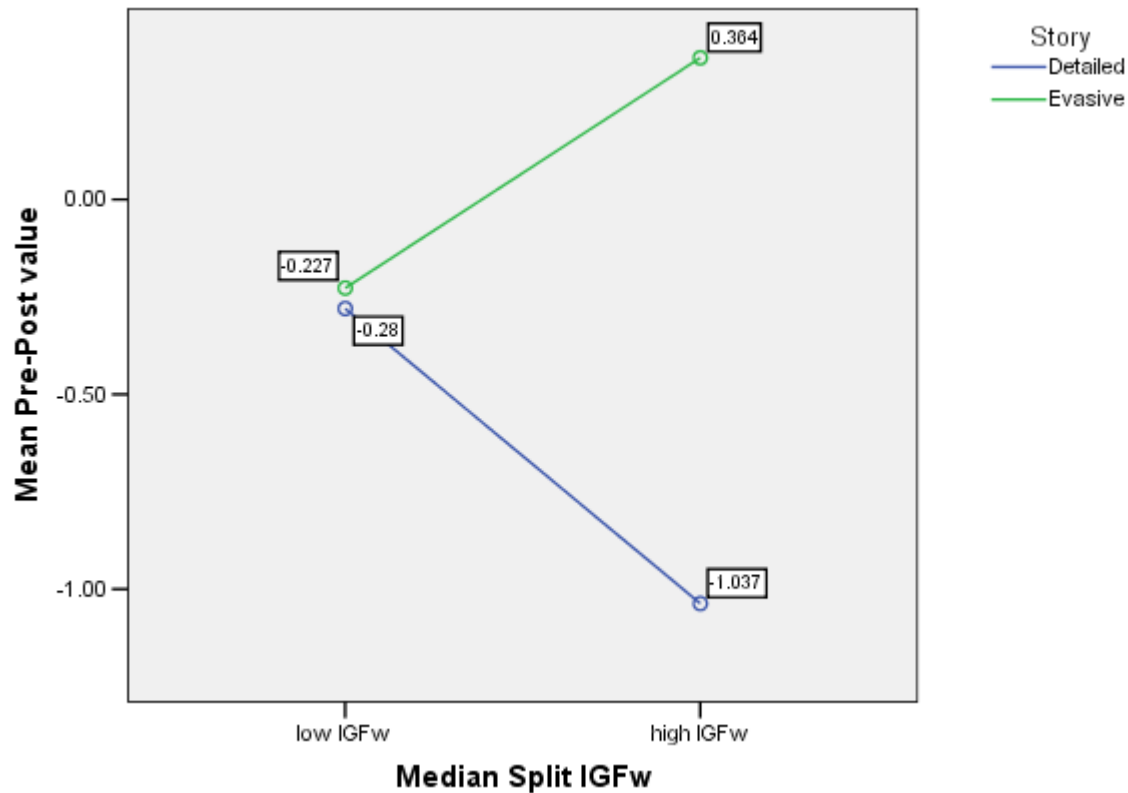

Figure 1. Involvement (Pre-Post) IGFw (High vs. Low) and Narrative (Detailed vs. Evasive)

Restorative Actions

Intentions to carry out restorative actions on the damaged social image of the in-group through a declared readiness to perform helping behaviours towards descendants of former victims (Nadler, Harpaz-Gorodeisky & Ben-David, 2009) were subjected to a two-way analysis of variance with two levels related to the kind of story received (detailed, evasive) and two levels of identification with the in-group (high, low). Typology of the narrative shows a non-significant tendency to affect restorative actions. The main effects of narrative on the intention to distribute resources for

building hospitals or schools in former colonies yielded an F ratio respectively of $F(1, 97) = 3.69$, $p < .06$ and $F(1, 97) = 3.27$, $p < .08$, suggesting that participants who had read a more detailed narrative tended to declare more altruistic intentions towards the group of former victims (for hospital $M_{det.} = 54.20$ $SD = 14.56$; $M_{evas} = 48.11$, $SD = 17.17$; for schools $M_{det.} = 52.99$ $SD = 15.34$; $M_{evas} = 47.33$, $SD = 16.29$). Likewise, the interaction between the intention to build schools with identification didn't reach a statistically significant difference ($F(1, 97) = 2.04$, $p = .16$). However, the data shows interesting patterns (Figure 2) that need to be explored further.

When reading a detailed narrative of war crimes of their in-group, respondents with higher levels of identification declared more restorative intentions than when assigned to read an evasive narrative of the same crimes.
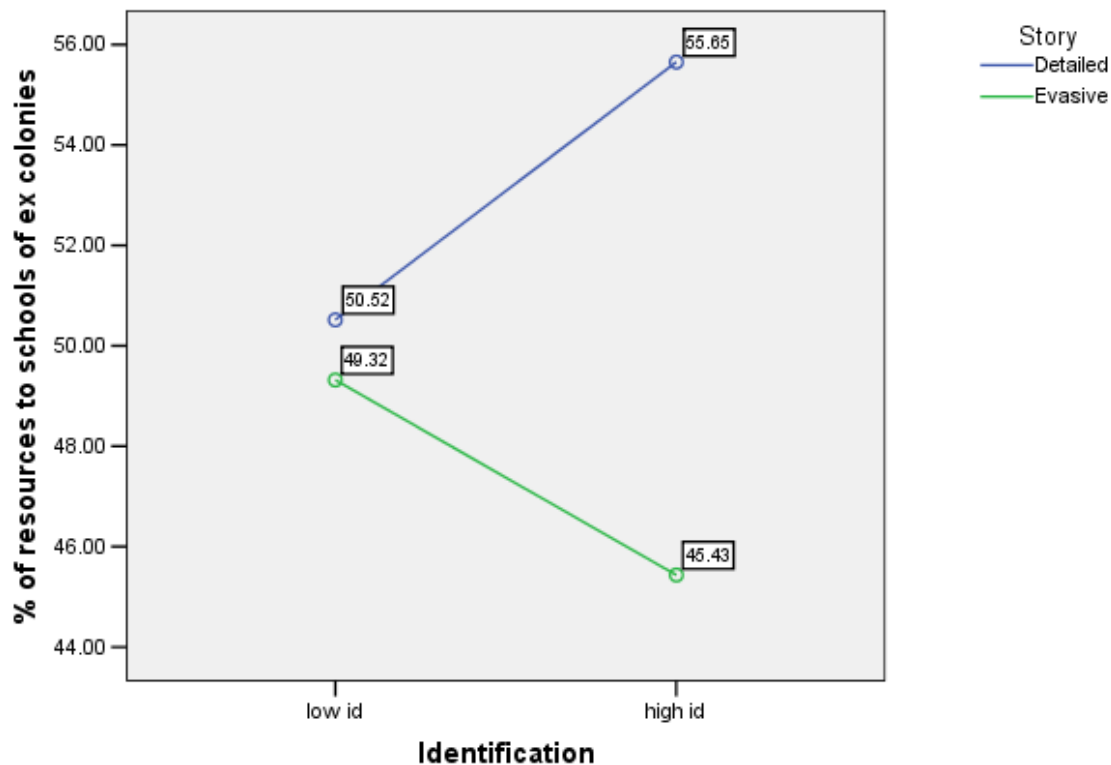
Figure 2. Restorative behaviours by Identification (High vs. Low) and Narrative (Detailed vs. Evasive)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper we aimed to address a rather general question: what is the best way to narrate war crimes committed by the in-group to new generations? We have suggested that, in the case of war crimes committed by the in-group more than three generations ago, reification arguments, i.e. narratives that tend to clearly present facts without leaving any space for dispute, may have a deeper impact and may thus help reconciliation processes.

This issue has been recently addressed by several authors (e.g. Valencia et al., 2011), and gathered into a general framework by Gibson (2006). In relation to the causal processes involved in intergroup reconciliation, Gibson (2006) discusses in depth the difficulties of clearly disentangling the role played by the social sharing of a truth that appears impartial from the role played by other relevant variables due to pre-existing societal features. Specifically, he proposes an alternative idea that impartial truth may play a positive role in reconciliation processes only if the social context where these processes develop is characterized by a widespread culture placing importance on human rights and by the presence of well-consolidated democratic customs and institutions.

The research that we present in these pages deals with a specific aspect of these intricacies by linking the social sharing of impartial truth with reconciliation processes. In particular, we have studied a particular situation, in which impartial truth is threatened not by overt denials, but by the more covert socio-psychological process of a widespread social amnesia. Although a clear-cut historical judgment is by now possible about Italian war crimes during the invasion of Ethiopia (1935-1936), our data confirmed that young university students continue to be ignorant of these facts of their own national past. Moreover, our respondents seemed to share with the large majority of Italians the historical myth that Italian national history has proved that Italians are incapable of cruel violence because they are 'good fellows' in every social situation, even in wartimes. Our research has explored reactions of participants, ignorant of their in-group war crimes, when faced with a narrative conveying the information that Italians did behave in violent and sometimes criminal ways when in war.

Considering that this social amnesia continues to be shared generation after generation, in spite of historical research that by now has proven beyond doubt the crimes perpetrated by the in-

group, we can propose the idea that this social silence is an expression of structural and cultural violence against the group of former victims (Galtung 1990, 1996). Moreover, silence in the social debate due to this lack of intergenerational communication – which, for younger generations, is also a lack of information – has jeopardised reconciliation processes. If narratives on the social representation of a violent past are needed to elaborate the loss implicit in any collective memory (Ricoeur, 2004), this is more valid for memories of moral indignity, which perpetrators' descendants must face in order to accept their collective responsibilities and therefore restore the integrity of their in-group (Leone, 2011). From this other theoretical perspective, the lack of social representations about in-group war crimes pre-dating their birth may be considered a form of structural and cultural violence against newborn generations as well, since it does not meet the need of knowing and understanding the past which is intrinsic to reconciliation processes together with the need to protect and restore the social image of the in-group. Therefore, a lack of social representations leading to a more realistic knowledge of the past of the in-group, especially in the crucial moment when witnesses of this past are bound to disappear, may slow down the mature reconciliation processes by which new generations try to accommodate their social identity to the heavy burden of this significant and negative historical awareness.

Our research has tried to deal with some aspects of these difficult theoretical issues, starting from the general idea that, having to cope with such a long-lasting social silence, narratives on in-group crimes during colonial wars addressed to young Italians in the present day would be more effective if using a clear and detailed style than when brushing over facts, as for instance many history textbooks currently used in high schools still do (Leone & Mastrovito, 2011). We expected that some effects would be caused by the simple reading of negative information, lacking until then, while some other more nuanced effects would be linked to the style (detailed vs. evasive) of these narratives.

Results seem to suggest that not only this startling information, but also the communicative strategies used to convey it are important for causing a reaction of emotional uneasiness and a willingness to recompense through social actions. In fact, both for emotions and restorative actions, new information about in-group crimes seems to act directly and through nuanced interactions with the typology of narrative (either detailed or evasive). Interestingly,

these changes in emotions and readiness for restorative behaviours towards the group of the former victims interacted both with the participants' identification with the in-group and with their level of agreement with the myth of Italians as good fellows. Though requiring more research exploration, these first results seem to suggest that detailed narratives are more effective than evasive ones when participants are more attached to their in-group, and therefore more ready to defend its moral integrity.

These results seem to suggest that, when the in-group is responsible for violence and crimes, the social sharing of an impartial truth – if impartial truth is 'signalled by its willingness to cast blame wherever blame is deserved' (Gibson, 2006, p. 148) – implies casting the blame on one's own group. However, only a clear coping with this identity loss and with the emotional distress connected with it seem capable of restoring the moral integrity of the group, showing the willingness to make newborn generations conscious of violence that occurred long before their own birth.

In our case study, however, relationships between impartial truth and the democratic assets of the society, stressed by Gibson (2006), appear to be linked in a circular manner. In fact, after the end of the Fascist régime the newly regained democratic assets of Italian society allowed the possibility to share information about in-group crimes. Whenever this possibility was realized, a higher level of information about the negative past of the in-group consolidated democratic assets. This has not been the case, though, until now, of crimes committed during colonial wars. This amnesia also affected the role of democratic institutions, since these crimes were for a long time not officially recognised and are still a matter of parliamentary debate (Camera dei Deputati – Senato della Repubblica, 2006). In order for this virtuous circle to consolidate also for these difficult memories, the role of reified universes seems to be crucial, to gain a widespread social awareness and to meet the needs of new generations. In our case study, we have aimed to explore in more depth how this role may be accomplished by the detailed narratives of data from historical research that proves beyond any doubt the Italian responsibilities in war crimes during the colonial invasion of Ethiopia. The tendency of respondents who identified more highly with the Italian nation to react more emotionally when reading a detailed narrative of past in-group wrongdoings may perhaps reflect their surprise due to a lack of information on controversial collective memories that acts, for descendants of the

perpetrators' group, as a form of cultural violence *per se*, making it impossible for them to elaborate further the past of the collective that they happen to have been born into (Hansen, 1993).

It would be interesting to see how this reciprocal balance between reified and consensual communication changes with generational change, when shifting from social representations of a 'lived History' to social representations of collective memories and when shifting again to social representations without any possible witnesses to intervene, in mature reconciliation processes (Leone & Mastrovito, 2010). Different effects of reified and consensual communication addressed to descendants of victims as compared with those addressed to descendants of perpetrators need further theorization and research as well. In order to answer our question on whether clarity in narratives of in-group crimes may be a good choice when addressing descendants of former perpetrators – making them more uneasy with their social identity but also more ready to accommodate it to this difficult knowledge and to pursue reparative actions through helping behaviours towards the group of former victims – much more research is required. In any case, our initial exploratory results suggest that it may be worthwhile to ask ourselves this question.

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