

## Temporal Cross-References and Multidirectional Comparisons Holocaust Remembrance Day on Italian State Television

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### Abstract

*This paper will analyze the connections between Holocaust memory and the presence of other genocides – or crimes against humanities – narratives in Italian TV commemorations of the Holocaust Day of Memory (Giorno della memoria) between 2001-2015.<sup>1</sup> The research investigates the question of whether Italian television's approach to the Day of Memory has been exclusively centered on the Holocaust, or whether it has been used also as a starting point to talk about other traumatic historical or current events such as the Iraq War, the War in Afghanistan or Italy's participation in Western policy against Islamic terrorism. With this aim, the paper will examine Italy's State-owned network RAI's programming in the week before and after the Day of Memory (January, 27) from 2001 to 2015, revealing how an increasing civic and didactic awareness of the Holocaust emerged from the TV programs here analyzed. The paper will trace this new television discourse, where the Holocaust began to be perceived as an unconditional warning and a constant term of comparison with other contemporary tragedies.*

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## Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Italian Public Sphere

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a marked acceleration in Europe in the development of multiple forms of Holocaust memory and commemoration. This is particularly noteworthy in the establishment across Europe of official Holocaust Memorial Days, established along the lines traced by the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 2000.<sup>2</sup> From the outset, these new public commemorations assumed different and often contradictory national and supranational forms and aims.<sup>3</sup> In order to reflect this complexity, we need to rethink the establishment of the various national Holocaust Remembrance Days not only as processes playing a decisive role in the articulation of memory, but also as public vehicles of multiple, even conflicting historiographical paradigms. Among the latter, the problem of national responsibility has certainly been one of the most intensely debated by historians, while at the same time only rarely discussed or acknowledged on these public occasions.<sup>4</sup> After the end of the war, many European countries engaged in widespread efforts to absolve themselves as much as possible from possible charges of collaboration in the Holocaust. This often led to a public demonization not only of the Nazis, but also of the German people as a whole. This was the case of Italy, too.<sup>5</sup>

Visual culture, including television, provides a privileged vantage point for the analysis of mainstream discussions and paradigms about the Holocaust and its commemoration.<sup>6</sup> In the Italian case, which will form the primary focus of this

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<sup>2</sup> On these changes see Larissa Allwork, *Holocaust Remembrance between the National and the Transnational. The Stockholm International Forum and the First Decade of the International Task Force*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), as well as her contribution in this issue of *Quest*.

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), in particular their reflections on the concept of “cosmopolitan memory,” 23-38.

<sup>4</sup> Levy and Sznaider speak in positive terms of the way in which “television, movies, literature and newspapers have replaced historical experts as a source of information about the Holocaust.” See *Ibid.*, 133-4.

<sup>5</sup> This is above all true for the Italian case. On this, see Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista: Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000); Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, *Caino a Roma: I complici romani della Shoah* (Roma: Cooper, 2005); Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2013); Simon Levis Sullam, *I carnefici italiani: Scene dal genocidio degli ebrei 1943-1945* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> On the representations of the Holocaust on TV, see Jonathan Pearl and Judith Pearl, *The Chosen Image: Television's Portrayal of Jewish Themes and Characters* (London: McFarland, 1999) and Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For the Italian case, see Emiliano Perra, *Conflicts of Memory: The*

article, television programs have become one of the main vehicles for the diffusion of images and public memory of the past. In this context, we should also observe how public broadcasting service reacted to the Holocaust politics of public memory and commemorations.<sup>7</sup> Because of RAI's close links with the government of the day, which makes it more immediately responsive to the political aspects of memory, this article will only focus on the State broadcaster and not engage with private networks' coverage of Holocaust commemorations.<sup>8</sup> To do this, in this article I examine RAI broadcast programming in the week before and after the Day of Memory [*Giorno della memoria*, in Italian] in Italy (27 January), from 2001 to 2015<sup>9</sup>. After a brief discussion of various kinds of Holocaust-related programs during these years – focusing only on RAI's generalist channels and excluding TV-series and fictional products<sup>10</sup> – I will offer an analysis of a corpus of televised Holocaust Remembrance Day

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*Reception of Holocaust Films and TV Programmes in Italy, 1945 to the Present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010) and Damiano Garofalo, "La Shoah e l'esperienza dei Lager nei documentari televisivi di Liliana Cavani," *Memoria e Ricerca*, 46 (2014), 173-191. See also Andrea Minuz, *La Shoah e la cultura visuale: Cinema, memoria, spazio pubblico* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See. Perra, *Conflicts of Memory*, 217-231 and id., "La rappresentazione della Shoah in televisione," in *Storia della Shoah in Italia: Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni*, vol. II, eds. Marina Cattaruzza, Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam and Enzo Traverso, (Torino: UTET, 2010), 434-45.

<sup>8</sup> For the relationship between Italian politics and television see Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1992); Franco Chiarenza, *Il cavallo morente: Storia della RAI*, (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2002) and Giulia Guazzaloca, *Una e divisibile: La Rai e i partiti negli anni del monopolio pubblico (1954-1975)* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2011). For the recent years, see also Christian Ruggiero, *Il declino della videocrazia: Tv e politica nell'Italia del Medioevo* (Napoli: Scriptaweb, 2011). On the relationship between television and Italian history, see *Fare storia con la televisione: L'immagine come fonte, evento, memoria*, ed. Aldo Grasso (Milano: Vita & Pensiero, 2006); Anna Bisogno, *La storia in TV: Immagine e memoria collettiva* (Roma: Carocci, 2008); *Televisione: Storia, immaginario, memoria*, eds. Damiano Garofalo and Vanessa Roghi (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2015), in particular 97-157, and *Televisionismo: Narrazioni televisive della storia italiana negli anni della seconda Repubblica*, eds. Monica Jansen and Maria Bonaria Urban (Venezia: Ca' Foscari University Press, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> On the Italian Holocaust Remembrance Day, see C.G. Hassan, "Costruzione della memoria e rappresentazioni sociali: L'immagine della Shoah nella stampa italiana (2012-2013)," in *La Shoah nel cinema italiano*, eds. Andrea Minuz and Guido Vitiello, *Cinema e storia*, 2 (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013), 143-155 and Fausto Colombo, Athos De Luca, Vittorio Pavoncello, *Il paradosso del Giorno della memoria: Dialoghi*, (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> It is worth mentioning the important role assumed by the historical channel Rai Storia, which is only available on digital terrestrial television. This educational channel has dealt extensively with the Holocaust on every Memory Day since it started broadcasting in 2003. Nevertheless, we think that in this context it is more helpful to reconstruct the role played by RAI generalist channels because of their greater circulation among audiences.

commemorations broadcast by RAI. The specific angle of the analysis is twofold: first, to enquire the extent to which RAI's commemoration of the Day of Memory has been exclusively centered on the Holocaust, including Italian collaboration. Secondly, the article will explore possible intersections between Holocaust commemoration and other historical or current events.

Given the call for a transnational lens of this topic, the analysis would probably benefit from a brief preliminary engagement with transnational theoretical issues. As we shall see, all the comparisons with the Holocaust, made both by conscious and subconscious politics, seem to involve other genocides from a transnational point of view. For this reason, we should strongly consider what is happening elsewhere to determine whether the tendency to incorporate other genocides in the Holocaust public memory is just a narrative one or indeed a political one. Holocaust public memory is devoted to carry messages from the Holocaust to society at large. As Peter Novick has already observed, "these implications have been translated into lessons, and it is the rare Holocaust commemoration, or Holocaust institution, or Holocaust curriculum, that is not dedicated to promulgating *the lessons of the Holocaust*."<sup>11</sup> These lessons have a redemptive and political aim even when applied to other genocides. Whilst it is clear that invoking the Holocaust in a comparative way is a clear rhetorical asset, it could also be interesting to analyze the ways in which other genocides are talked about in public spaces primarily dedicated to the Holocaust<sup>12</sup>. In this sense, TV programs could be certainly a good lens to analyze this phenomenon from a transcultural and transnational point of view.<sup>13</sup>

Before entering into the analysis of the televisual material, it is necessary to refer to law n. 211, approved by the Italian Parliament in 2000, through which the

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 239.

<sup>12</sup> For a comparable perspective, see Joan B. Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) and *Local History, Transnational Memory in the Romanian Holocaust*, eds. Valentina Glajar and Jeanine Teodorescu (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> For the possibility of re-thinking to media history from this hybrid mixture, and also television as a field where cultural texts travel across countries and influence each other, see Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*, eds. Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

‘Day of Memory’ in memory of the extermination and persecution of the Jewish people and of Italian military and political deportees in the Nazi camps” was instituted.<sup>14</sup> By referring to a broad range of persecutions, the text of the short law served to affirm a comprehensive public memory rather than that of a single community or of private memories/commemorations. Soon afterwards, however, even if the word “Holocaust” was never mentioned in the law, the Jewish community soon took a decisive role in the definition of these new commemorations. By opting for a date such as January, 27 that related to the international memory of the Holocaust, rather than the memory of a day connected to an event that had happened on the Italian soil, the Italian Government seemed to lose another occasion to engage with the country’s historical guilt.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, we have to note that this law anticipated all the subsequent Remembrance days that were approved in Italy,<sup>16</sup> working as a sort of a national pacification vehicle.<sup>17</sup> In the process of creating the following Remembrance days, the Holocaust has been re-elaborated and de-historicized with the aim of transforming it into a paradigm with a strong iconic and

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<sup>14</sup> Law n. 211 of 20 July 2000, <http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/00211.htm> [accessed on 1st September 2016].

<sup>15</sup> On the debate about choosing October 16, the date of the roundup of the Jews of Rome, or January 27, a day chosen by most European countries as well as the UN and the EU, see Giovanni De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore: Le memorie di un’Italia divisa* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2010), 67-72. For the symbolic role of October 16 in Italian Holocaust memory, see *16 ottobre 1943: La deportazione degli ebrei romani tra storia e memoria*, eds. Martin Baumeister, Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi and Claudio Procaccia (Roma: Viella, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> On this relationship see Valentina Pisanty, *Abusi di memoria: Negare, banalizzare, sacralizzare la Shoah* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2012) and Susanne C. Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of the Holocaust* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 175-281.

<sup>17</sup> As the final accomplishment of this work of pacification, on 30 March 2004 the Italian Parliament, with only the extreme left abstaining, instituted a “Day of Remembrance of the Italian exodus and the Foibe” in parallel with the Day of Memory, which had been established four years earlier. As John Foot has commented, in the decision to establish the Foibe Day at two weeks’ distance from the Holocaust one, there was the precise political will to divide the Italians between those who will commemorate the Holocaust, and those who will remember the Foibe. The presence of politicians at one or the other institutional event becomes, therefore, a symbol of political, ethnic or religious belonging. Through this division the Italian state seems therefore to acknowledge the divided memory of the country. On this, see John Foot, *Fratture d’Italia: Da Caporetto al G8 di Genova, la memoria divisa del paese* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2009), 142. On the construction of a televised memory of the Foibe, see Damiano Garofalo, “La memorializzazione delle Foibe il paradigma della Shoah: Storia, politica, televisione,” *Media e Storia*, ed. Ilenia Imperi, *Officina della Storia*, 13 (2015), <http://goo.gl/L62x8T> [accessed on 1st September 2016].

symbolic value for the present.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the institution of a variety of other commemorative dates cannot help but resulting in the at least partial de-historicization of the Holocaust itself.

### Laying the Foundations of a Holocaust Televised Memory

Italian State Television has played a leading role in these recent Holocaust memory mutations. Indeed, during Holocaust Remembrance Day Italian TV programs and talk-shows dedicate every year several programs of debate and public investigation to the subject. Here it is worth examining several televised instances of particular significance. I refer first to the political talk-show *Porta a porta*, a highly popular program often reverential towards the government of the day that has played an important role in shaping RAI's approach to the Day of Memory since 2005.<sup>19</sup> Hosted by the famous journalist Bruno Vespa, the program dedicated each January, 27 episode to the theme of the Holocaust. All these special episodes tended to be structured along similar lines, and over the years such structure has become a sort of televisual paradigm for a host of other public media commemorations of the Holocaust.

Several structuring features of *Porta a porta*'s broadcasts are worth noting. First of all, in most instances, the discussion is introduced using a series of platitudes common in Holocaust memory talk, such as "so as not to forget" [*per non dimenticare*], "never again" [*mai più*] or "so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past" [*per non ripetere gli errori del passato*]. Secondly, several politicians and a few historians propose their own viewpoints on the event and, finally, the last word is given to survivors and the relatives of the victims, both through pre-recorded interviews or with several of them actually present in the TV studio. The political debate and the lachrymose rhetoric based on the emotional content of the private stories of the victims, which are typical of Italian Holocaust public memory, therefore leaves little space for historical considerations. This pattern is

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of this global adoption of the Holocaust as a paradigm, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, Martin Jay, Bernhard Giesen, Michael Rothberg, Robert Manne, Nathan Glazer, and Elihu Katz, *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> On the role of Bruno Vespa's *Porta a porta* as a TV phenomenon, and also for its political connotations, see Giandomenico Crapis, *Televisione e politica negli anni novanta: cronaca e storia, 1990-2000* (Roma: Meltemi, 2006), 181-182; Gianpietro Mazzoleni e Anna Sfaridini, *Politica Pop: Da "Porta a porta" a "L'isola dei famosi"* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009). On the Italian talk show genre, see Aldo Grasso, *Radio e televisione: teorie, analisi, storie, esercizi* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), 79-98.

repeated every year. To understand better the role played by *Porta a porta* in shaping a Holocaust public memory paradigm, at least in recent years, we need to analyze the program starting from a wider question: when and how did Italian television decided to engage with the Day of Memory? The first thing that stands out is that were in fact no episodes of *Porta a porta* on Holocaust-related themes until 2005. Considering the prominence of this theme in the last ten years' of television programming, this absence is quite singular. However, we can note a similar absence in other TV programs until 2004.

On the first Day of Memory in 2001, only two documentaries were broadcast, both on the third RAI channel Raitre in an unfavorable early morning slot. The first one was entitled *La memoria e la pace* [Memory and peace] and was directed by Massimo Sani.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, this was a televised report based on a survey conducted in various schools in Italy on the memory of World War II and the Holocaust. Sani investigated what historical knowledge those students had at the end of their secondary education. The program shows several debates filmed inside classrooms between students and Holocaust survivors. This program was followed by another documentary directed by Sani, entitled *Difesa della razza, memoria di una legge* [Defense of the race, memory of a law],<sup>21</sup> which was an edited version of a lecture by historian Giuseppe Barone on racism and the Italian racial laws, with several testimonies by Holocaust witnesses.

While both programs aired during the first Day of Memory appear strongly Jewish-centered, commemorations of the second Day of Memory in 2002 were almost hegemonized by the mini-series *Perlasca: un eroe italiano* [Perlasca: an Italian hero], directed by Alberto Negrin and broadcast on Rai1 on January, 28-29. This series presented the story of a "good Italian," Giorgio Perlasca, who saved the lives of thousands of Jews in Budapest. The story revolves entirely around the fate of Hungarian Jews and, though the protagonist is a fascist, during the course of the two episodes the words "fascist," "fascism," or "Mussolini" are never pronounced. The exaltation of the main character, therefore, occurs thanks only to the fact that he is Italian, and "naturally" good, heroic and just.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *La memoria e la pace*, dir. by Massimo Sani, January 27, 2001, Rai3, 7:00 am.

<sup>21</sup> *Difesa della razza, memoria di una legge*, dir. by Massimo Sani, January 27, 2001, Rai3, 8:00 am.

<sup>22</sup> See, above all, Robert Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944-2012* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 152-153, and Milly Buonanno, *Italian TV-Drama and Beyond: Stories from the Soil, Stories from the Sea* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), 211-222.

With this in mind, we can easily affirm that in the first two years of programming we do not encounter any references to other genocides or historical traumas; moreover, we can also observe how, starting from the hugely successful broadcast of *Perlasca*, the televised landscape on these themes totally changed. On the one hand, in fact, we can perceive the increasing centrality of the Holocaust within public debate; on the other hand, even the Government began to realize the possibility of using Holocaust commemorations for political purposes.

### **Silvio Berlusconi's Holocaust Public Memory**

For the abovementioned reason, the year 2003 represents a very decisive turning point in this analysis. On the evening of the Day of Memory, in fact, a message by the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was simultaneously broadcast on the three public service networks (Rai1, Rai2, Rai3). Here, I would like to quote this message at length, in view of its strong eloquence:

Today in Italy, as much as in many other countries, Holocaust Memory Day is celebrated. A sad and solemn occasion, which calls for everyone to reflect on the atrocities that man is capable of, and on the aberrations whereby any ideologies don't recognize the dignity, but I would also say the sacredness, of every human being. [...] The twentieth century will be sadly remembered for the horrors and suffering inflicted on men by the two totalitarian regimes: the Nazi one, and the Communist one. I appeal especially to the girls and boys of today who live in a country that has been able to recognize their mistakes and, thanks to the great American democracy and to the sacrifice of many of its young lives, was able to reconstruct a democracy respectful of the dignity of the people and the principles of equality and freedom for all citizens. Freedom is the essence of humanity, it is the essence of our intelligence and our heart, is the essence of our capacity to love and create. And God, from the beginning, wanted every man [sic] in this way: he wanted him free. Even in the future you should be aware that this freedom is not given once and for all, but it must be defended day by day from new dangers which threaten it. The defense of freedom is the highest, noblest and most exciting mission.<sup>23</sup>

The vagueness of the word "freedom" assumed immediately a political role in Berlusconi's speech. This was intended to be inclusive: because the Nazis tried to

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<sup>23</sup> *Messaggio del Presidente del Consiglio in occasione della Giornata della memoria*, January 27, 2003, 8:30 pm, Teche RAI n. M03027/001.



restrict freedom of choice, speech and thought during their regime, the European citizens of today and tomorrow must defend all these freedoms day by day.<sup>24</sup> Then, without mentioning the Holocaust, Berlusconi continued:

This year, in celebrating Remembrance Day, we remember that the international community is committed to fighting terrorism, and to rendering harmless those regimes that threaten world peace. Once again, the choice between peace and war is in the hands of those who deny the freedom of their people and attack the peaceful coexistence among peoples. We are for peace, but we cannot become jointly responsible for surrendering to he who threatens our security, our freedom and our democracy. This day must be therefore an opportunity to cultivate the memory, not to forget, to fight against the resurgence of intolerance, racism and anti-Semitism, which still occur in many parts of the world. This day should be, for each of us, the chance to take on the commitment not to forget and to contribute to the building of a fairer world based on peace, democracy and freedom for all women and all men.<sup>25</sup>

The fact that Berlusconi did not mention the Holocaust and the Jews – except for a vague reference to anti-Semitism – as well as the fact that he mostly made references to terrorism and employed the word “freedom” without qualifying it further, is not without import. For the first time following the establishment of the Day of Memory, Berlusconi himself participated, via a televised message, in the public commemoration of the Day, thus transforming it into a media event.<sup>26</sup> Here we can see how, whilst publicly honoring the anniversary, Berlusconi also used the commemoration with the aim of finding approval for

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<sup>24</sup> With the same purpose, the Italian Parliament, with the Law no. 61 of 15 April 2005, established a Day of Freedom to be commemorated on November 9. This day was intentionally set on the anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, meant as a symbolic event for the liberation of oppressed countries and as a call for democracy for all the people still subject to totalitarianism. On the occasion of the “Day of Freedom,” official commemorative ceremonies are annually organized with the aim to illustrate the value of democracy and freedom against the dangerous effects of past and present totalitarian regimes. See <http://www.parlamento.it/leg/ldl/sldlelencoo42005ordcron.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> *Messaggio del Presidente del Consiglio in occasione della Giornata della memoria*, cit.

<sup>26</sup> As already observed by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, media events are historical facts which have become global rituals of mass communication, in particular of television discourse. Constituting a new television genre, the broadcasts of these rituals show us that these media events have the potential for transforming societies as they shape audiences around the globe. See Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events. The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1994).

his government's foreign policy. In particular, we should recall how in 2002 the Italian Government decided to involve the country in the military intervention in Afghanistan against the Taliban. The strong emphasis placed by Berlusconi on the USA as the "great American democracy," as well as the continuous references to ambiguous threats to freedom and security, can be easily read as a justification for that military intervention, as well as of the impending Iraq invasion, which began in March 2003.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the fact that Berlusconi wanted to underline the equal involvement of the "two totalitarian regimes," Nazis and Communists, in the horrors and suffering during the twentieth century, also convert the Day of Memory into an occasion to deliver a jab at domestic leftwing opponents, still disparagingly referred to as communists in the rightwing press.<sup>28</sup> The ultimate objective of this politics of memory is undeniable: a political use of Holocaust memory and commemoration strongly connected to present events.<sup>29</sup>

The same year also saw the first TV program entirely dedicated to the Day of Memory. This was a special episode of the TV program *La storia siamo noi*, edited by Giovanni Minoli and broadcast in the morning of January 27, 2003.<sup>30</sup> Here, we can see the germs of several elements which were then consolidated in numerous *Porta a Porta* specials. Before presenting a documentary on Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Minoli introduced the topic with a live recording from the Fosse Ardeatine, alternating pre-recorded interviews with ex-deportees with the views of in-studio guests Tullia Zevi, Alessandra Minerbi or Fiamma Nirenstein. In this case, the discussion revolved entirely around the Holocaust, with no particular reference to other historical or current events.

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<sup>27</sup> On Silvio Berlusconi's foreign policy on Afghanistan and Iraq, see Giuseppe Cassini, *Gli anni del declino: La politica estera del governo Berlusconi (2001-2006)*, (Roma: Bruno Mondadori, 2007). On the relationship between Italy and the United States during the Berlusconi cabinet, see Mimmo Franzinelli and Alessandro Giaccone, *La Provincia e l'Impero: Il giudizio americano sull'Italia di Berlusconi* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Along similar lines, but without making any references to the involvement of the United States in several Middle East wars, in his speech given in front of the Confederation of Italian ex-Partisans and Combatants the President of Italian Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi said that "memory can create a more civilized and more just world, where the courage to change things prevails over fear," see "Ciampi sull'Olocausto: Ricordare è un dovere," *La Stampa*, January 28, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> On this tendency, which is not just related to the Italian case, see Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Aline Sierp, *History, Memory and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> *La storia siamo noi – Olocausto*, January 27, 2003, Rai3, 8:00 am, Teche RAI n. F390082.

### Breaking the Rules: Chile, Balkans and Rwanda

The following year, an analogous scheme appears on *La storia siamo noi*, but in addition we also have the first live recording from the Senate of the Memory Day official commemoration.<sup>31</sup> The event focused entirely on the extermination of the Jews, and many Senators underlined the importance of the commemoration for the development of what they championed as a united European community around Judeo-Christian values and roots. Furthermore, 2004 saw the televised coverage of a sporting event strongly related to the Memory Day: a testimonial football match between singers, actors and journalists organized with the aim of raising funds for a Holocaust Museum in Rome<sup>32</sup> – which, after 12 years, still does not yet exist<sup>33</sup>. Between 2003 and 2004 we can then see the beginnings of a new public attention for the Memory Day. Since then, the event has become more and more politicized, memorialized and also mediatized.

For all these reasons, and also because of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz, it is not by chance that 2005 had the first special episode on Memory Day of the above-cited TV talk show *Porta a Porta*.<sup>34</sup> In it, anchor Bruno Vespa interviewed Holocaust survivors Alberto Sed, Edith Bruck, Mario Limentani and Alberto Mieli, as well as politicians Walter Veltroni (at that moment Mayor of Rome and one of the most ambitious leader of the centre-left coalition), Altero Matteoli (right-wing, member of the post-fascist Party *Alleanza Nazionale* who, at that moment, was the Minister of the Environment), and Senator for life Giulio Andreotti (centrist and former leader of Christian-democrats). The guests discussed several themes, though the main topics draw on the stories of the ex-deportees' traumatic past experiences. However, more relevant for this article is that, whenever Vespa interviewed the politicians, they always invoked comparisons with other atrocities or present issues.

A brief excerpt of this debate is useful to illustrate the point. Andreotti commented on the fact that, though “tonight inspires great emotion,” “it would not be possible to create a special episode like this on the survivors from Siberia,

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<sup>31</sup> *Per non dimenticare – Il giorno della memoria dell'Olocausto*, January 27, 2004, Rai1, 10 am, Teche RAI n. Mo4027/001.

<sup>32</sup> *Partita della memoria*, January 27, 2004, Rai3, 9:00 pm, Teche RAI n. Mo4027/002.

<sup>33</sup> For the debate around the museum, see Minuz, *La Shoah e la cultura visuale*, and Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, 14-24.

<sup>34</sup> *Porta a Porta*, January 27, 2005, Rai1, 11:45 pm, Teche RAI n. F423958.

because there were no survivors.” This is because, in his view, ““when a system abandons the rule of law, we have things like the *Desaparecidos*, we watch what happened in Chile.” For this reason, Andreotti continues, “the real message that all the people who died in the camps give to us, and also the message that survivors give to us today, is precisely that we have to be inflexible preserving this system of values.” Vespa followed suit by recalling that “even if on a smaller scale, something similar has happened in some areas of the world: we have witnessed episodes of ethnic cleansing and, unfortunately, such facts will come to be again.” Then, Walter Veltroni intervened, intending to clarify his position with regards to the possibility of comparing other historical events to the Holocaust:

So, we have to distinguish the matter into two parts. First of all, nothing is comparable to the Holocaust, nothing is comparable to the systematic organization of a death machine that was specifically intended to destroy the Jews, those who do not think like the Nazis, homosexuals, gypsies, etc. But, if we look at this problem from another perspective, that of the ferocity of the human being, we can see in the present similar examples. [...] In recent years, for example, we have seen many of them, and we know well only few of them. I am thinking only of the ethnic wars that take place in parts of the world that are not under the spotlights. Even the brutality of the war in Rwanda was chilling! What happened in the Balkans, the mass graves... there are words that we have started to hear again, like beheadings, tortures... I mean there are times in history... like Beslan! Beslan was one of the most terrible massacres of the recent history!

At this precise moment, Veltroni was interrupted by Vespa, who added, among other examples, “the persecution of the Kurds by Saddam Hussein!” Once again, then, the question was brought back to current international politics, with an indirect reference to the USA invasion of Iraq supported by the right-wing Italian government. Veltroni carried on, ignoring Vespa’s clarification:

So, with the premise that we made, because in the Memory Day nothing is comparable to the Holocaust, we must say that when those elementary principles of respect for pluralism, freedom, and also the value of democracy unfortunately fail, then the risk to be familiar with the depths of insanity could easily return.

This discourse is entirely based on the usual rhetoric of slogans like “never again,” “so as not to forget,” or “so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past”<sup>35</sup>. But behind these linguistic constructions, we see public uses of the Holocaust founded on well-defined political visions of the past. If in Berlusconi’s message and partially also in Vespa’s statement we have an attempt to use the Holocaust to legitimize the political line of the Government Veltroni’s purpose seems much more oriented towards commemorating the Holocaust by connecting it to the present as a civic duty. This means that we should read the comparisons that Veltroni made – Balkans, Rwanda, Beslan – in the context of a general educational vision that also includes school trips to Auschwitz, the project of a National Holocaust Museum, and other initiatives encouraged by him with the aim of shaping the young generations to develop awareness of the past in order to act in the present. But the obvious risk of this didactic mission is to generate an anxiety of remembering, without specifying exactly what is to be remembered.

### Coming to Terms with the Present: Lampedusa and Other Massacres

The final accomplishment of the Veltronian political project is clearly presented in a *Porta a porta* episode, broadcast on January 27, 2009, on the immigration problems in Lampedusa.<sup>36</sup> Having debated on the demonstrations of the inhabitants of Lampedusa, who opposed the creation of a Centre for Identification and Expulsion (CIE) of immigrants, Vespa interviewed Veltroni again, commenting negatively on the situation of the island of Lampedusa and presenting, at the same time, the 2009 Memory Day. This passage appears very unnatural, but it is nonetheless full of a clear ideological undertones. After a televised report on an exhibition in Rome on Italy’s Racial Laws, Vespa continued his interview with Veltroni. The politician argued that the tragedy of the Holocaust explains how, in times of crisis, there is a real risk of a new wave of racism and violence, and also stressed the need to educate the new generations on the Holocaust so that they will not commit the same mistakes (in terms of their approach to immigration).

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<sup>35</sup> As Peter Novick has observed, many of these “invocations of the Holocaust” found particular resonance in the American context. In particular, these are usually exhortations Jews directed at themselves, “to spur them to greater efforts on Israel’s behalf, to see that new generations drew the correct lessons from the catastrophe.” Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 159.

<sup>36</sup> *Porta a porta*, January 27, 2009, Rai1, 11:00 pm, Teche RAI n. F536562. On this, see also Derek Duncan’s article in this issue of *Quest*.

But we are not only in front of hazardous comparisons with the present, but also with allusions and cross references with other genocides which happened in the past. For example, once again on *Porta a Porta*, on occasion of the 2012 Memory Day, we have the first televised reference to the Armenian genocide.<sup>37</sup> The episode followed the familiar structure (Holocaust testimonies, a few historians, and some delegates from Jewish communities, this time without any politicians). However, at the end of the episode Vespa presented a report with archival images on the deportation and killing of Armenians at the hand of the Young Turks in 1915-1916. The program presented the Armenian genocide as the first genocide in modern history. It claimed that the so-called “death marches” were used for the first time, and that around 1,200,000 people died of starvation, disease or exhaustion. These marches, the program continued, were directly organized under the supervision of the German army officers in connection with the Turkish army, and can be considered as a dress rehearsal for the most well-known marches that deported Jews were forced to endure towards the end of the Second World War.<sup>38</sup> It was then the turn of the President of the Roman Jewish community Riccardo Pacifici to compare the historical revisionism of this event made by the Turkish Government with the, in this view, fast-rising phenomenon of Holocaust denial.<sup>39</sup> Pacifici was followed by Catholic historian Andrea Riccardi, who at that time was also the Minister for International Cooperation in the Monti Cabinet. Commenting the report on the Armenian genocide, Riccardi stated that “because we have assisted to the massacres in the Balkans, in Rwanda, we should be accustomed to these images; however, every time we listen to these voices or we see these clips, it’s always the first time, because this horror is really too much for us; this is the abyss of horror we can’t get used to.” Here, for the first time, it is worth noting how another genocide takes part in the

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<sup>37</sup> *Porta a porta*, January 26, 2012, Rai1, 11:00 pm, Teche RAI n. F627167.

<sup>38</sup> Actually, there is no historical evidence that the Armenian genocide where organized under the control of the German army. See Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*. trans. Paul Bessemer (London: Constable, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> This is a quite strange connection because, at that moment, political and economic relations between Mario Monti and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Prime Minister of Turkey, were really favourable. On this, see “Monti: L’Italia vuole che la Turchia entri nell’Ue,” *Lettera 43*, May 8, 2012. The position of Andrea Riccardi also seemed to be clearly philo-Turkish, see Andrea Riccardi, “Perché serve che la Turchia sia europea,” *Famiglia Cristiana*, n. 46, November 12, 2015. Probably, this new interest on the Armenian genocide followed the news of the approval in France of a law that makes it a criminal offence to deny that genocide. On this, see Kim Willsher, “Armenian genocide denial to be banned in France as senators approve new law,” *The Guardian*, January 23, 2012.

commemoration in an otherwise exclusively Holocaust-oriented Memory Day. Moreover, the fact that TV guests who usually deal with the Holocaust are consulted on other themes – in this case the Armenian genocide – means that it is not what to remember that is important (be it the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, or the massacres in Balkans or Rwanda), but rather how to borrow the same public memory paradigm and adopt the same structure for TV commemorations.

It is by no means a coincidence that an identical scheme is staged in the televised coverage of all the institutional commemorations organized by the Chamber of Deputies from 2010 until the present. With reference to the 2010 ceremony, we see how all the speeches by politicians and institutional delegates introducing Elie Wiesel's own speech are full of pompous rhetoric and vague banalities.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, these occasions provide an opportunity for reiterating publicly the supposed rightness and goodness of all Italians vis-à-vis the Holocaust. In his intervention, Wiesel thanked the Italian country for its commitment to preserving Holocaust memory; he then accused Pope Pius XII for his silence during the Nazis' mass killing of European Jews. Wiesel also renewed his appeal for the arrest of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had denied the Holocaust and called for the destruction of Israel. "He should be hauled off to the International Court of Justice to face charges of incitement of crimes against humanity," Wiesel said, taking also the opportunity to plea for the liberation of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, while also invoking peace between Israel and Palestine. Finally, he ended his speech with the hope to assist to the approval of an international bill declaring suicide terrorist attacks as "crimes against all of humanity."

This speech is particularly interesting for its strong multidirectional aim. Wiesel, in fact, did not mention any possible comparison of the Holocaust with other historical genocides, but his intention is to use a historical trauma in the discussion of present issues. All references to the Ahmadinejad denial, the Shalit kidnapping, and also to the Road map for peace between Israel and Palestine stem from a Holocaust testimony and, as a consequence, are publicly legitimized by it.

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<sup>40</sup> *Discorso di Elie Wiesel alla Camera dei deputati*, January 27, 2010, Rai3, 12:10 am, Teche Rai n. F574549.

From then on, Italian TV began to cover all yearly institutional Memory Day commemorations with a special episode of Rai3 news. In these programs, we can also note the slow emergence of references to the *Porajmos*, the genocide of Roma and Sinti people during the Second World War, which has started to be publicly considered as part of the Holocaust<sup>41</sup>. Nevertheless, the space given to the *Porajmos* remains minimal, and the prominence of the Jewish component still orients all public commemorations, with the above-cited political instances, up to the present.

## Conclusions

The discontinuity of the last years, in regards to the narratives that dominated the public sphere until the middle of the 1990s, coincides with a general crisis of the idea of militancy, which, as is widely known, has involved the crisis of ideologies.<sup>42</sup> In terms of the politics of memory, this represented a shift of attention from the centrality of the political deportation, and, as a consequence, of the figure of the partisan fighter, to the much more innocent positions of the witness and the victim. Following on from this cultural and political shift, the first archetype seems to have almost completely disappeared from television's public discourse on history. Therefore, an increasing top-heavy civic and didactic awareness of the Holocaust emerged from the general decline of the anti-Fascist narrative. This strong shift, thanks also to a new television discourse in political terms, has certainly favored initiatives frequently based on a vague duty to remember.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, this clear change of position allowed the Holocaust to occupy an empty space, not only in terms of the past – and consequently in public memory – but also in the present. It becomes an unconditional warning, a

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<sup>41</sup> Here I refer, above all, to *Celebrazione del giorno della memoria alla presenza del Presidente della Repubblica Giorgio Napolitano*, TG3 Special Episode, Rai3, January 27, 2011, 11:00 am, Teche RAI n. F618225; *Celebrazione del giorno della memoria alla presenza del Presidente della Repubblica Giorgio Napolitano*, TG3 Special Episode, Rai3, January 27, 2012, 11:00 am, Teche RAI n. F618225; *Celebrazione del giorno della memoria alla presenza del Presidente della Repubblica Giorgio Napolitano*, TG3 Special Episode, Rai3, January 27, 2014, 11:00 am, Teche RAI n. F615859.

<sup>42</sup> On this crisis, see above all Sergio Luzzatto, *La crisi dell'antifascismo*, (Torino: Einaudi, 2004) and Guri Schwarz, "Crisi del discorso antifascista e memoria della persecuzione razziale nell'Italia degli anni Ottanta," in *Dopo i testimoni: memorie, storiografie e narrazioni della deportazione razziale*, ed. Marta Baiardi and Alberto Cavaglion (Roma: Viella, 2014), 171-184.

<sup>43</sup> A propos of this, Emiliano Perra talks about a "Post-Antifascist Holocaust Memory," see Perra, *Conflicts of Memory*, 224-231.



constant term of comparison with other contemporary tragedies – Palestine, Balkans, Rwanda, Beslan, or the immigrants’ issue, as we have seen.

Television forces the public memory to question itself with the absoluteness of the paradigm of the Holocaust, which is increasingly mentioned and used as a metaphysical and decontextualized entity. On the one hand, it is enshrined as the “absolute evil” in history. At the same time, however, behind the litanies and linguistic rhetoric of the “never again” and “so as not to forget” mottos lies some precise political visions of the present (as in the case of Silvio Berlusconi’s and Walter Veltroni’s ideas). With this in mind, fifteen years later it seems therefore necessary for us to rethink the Holocaust Remembrance Day in virtue of the televised representations, even if in this context uniquely related to RAI generalist channels and to non-fiction programs. We ought to adopt a new approach on the multidirectional implications of Holocaust public memory, as analyzed from a transnational point of view. It is quite obvious, in fact, how all these processes have involved, in various problematic ways, the building and the evolution of a post-war Italian identity increasingly linked to Holocaust public memory segueing into an era of multidirectional memory where the Holocaust enables the articulation of other local and national histories of victimization precisely in virtue of its uniqueness<sup>44</sup>. In the shape of these new public memories proliferating under the contemporary media regime in modern societies, the Holocaust seems no longer to be the only historical trauma to be remembered, even if its uniqueness probably means that it continues to assume a leading role in all the above-mentioned comparisons.

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<sup>44</sup> The theorization of the so-called multi-directional memories could help us define a sort of “memory archive,” which could set the new rules for the media representations of traumatic pasts. For this methodology, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 229.

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