Event-making the past: commemorations as social movement catalysts

A modified version of this text is forthcoming:

Jerne, C. (forthcoming) Event-making the past: commemorations as social movement catalysts, *Memory Studies*, 14(2).

Abstract

While shared narratives of the past have long been considered functional in terms of legitimising, coordinating and directing movement imaginary and action, it is not until recently that studies of memory and social movements have begun to interact systematically. Furthermore, these studies have treated mnemonic practices from a cognitive perspective rather than an affective, relational stance. This article analyses the mass commemoration of mafia victims that took place in Bologna on 21 March 2015 using an affective lens. It shifts the focus from memory as an identity-shaping, community-building force, to memory as a mobilising force that intensifies and fuels heterogeneous and multidirectional movements such as the anti-mafia. In particular, it highlights the suggestive force of objects, discourses and bodies that together catalyse the crowd, drawing from ethnographic material. It concludes that what is ritualised, and thus important for the movement's direction, is the way the past is presented and lived through the event. It suggests that the study of social movements and memory can benefit from the affective turn in memory studies.

Keywords: Catalysis, civic religion, collective memory, crowds, proxy-event, victims.

Author

Christina Jerne, Department of Scandinavian Studies and Experience Economy, School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University. cjerne@cc.au.dk.

Introduction

Scholars have long acknowledged that remembering has an accruing potential for the social body. Commemorative practices have, for instance, been deemed important for the formation of collective identities (Assmann 1995) and functional in terms of both establishing and symbolising social cohesion (Hobsbawm and Rangers 2005). Commemorations are indeed highly political acts as they entail prioritising some events over others, engraving them in the collective imaginary by choosing to celebrate them as cardinal elements of a certain culture (Assmann 1992). Consequently, it is not surprising that social movements are often prominent actors in shaping collective memories.

Shared narratives of the past have been regarded as functional in terms of legitimising, coordinating and directing social movement imaginary and action (Baker 1985; Armstrong and Cragg 2006; Polletta 2006). The very presence of strong collective memories has even been seen as indicative of the level of success of a movement (Epstein 2009). However, it is not until recently that studies of memory and social movements have begun to interact systematically (Kubal and Becerra 2014; Doerr 2014).

Moreover, while numerous studies have been dedicated to the politics of remembering, fewer have dealt with the non-representational aspects of commemoration, treating mnemonic practices from a cognitive perspective rather than an affective, relational stance. In fact, many stem from essentially rational and inscriptive approaches to the study of the social, which can be seen as descending from the Durkheimian tradition that has deeply influenced contemporary social theory (Latour 2002; Borch 2012). Nevertheless, there is growing interest in the affective dimensions of memory and heritage (i.e. Doss 2008; Allen and Brown 2011; Daugbjerg 2013; Waterton and Watson

2015; Freeman et al. 2016; Papailias 2016; Knudsen and Ifversen 2016), which has opened up for rich discussions on the sensory, aesthetic and circulatory aspects of mnemonic encounters.

Following this line of thought, I propose to look at the role that commemorative ceremonies play in social movements through an affective lens. I look not at the connection between the past and the future through cognitive processes of meaning-making, but instead at the connection between human bodies and other bodies in a commemorative setting, and thus at the affects that are unlocked in the topography of crowds. The fact that commemorations take a crowded form has indeed been an overlooked aspect of this form of collective remembrance- and yet it is a fundamental one. After all, it is through the body that we remember, and in this eventful form, it is with (many) other bodies that we both affect and are affected by (Latour, 2004) the way we celebrate the past and the future. What does this eventful use of the past do for social movement trajectories? Why is this practice indeed ritualised in this very form?

Through an empirical analysis of the ‘day of memory and commitment to commemorate victims of the mafias’ that took place on 21 March 2015, this article discusses the role of commemoration in social movements, taking its point of departure in these questions. The paper begins by looking at the ‘things’ that are assembled for the event and the aesthetic strategies that are used to make the past present for this crowd. I indicate various ways in which a collective trauma (the death of innocent mafia victims) is ‘slid onto’ objects, discourses and bodies that have a potentiating role to play for the movement. I then move onto looking at how the event of crowding, of gathering in a mass of bodies, further invigorates the participants. I argue that the crowd plays a particular role in this commemorative assemblage, giving this wishful use of the past a lively embodiment. As Thrift reminds us, it is difficult to distinguish between bodies and

things (1996), which is why we must turn to their relationships to trace social becomings (Dewsbury, 2000).

The discussion concludes by suggesting that these elements are catalytic for the anti-mafia movement. In fact this remembrance has a double-edged character to it because it both *commemorates* the victims of the mafia and *resists* the mafia through an affirmative, crowded embodiment of the social contract. Thus the commemoration is viewed here not merely as a social catharsis¹, but as a social catalysis, that invigorates the movement. Overall, I suggest that commemorative events can play a crucial role in stirring political desires through a ‘prospective’ use of memory (Pentzold et al. 2016). This shifts the focus from the identity-shaping-role of memory, to the intensity-infusing-function it plays for heterogeneous and multidirectional movements such as the anti-mafia.

My observations are based mainly on my own part-taking in the event, where I used participant observation methods, conducted 13 walk-along interviews, and recorded speeches and interventions during the workshops that took place in the afternoon. Some of the data derives from the on-going exchanges I have had with Libera² activists throughout the past three years. Another substantial portion derives from an analysis of Libera’s website, as well as the posts that occurred on the event’s official Twitter hashtag #ventiliberi throughout 21 March. This allowed me to capture and code what the participants were sharing with each other and the non-present community during the event in its immediacy.

Silence is a crime³

In the past twenty years, the Italian mafias have become less megalomaniacal in their murders. The 1980s, the years of 'second mafia war', are the ones engraved in the collective memory because they culminated in the murder of high-profile institutional figures. Nonetheless, today's mafias have continued to expand their economic empire, globalising and cooperating at unprecedented levels (Santino 2007). At this time, when mafia growth is less visible, it has become important for the anti-mafia forces to gather annually and remember not to forget.

21 March marks the vernal equinox, the first day of spring. It has also been chosen by the movement as the day on which to 'renew hope' (Libera, 2015a) and commemorate the victims of the mafias; those who have fought it with arms, those who have fought it with words, those who have protected institutional figures who sought to incarcerate its affiliates, but also all those people who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Significantly, unlike many other movement commemorations, this particular event does not occur on a date that marks a specific event. 21 March is a purely symbolic date:

21 March is not only the first day of spring, a symbolic date, but also a neutral day: nobody has been killed by the mafia on that date. (Libera Activist, Skype interview, 13 February 2015).

In 2015, the mass gathering took place in Bologna, where 200,000 people collected from all over Italy to take part in the event. Throughout the past twenty years this ceremony has been ritualised (Bell 1992:89; Armstrong and Crag 2006), turning into a recurrent

appointment to read out and refresh the 1,035⁴ names of victims. It is the annual event at which the Italian anti-mafia scene gathers to recharge its batteries for the future.

The first ‘memory day’ was organised by Libera in Rome in 1996, more or less concurrently with the association’s own establishment. Since then, the number of participants has grown exponentially, and the ceremony has been held in different parts of the country, reflecting the fact that both the mafia and the anti-mafia are truly national phenomena.

The title of the event, ‘the day of memory and commitment’, tells us that the commemoration is explicitly political. It is the annual occasion to reflect on what has been achieved by the movement so far, and what the next steps should be. But it is also an event that is used by the movement to engage its network in long-term activities that culminate on 21 March (such as artistic projects that schools exhibit, theatrical representations and thematic workshops).

Being a 20th anniversary, the 2015 edition was exceptionally festive. The first part of the day focused on commemorating mafia victims and, according to the official programme, was ‘an opportunity for family members of victims to share their strength and seek a real and profound justice, transforming their suffering into an instrument to fight against the mafias, defined by commitment and peace’ (Libera, 2015a). The event began at 9.30 am when the crowd met at the entrance of the Dall’Ara stadium and stood behind the victims’ families. They led the march for about 3 km until they reached Piazza VIII Agosto two hours later, where the names of the innocent victims were read out. Successively, the crowd was addressed by a few family members, an institutional

representative and the leader of Libera, Don Ciotti. The afternoon was dedicated to workshops and seminars on various themes. These activities were scattered around the city and represent the vast and growing anti-mafia movement.

‘Victims of duty’: affective motors of civic veneration

Commemorating mafia victims has an attractive power over many different groups. Indeed, the role of victims is increasingly hegemonic in the Italian cultural context. Studies have granted the victim a surrogate function to institutional voids in shaping collective memory (De Luna 2011), as well as setting a general sense of direction (Giglioli 2014) and inciting faith in the civic. De Luna’s critical historical enquiry has importantly pointed out that it has often been through the pain surrounding their deaths that the Italian people have found the idols of their civic faith. This event is a vivid example of this association, as the movement’s agenda is precisely to make these deaths important and make their commemoration an activating, catalysing ritual. My aim here is not to ask why but to show how the event draws on these matrices⁵ (victims and the civic) during the event.

In the following, I highlight things that have been assembled for this event and that in other words have affects ‘stuck’ onto them (Ahmed 2004a). As Sara Ahmed argues, emotion is neither something that resides in the subject and is diffused, nor something that resides outside the subject and is then appropriated. The objective distinction between the inside and the outside, which places the ‘I’ or the ‘we’ as causal factors of emotional states, is misleading. It is instead *through* emotions, through our encounter with other bodies, that “surfaces and boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others.” (Ahmed 2004b: 10). This event

constantly circulates desire between two ingredients that are traceable in its title: ‘memory and commitment’. These are brought to life through: a. the bodies of the victims’ relatives and b. the (discursive and non-) embodiments of the State. It is by sticking these together, and event-making them, that their affective values circulate, become entangled and augment.

According to the organisers, the day before the mass commemoration was the most testing as it was dedicated to the family members. They are indeed key protagonists of the event and are a central concern of the social movement organisation. Libera indeed started as a support network for relatives of less prominent mafia victims who were facing the problem of being alone with a burden. The burden of being alone with an uncomfortable and politically sensitive loss, but also in many cases the task of seeking justice and learning the truth about the deaths of their relatives⁶.

This original spirit was reflected throughout the entire event as their bodies were treated differently than any other. The day before the mass, the relatives of the victims were the first to be addressed by the city’s representatives in a private reunion, which was then made even more intimate when the leader, Don Ciotti, held a ‘closed-door’ event with them.

We are not allowed in. It’s a sort of confessional I think. They are being soothed by him... many of them were agitated (Libera activist 2, personal interview, 20 March 2015).

The agitation that the activist is referring to is connected to a speech which was held by one of the family members, Vincenzo Agostino, whose physical appearance is a living artefact, a vital ingredient to the formation of this collective memory. Mr. Agostino’s son, Antonino, was a member of the Italian secret services who was murdered in 1989⁷. His

father, Vincenzo, was present on the night of the homicide and has made an oath not to cut his beard and hair until the truth about his son's death is revealed. It is his body that was chosen to address the victims' family members.

He began his speech by calling all the other relatives his 'colleagues of misfortune', towards whom he renewed his pledge:

As I promised, I will not cut my hair and beard until I have truth and justice. (*screaming*) I don't want these rotten apples in my city! (Agostino, Vincenzo (2015) public speech, 20 March).

Mr. Agostino's body and voice had a strong impact on the audience, which reacted by standing up and applauding much louder and for a longer time than for the other speakers. His body was in pain, broken, and thus effective in creating an affective connection to him but also to his cause. His body is indexical for the anti-mafia movement: it mourns the victim (*hair*) but also resists becoming a victim to that force by using the same body to protest (*hair*). It sets the example of what should be done with the past. Choosing to make the family members protagonists of the event is exemplary of how bodies can be used affectively to make a subjunctive use of the past.

Notably, their bodies were distinctively positioned throughout the mass event as well. Libera's own framing of the event resonates with the idea of corporal contact and imitation. Their website describes 21 March as a day on which the family members can 'share their strength' and *demonstrate* how suffering can be transformed into commitment to peace, legality and justice. This is also implicit in the spatial organisation of the commemoration: the crowd stands *behind* the family members throughout the march, following their physical trajectory. Some of the participants told me they tried to arrive early in order to get a glimpse of them, and to stand close to them. This highlights the

importance of metonymical proximity; of how standing next to the bodies of the relatives is connected to their overall commitment to the movement.

The trajectory is thereby also physically set by them: they infuse their ‘demonstration of commitment to civic engagement’ into the masses through their movement. The family members also addressed the crowd from *upfront* on the main stage at the ceremony, directing the names of their lost ones at them. Their utterances filled the crowd with awe and respect, as silence reigned during this act. Even the small children, who had been ecstatic during the day, were silenced by the solemnity of this moment. At the end of the ceremonial reading of the names, 1,035 white balloons were released into the sky in memory of each victim, in metaphorical substitution of their bodies. One scout leader told his open-mouthed pack of cubs: “We must always look up at the sky but we must never forget the responsibilities we have here on earth.”

This tension between the past and the present, the immanent and the imminent, is constantly referred to through the different objects (like these balloons) present at the event. As the scout leader noted, for this context the desired trajectory is one of ‘responsibility’ and civic duty. In Libera’s own terms:

(...)There are relatives of known victims, those whose names arouse an immediate and strong emotion. And then there are relatives of those victims whose names don’t mean much. For this reason it is a *civic duty* to remember all of them. To always remember that *Italy* owes its *entire dignity* to those names and those families (...) (own emphasis, Libera 2015b).

As I have emphasised here, the figure of mafia victim is recurrently slid onto questions of the State, of rule of law, of legality. Indeed the entire relationship between the mafia, the anti-mafia and the State is a complex one which cannot be but touched upon in this context. One important tension was highlighted by Dalla Chiesa (1983), who pointed at the ambivalent relationship between the anti-mafia movement and the State. On the one hand, it is pro-systemic as it aims at upholding and enforcing the social contract on which

the State is built. On the other, it is anti-systemic as it targets the criminal forces that try to corrupt it.

In fact, in this context the commemoration is connected to heightening the faith in the State, not intended as the living corpus of politicians, but as the abstract institution of the rule of law. Remembering innocent mafia victims, whose deaths are already dense with affective intensity, allows transferal of intensity onto another object: the absolute social contract. Commemorating the victims of the mafia is accordingly a practice that allows for the affective embodiment of the State: it makes it 'actual' by giving it a crowded corpus.

In his illuminating book (2011), Lottieri notes that while it was Rousseau who first expressed the democratic State as a form of civic religion, it was only with Hegelian immanence that this concept was refined and brought to its heights:

The State is the actuality of the ethical Idea. It is ethical mind *qua* the substantial will manifest and revealed to itself, knowing and thinking itself, accomplishing what it knows and in so far as it knows it (Hegel, 1896).

The idea that victims of the mafia must be worshipped for the sake of the republican State exemplifies how this immanent, metaphysic power of the civic is still made present today. The material practice of commemorating is what effectively halts the distance between the secular and the divine⁸. The deaths are made sacred *through* the association with the civic, thereby making the sacred *present* (Hetherington 2003). This parader's ethical consideration on memory is a good example:

Q: Have you been to this event other times?

A: I always come to this event. Memory is important because first of all these people have died doing something just. It should be normal to do something right for one's country, and behave correctly. Instead those that have died have been punished for fulfilling their duty (parader 1, personal interview, 21 March 2015).

Remembering is here a moral act that highlights the difference between what is just and what is not. Importantly, she refers to mafia murders as a form of punishment for having

lived a life of justice and law abidance. Although it is true that some of the victims were actively engaged against the mafia, many of them were unfortunately just in the way of the mafia, and thus their deaths were neither causally linked to their personal dedication to the anti-mafia crusade, nor to their particular loyalty to the rule of law. Their innocence is therefore characterised by something which they are not (a part of a criminal group) rather than by something which they are (particularly dedicated to the State). Nonetheless, the term ‘mafia victim’ is used as a metonymy for all that is civic. It is in this sense only natural to use the term punishment to define the fates of the victims. Punishment is here representative of an immanent order of (in)justice: the mafia, being an emanation of power and greed, is portrayed as the persecutor of the devout citizens of the State. Importantly, it is because the civic does not reside in one object that faith in it can circulate.

Figure 1 Photo by Author

Naturally, 'the State' itself was bound to respond to such a celebratory summoning and was present in all its forms. In the most physical of senses, it was the mayor of Bologna who welcomed the family members the day before the procession, and this occurred in the Palace of Re Enzo with the entirety of the municipal council. The parade was full of official representatives who were richly embellished with rosettes, bands, flags and municipal emblems. The square where the ceremony was held is home to the statue of 'il Popolano' that represents the victory of liberal Bologna over the reactionary Austrian Empire during the 1848 revolutions. Indeed, there was a clear desire to create an official atmosphere, so as to legitimise the performance and slide the 'civic' onto the commemoration. The human and non-human civic objects were in fact convened by the anti-mafia to publicly enforce the idea of justice and the rule of law. Don Ciotti, for instance, concluded his speech by renewing his now annual request for the institutionalisation of the day of memory and commitment- an appeal to make it a national day that is part of the official State heritage (Harrison 2013:14)⁹. This institutionalisation is of high importance to the anti-mafia as the State itself (in its human incarnations) has been intimately connected to the mafia.

However, the State (like God) can work in mysterious ways. The 200,000 people in Bologna were performing their faith publicly, confirming their belief in the 'parahuman authority' (Santino, 2004) of justice, the law, the State. Seemingly, commemorating the 'victims of duty' is a social performance that fortifies and animates that faith, something which is discussed by the participants as having a transformatory and confirmatory agency (Santino 2004:364).

@tweet3: will and possibility to build a future! Let's stop telling the youth that there is no hope
@tweet4: The future of Italy will be better. That's what these young people who march against the mafia are telling us.
@tweet5: Days like these in #Bologna are hope and future to build a future of transparency

Ritualising this event, repeatedly creating a space that combines the most important affects for the movement, has a vital role to play for the future of the mobilisation. The appointment has been described by many of my respondents (Libera members, family members of the victims and paraders) as ‘the most important day of the year’, so it is a central element in the movement’s repertoire. This shows that the past, which already has affects ‘stuck’ to it, can be used as a vector to circulate desire.

In the late eighties and nineties, when the movement gained national mass features, collective demonstrations often followed the death of eminent public figures. The affective intensity of these traumatic events has, in a sense, been replaced by the ‘proxy’ event, the mass commemoration of the traumas. If there is no event, there is nothing to experience, and it is above all through *experience* that the past is made present, and ‘events are incorporated and remembered’ (Koselleck, 2004:259).

In the absence of ‘excellent cadavers’ (some of my respondents speak of the 1992 assassinations¹⁰ as ‘our own 9/11’), a successful strategy has been to assemble ‘actual’ family members and ‘actual’ bits of State, which allows for desire to circulate without necessarily requiring a murder to incite protest. It is a proxy event that instead of raging, celebrates. Following Ahmed’s understanding of emotion as a relational, circulatory process, it is possible to read the event-making of the past as a practice that creates *intensities*, which are functional to solidifying identities (DeLanda 2006). This can suggest that commemorations are catalytic movement practices, not so much because they invite conscious elaboration of and reflection on a particular meaning that is attached to the past, but because of the energy that is activated throughout the presentation of these meanings.

The following part of the analysis focuses on the bodies that propagate and absorb this energy, namely the commemorating crowd.

When the movement crowds

A sea of people
in disorganised billows
has poured into the squares,
the streets and the suburbs.
It's one big clamour
that freezes the blood,
like a creaking of broken bones.
One cannot want or think
in the deafening din;
in the smell of crowd
there's a festive air.

G. Impastato¹¹

Giuseppe Impastato, one of the most famous Italian mafia victims, spoke of being in a crowd as a sensorial event that halts one's rational capacities. Indeed, the experience of crowding is by its very nature a memorable one, regardless of the reason. The fact that the anti-mafia chooses to commemorate *en masse* (like many other social, political and cultural groups) is in itself cogent. Would a memorial site or an archive of the names of the victims not be equally significant? As crowding is a ritualised practice, there must be something about the crowd itself, as a particular topology, that does something different. As Don Ciotti repeated "it's not enough to be moved but we must move!" here I focus on what is moved in the crowd by the event. I conclude by reflecting on its role in the formation and affirmation of the movement's future projection.

Crowds have been at times central, and others peripheral, in sociological thought. Their position has been tightly connected to the epistemic and political climate that surrounded the study of collective action. Indeed, the conception of the social movement tradition in the 1960s and 70s has been seen as key to the dissolution of crowd semantics (Borch 2012), and has represented an overall triumph of more rationalist approaches to the study

of the social. In the past decades, ratiocentrism has been challenged from many fronts, and crowds have gained a new space in social thought.

Perhaps as a result of the rapid transformation of our forms of communication, studies have convincingly discussed the category of crowds as not being necessarily defined by physical co-presence, using notions such as traversing crowds (Olofsson 2010), mediated crowds (Baker 2011) and online crowds (Stage 2013; Knudsen and Stage 2015a). Yet this line of thought is not pertinent to this context, as it is a topological gathering which is under analysis here. Nor are Rheingold's 'smart mobs' (2002) referred to, as I am not discussing the rational strategies that are communicated between the crowd members, nor am I interested in asserting the mere cognitive capacity of crowds (Surowiecki 2004). It is the non-duality between body and mind which is here of interest.

This is why I turn to two classical crowd theorists: Gabriel Tarde and Elias Canetti. Although Tarde's approach to crowds was generally conservative and rather distanced, I find his work useful from a broader sociological perspective. The crowd is in fact the social formation that best crystallises the imitative-suggestive force that informs his overall view of the social. For Tarde, the social is something that occurs in the inter-subjective space which is in constant flow and rearrangement, rather than being something which is a pre-existing domain in itself; namely a 'social fact' (Latour and Lépinay 2009; Niezen 2014; Toews 2010; Toscano 2007). Canetti's innovative account of crowds was instead dictated by his belief that crowds had only been described from the outside, and that authors who had worked with crowd theory had not personally experienced being part of a crowd. This, according to him, was misleading and led to purely external descriptions which were chiefly negative in nature. My own analysis, being informed by a celebrative crowd and being methodologically founded on participant observation, is moved by this approach.

Strength, abundance, sameness and presence

Although the gathering termed itself using the classical crowd symbols used by Canetti (1981:70-95), this crowd is not as ‘natural’ as the elements which are used to describe it.

@tweet6: human tide for legality.

@tweet7: a sea of people, flags and colours.

@tweet8: an endless river of people.

In fact, this crowd is an organised one, rather than a ‘spontaneous one’, to use Tarde’s words (1901:91). Crowding is, in other words, a planned event for this social movement.

One of the most important elements that emerged from my discussions with the participants during the commemoration and from their online posts was the experience of being present at the event itself. When asked “what are you doing here today?” many of them referred to the importance of commemoration, but *all* of them talked descriptively of their micro-experiences, of what was happening during their being there as part of a crowd. The past was indeed secondary in the online and offline crowd’s overall discussions; it was more of an expedient to gathering and living the present.

The physical descriptions of the masses and the sensations deriving from participating were indeed the aspects that were most prevalent. This confirms the idea that practice is highly situational and therefore intrinsically linked to the unfolding of the act itself. This is why it cannot be grasped outside of its happening, because in the process of abstraction, practice loses its essence and becomes something different (Bell 1992:81). For Bell, a ritual *itself* is a practice that implies differentiation. In particular, it entails giving more importance to some ways of acting compared to others, thus repeating them. Deleuze sees habitual repetition as that which constitutes the subject, and synthesises ‘the past and the present in view of a possible future’ (Delanda 2016:27). Repetition and differentiation are *per se* rooted in the body, which acts in circularity and produces a symbolically ritualised practice (Bell 1992:93). The body is thus the transmitting device, the verb of the ritual and the index to the direction.

There is something particularly powerful, as we shall see, about a mass bodies transmitting a ritual 'live' to one another. According to Canetti, the force of the crowd lies in the fact that it is the only occasion which man has to evade his biggest fear; that of being touched by the unknown.

(...) It is only in the crowd that man can become free of this fear of being touched. That is the only situation in which fear changes into its opposite (Canetti 1981:15).

This claustrophilia, as Borch (2012) suitably called it, is what gives the crowd an intimately vitalist connotation; and coupled with the narrative of remembering for the future, it produces the faithful mass, which I observed in Bologna.

One of the elements that emerged from the online tweets, which are direct, emic transpositions of what affected the crowd (Knudsen and Stage 2015b), was the importance of numbers. Many of the participants, in fact, underlined how many people were present and noted the spatial extension and abundance of the group, correlating it to strength and power:

One realises that we have really become numerous! And this helps to fight one's fear of denouncing things that are not right. 200,000: union really does make strength! (parader 3, 21 March 2015).

@tweet9 together we are scary!

@tweet10 I marched with thousands of people in Bologna. It confirms a very deep democratic conscience.

These comments all note that it is somehow the magnitude of the crowd that substantiates the value and force of the group. Another element that was present was the confirmatory and relieving experience of *seeing* the others, being able to observe that there were in fact many people who mirrored one's own desire.

(...) I was able to see all the coordinating groups, all the local associations, and a STRONG presence of the youth, even in scholastic age, and scouts. Therefore there *is* participation! Often you hear people say that the youth never comes to these demonstrations, but instead you can see the contrary; there is an immense amount of people that comes spontaneously (parader 7, 21March 2015).

@tweet11: it's wonderful to feel part of an immense mass, of a people which asks for TRUTH AND JUSTICE.

Today there is the material manifestation that there are many out there like me; it is a colourful, joyful event that shows that even in the sorrow we believe in legality (parader 5, 21 March 2015). However, the opposite issue of standing out from the *we* as an *I* was also important. This was also observed by Canetti, who saw the crowd as constituting a condition of possibility for the individual rather than as something which transcended individuality (Borch 2012: 241). Indeed the various groups bore their own colourful banners and slogans, describing who they were and where they came from. This emerged from my interviews as well, with all my respondents presenting themselves and their socio-geographic belonging even before I asked them who they were. This comment from a cooperative from Bologna is useful in understanding why this was the case:

As a cooperative we have supported Libera's activities and it is important for us to be here. And it is important for us to give out the signal that for us it's essential to stand by them (parader 10, personal interview, 21 March 2015).

Presentation thus seems to be as important as representation; the actual act of *being* there physically is as vital as signalling out their position to the larger movement. This was further enforced by Libera itself, which talked to the participants on Twitter asking: "Are you here?" "Tell us where you are!" "What are you seeing?" Most of the posts were subsequently presentations of the geographic origin or name of the group or individual in the format of: "X is present! We are here and came all the way from Z".

Further dialogue between the organisation, the leader and the crowd occurred in the form of repetition. Many posts were in fact direct transcriptions of what was being said, while it was being said on stage. These repetitive posts were in turn retweeted most often, resulting in an imitative circuit of re-affirmation. In other words, what was happening was repeated while it happened, thus confirming that what was happening live, both online and offline, was affecting the participants simultaneously. The liveness itself was thus important. The ones which gathered most momentum were those of Don Ciotti, whose charismatic force has been described as originating 'ciottism' by one of the activists I

talked to. He had a strong effect on the crowd, which is traceable not only via the online duplications of his words; but also during his speech, throughout which the crowd was stark silent.

However, the crowd seemed to be hypnotised by their own force as well as their leader's.

Images and sounds deriving directly from the crowd were also repeated, narrated online:

@tweet12: a loud echoing says "Mafia out of the State"

Choruses, songs and dances were present throughout the entire day, keeping the level of energy high. These travelled from group to group, with each group joining in the chants of others, sharing their different rhythms.

After hours of experiencing this shared intensity, the crowd dispersed throughout the city and joined one of the twenty-five events which had been prepared for the day. The themes were diverse and almost every event was fully booked, filling the city with discussions, debates, book readings, theatrical representations and film-screenings.

@tweet13: Here we are talking about social economy, development and legality. We are networking and elaborating new thought.

As this participant notes, the afternoon was designed as a productive moment giving him the chance to reflect on the past year, learn from experts and share ideas on what could be done in the future, confirming that the title of the event, 'the day of memory and commitment', was fitting. Indeed, the past was being used as an event-maker, a catalyst that gathers this collective drive into one place, and is affirmative of a different future.

Making these formative activities occur *en masse*, after the electric mass commemoration infuses an intense dose of energy in the participants.

@tweet14: #Goodnight with this tired but happy map [of the event]. And with the will to do more and more.

Similarly to this participant, Canetti spoke of the crowd as being an experience in which the individual could expand himself, be transformed. The crowd does not oppress the individual but is instead an experience in which 'he goes beyond himself, and then returns

within himself, transformed' (Moscovici 1987:49). Tarde goes even further and sees social transformation as originating in individuation, 'but rather than coming to rest and perhaps to stagnation in an ego, it quickly moves on to become, ultimately, a larger cultural force' (Toews 2003:87). This puts the individual in the position of having creative agency, not in relation to a particular will or volition, but rather with regards to his ability to imitate and be imitated. The crowd, due to its physical characteristics, is one of the most powerful assemblages in which this can occur.

Proxy-event and intensity

While this study does not allow us to deduce that social transformation is causally correlated to crowding practices, it does push us to reflect on the role that ritualised crowding plays for social movement development. First of all, it can be asserted that this commemorative form has been successful as it has grown exponentially and expanded to different parts of the country. Armstrong and Cragg (2006) might say that the movement has a high level of 'mnemonic capacity', meaning that it is able to commemorate the way it does, due to a series of political, cultural and organisational opportunities that afford this type of practice. But the opposite might also be postulated: could it be that the ritualisation of the commemorative event itself has contributed to the creation of these opportunities?

The past twenty years have in fact been prosperous for the anti-mafia. Novel and progressively different actors have become involved in the struggle against the mafias, despite the absence of traumatic deaths with a high media impact (Renda 1993; Mattoni 2013; Dalla Chiesa 2014: 107). Contemporary anti-mafia associations' definitions of what constitutes the mafia are increasingly hybrid, multifaceted and heterogeneous, ranging from environmental pollution, to human trafficking, to austerity measures and to institutional corruption (Jerne 2015). The emergence of different strategies of contention

has been concurrent with the growth of Libera as an umbrella organisation and its ‘invented’ tradition of 21March (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2005). Despite the semantic and pragmatic expansion of the movement, coordinated mass protests such as the ones that followed the massacres of prominent public figures are rarer, and have been replaced by smaller, localised experiences that point towards different directions and contextual problems. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, many of the participants refer to *this* date as ‘the most important day of the year’. In this sense, its affective prominence is remarkable and suggests that there is something about the event itself that assembles the diverse actors. It is a proxy event that substitutes the trauma of death by repeating it through remembrance. Importantly, the affective intensity connected to death is transferred onto another object: civic commitment.

The commemoration has thus been crafted as an affective experience that draws in a broad range of activists, and is also an important occasion for them to meet, to talk about their activities and compare their challenges and successes with others. It is an occurrence in which thousands of people gather and celebrate. Indeed, many of these people participated *in order to* meet in celebration.

As my analysis suggests, crowding has particular effects on participants which are a fundamental aspect of the commemorative experience. As we have seen, the topological gathering of the bodies is in itself an event that stirs up individual reactions and collective atmospheres: it entails sensations of power, faith, force and joy. The sensation of being at the event, surrounded by other bodies, was described as heightening, comforting, stimulating and pleasurable. Indeed, this pleasure is possibly fundamental to furthering the practice because crowding is also part of what is ritualised. It is ultimately the crowd that embodies the civic faith. The past instead, can be treated as an event-maker

(Knudsen and Christensen 2015), hence a catalyst which is functional in making something happen, so as the catalyst that constitutes and activates the movement.

Conclusions

‘You haven’t killed them! Their ideas walk on our legs’¹².

The physical practice of commemorating has been successful in keeping the movement *alive*. My analysis has highlighted some of the intensities of the event, suggesting that it is this very intensity that is ritualised. On the one hand, I have discussed how the act of crowding per se *does* something for the participants: it gathers bodies in similarity, exciting them, giving the sensation of power through the visible experience of being many. It produces songs, images and chants that are repeated collectively, simultaneously, joyously. It channels a shared reception of the suggestive ideas of the charismatic leader. It allows people to meet, interact, learn and plan their next encounters. In essence, it vitalises the movement through its very form and allows for the affirmation of a particular desire. Celebrative crowds are units of pleasure¹³, the celebration of the movement itself.

Moreover, I have shown how crowded commemorations event-make the most important signs for the group and circulate them through associations of bodies, objects and words. In this case, mafia victims already have affects stuck to them, and it is by writing the bodies of the victims’ relatives next to embodiments the State that the civic is vitalised. Repeating this association annually to a festive crowd *does* something, as it is an experience activists return to.

Commemorations have the potential to set social movement direction because their topology allows a unique circulation of energy which activates the desire for the repetition

of that event. They set the direction through their *form*. Event-making the past can thus be an important movement practice because it gives the past vitality. This suggests that the growing interest in social movements and memory can benefit from the affective turn in memory studies and encourages future dialogue between these two fields. For if one wants to understand empowerment, it is to the body that one must look.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Britta Timm Knudsen for reading and commenting previous versions of this article. The paper has benefited from the stimulating discussions at Copenhagen Business School's conference "Imitation, Contagion, Suggestion" in 2015. Thank you also to Daniele Belcari, Lea Muldtofte and the two reviewers for their constructive input, and to Nicola Palladino and Lillo Gangi for their warm support during fieldwork.

Notes

1. Here I refer to the aesthetic Aristotelian meaning of catharsis used in *Poetics* (1902, 1448b 10): "Objects which in themselves we view in pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and dead bodies." Catharsis, or purification of emotions, would in this sense occur through the confrontation with accurate representations of these very same emotions. In the case of the commemoration, it would be the representation of grief that would produce a collective "relief" or catharsis from the losses which each member of the crowd feels, as it is authentic but nonetheless staged, or performed for the event.
2. Libera is an Italian umbrella organisation that coordinates about 1600 different anti-mafia associations.
3. 'Il silenzio è dolo' is the title of a song released in 2015 by Marco Ligabue which was played continuously throughout the event. The title is a paronomasia of "il silenzio è d'oro", one of the fundamental principles of mafia folklore, namely that silence is golden.
4. 1,035 is the current number of names which are known and commemorated. This only includes 'innocent' victims, meaning victims of the mafias that were not part of criminal groups themselves. Importantly, it is the victims of the mafias (plural) that are commemorated, highlighting the recent expansion of the semantic field associated to the term mafia (Jerne, 2015:203-205).

5. For the significant relation between matrix events and events see (Knudsen and Christensen 2015).
6. Today, about 70% of the relatives do not know the truth about who stands behind the homicides (Don Ciotti, 2015).
7. He was investigating the failed attack of Addaura, aimed at judge Falcone. On the night of his assassination, some men broke into his house and stole important documents from his investigation, presumably on the relationship between Palermo's police force and Cosa Nostra (Palazzolo, 2005).
8. See also Puccio-Den (2008; 2011) and Ravveduto (2014) for reflections on the cult of anti-mafia victims as 'secular religion'.
9. After 22 years of annual requests, on March 1 2017, the Chamber of Deputies unanimously voted for March 21 as a national day 'of memory and commitment to commemorate victims of the mafias'.
10. In 1992, Cosa Nostra detonated two bombs, murdering (amongst others) two judges, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who were particularly successful in incarcerating their affiliates. These events are commonly referred to as massacres (*stragi*), due not only to the death tolls they caused but also to the material and media explosion they triggered.
11. My own translation (2008).
12. This phrase was depicted on several banners. It was originally coined by the sheet committee, which was formed in Palermo after the death of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.
13. The paper in fact shows that crowd sociology, most commonly associated with negative descriptions of dangerous political masses (Le Bon 1960), can also be beneficial for reading other kinds of affects.

References

Ahmed, S (2004a) Affective Economies, *Social Text* 79, 22(2):117-139.

Ahmed, S (2004b) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.

Allen, JM and Brown, SD (2011) Embodiment and living memorials: The affective labour of remembering the 2005 London bombings, *Memory Studies*, 4(3) 312–327.

Assmann J (1992) *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich: Bech cited in Erll, A (2011) *Memory in Culture*, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Assman J (1995) Collective Memory and Cultural Identity. Trans. Czaplicka, J, *New German Critique*, 65:125-33.

Aristotle (1902) *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Butcher, S. H. (ed.), 3rd edition. London: Macmillan and Co.

Armstrong EA and Crag S (2006) Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth. *American Sociological Review* (71):724–751.

- Baker KM (1985) Memory and Practice: Politics and the Representation of the Past in Eighteenth-Century France. *Representations* (11):134-164.
- Baker SA (2011) The Mediated Crowd: New Social Media and New Forms of Rioting. *Sociological Research Online* 16(4)21.
- Bell C (1992) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Borch C (2012) *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Borch C (2014) Gabriel Tarde: 1843-1904. In: Helin J et al. (Eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Process Philosophy and Organization Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Canetti E (1981) *Crowds and Power*, trans. Stewart, C. New York: Continuum.
- Daugbjerg M (2014) Patchworking the past: materiality, touch and the assembling of “experience” in the American Civil War re-enactment. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20(7-8): 724-741.
- Dalla Chiesa N (1983) Gli studenti contro la mafia. Note (di merito) per un movimento. In: *Quaderni piacentini*, n. 11.
- Dalla Chiesa N (2014) *Manifesto dell'Antimafia*, Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore.
- DeLanda, M (2006) *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, London: Continuum.
- DeLanda, M (2016) *Assemblage Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- De Luna G (2011) *La Repubblica del Dolore: Le memorie di un'Italia divisa*, Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Dewsbury J D (2000) Performativity and the event: enacting a philosophy of difference, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18(4): 473-496.
- Doerr N (2014) “Memory and Culture in Social Movements”, in Baumgarten B, Daphi P and Ullrich P (Eds.), *Conceptualizing Culture in Social Movement Research*, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Don Ciotti (2015) “La Verità Illumina La Giustizia”, interview by TG1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uh78WbkEYuI> (accessed May 2015).
- Doss, E (2008) War, memory, and the public mediation of affect: The National World War II Memorial and American imperialism, *Memory Studies*, 1(2):227-250.
- Epstein B (2014) “The Decline of the Women’s Movement” pp. 347-353 in Goodwin and Jasper (Eds.) *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, 3rd ed. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Freeman LA, Nienass B and Daniell R (Eds.) (2016) Memory, Materiality, Sensuality, *Memory Studies* (Special Issue), 9(1):3-12.
- Giglioli D (2014) *Critica della Vittima: Un esperimento con l’etica*. Roma: Nottetempo.
- Harrison R (2013) *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Hegel GWF (1896) *Philosophy of Right*. Trans. Dyde, S.W. London: G Bell.
- Hetherington K (2003) Spatial textures: place, touch, and praesentia. *Environment and Planning A*, 35: 1933-1940.

Hobsbawm E and Ranger T (eds.) (2005) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Impastato G (2008) *Amore non ne avremo*. Palermo: Navarra Editore.

Jerne C (2015) From marching for change to producing the change: reconstructions of the Italian anti-mafia movement. *Interface* 7(1):185-214.

Knudsen BT and Christensen DR (2015) Eventful Events: Event-making strategies in contemporary culture. In *Enterprising Initiatives in the Experience Economy*, Oxon: Routledge.

Knudsen BT and Stage C (2015a) *Global Media, Biopolitics and Affect*. New York: Routledge.

Knudsen BT and Stage C (Eds.) (2015b) *Affective Methodologies*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Knusen BT and Ifversen J (2016) Commemoration, heritage and affective ecology - the case of Utøya. In Tolia-Kelly D et al. (eds.) *Heritage, Affect, and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures*, Oxon: Routledge.

Koselleck R (2004) *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* trans. Keith Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kubal T and Becerra R (2014) Social Movements and Collective Memory. *Sociology Compass* 8(6): 865–875.

Latour B (2002) Gabriel Tarde and the End of the Social. In: Joyce P (ed.) *The Social in Question: New Bearings in History and the Social Sciences*. New York: Routledge.

Latour B (2004) How to talk about the body? The normative dimension of science studies, *Body and Society*, 10(2–3): 205–229.

Latour B and Lépinay VA (2009) *The Science of Passionate Interests: An Introduction to Gabriel Tarde's Economic Anthropology*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm.

Le Bon (1960) *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. New York: Viking.

Libera (2015a) “English Brochure”

<http://www.libera.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/70> (accessed Jan 2016).

Libera (2015b) “Cos’è il 21 Marzo”

<http://www.libera.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/472> (accessed Jan 2016).

Lottieri C (2011) *Credere nello stato? Teologia politica e dissimulazione. Da Filippo il Bello a Wikileaks*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore.

Mattoni A (2013) I movimenti antimafia in Italia. In: Ciconte, E et al. (eds.) *Atlante delle mafie: storia, economia, società, cultura, vol. II*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editori.

Moscovici S (1987) Social Collectivities. In: *Essays in honour of Elias Canetti*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, pp. 42-59. Cited in Borch, Christian (2012) *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Niezen R (2014) Gabriel Tarde’s Publics. *History of Human Sciences*, 27(2): 41-59.

Olofsson J (2010) Mass movements in computer-mediated environments: an account on crowds as socio-material densities. *Information, Communication and Society*, 13(5):765–84.

Palazzolo S (2015) “Delitto Agostino: il GIP Riapre l’inchiesta” in Repubblica, 17th June,

http://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/06/17/news/delitto_agostino_il_gip_riapre_l_inchiesta_nuove_indagini_su_faccia_da_mostro_e_sul_depistaggio_-117025589/ (accessed July 2016).

Papailias, P. (2016) Witnessing in the age of the database: Viral memorials, affective publics, and the assemblage of mourning, *Memory Studies*, 9(4):437-454.

Pentzold C et al. (2016) Introduction: Remembering and reviving in a state of flux. In: Hayek, A, Lohmeier, C and Pentzold C (eds.). *Memory in a Mediated World: Remembrance and Reconstruction*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Polletta F (2006) *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Puccio-Den D (2008) The Anti-mafia Movement as Religion? The Pilgrimage to Falcone's Tree. In: Margry, P J (ed.). *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Puccio-Den D (2011) Difficult Remembrance: Memorializing Mafia Victims in Palermo. In: Margry, P J and Sánchez-Carettero, C (eds.) *Grass-root Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, New York: Berghahn Books.

Ravveduto M (2014) La religione civile dell'antimafia. In *Reset*, 20th November, <http://www.reset.it/articolo/martiri-antimafia-religione-civile>, (accessed May 2015).

Renda F (1993) *Resistenza alla mafia come resistenza nazionale*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

Rheingold H (2002) *Smart mobs: The next social revolution*. Cambridge: Perseus Books.

Rudé G (1959) *The Crowd in the French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Santino J (2004) Performative Commemoratives, the Persona and the Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual, and the Field of Folklore. *The Journal of American Folklore* 117(466) 363-372.

Santino U (2007) *Mafie e Globalizzazione*. Trapani: DiGirolamo Editore.

Spinoza BD (2002) *Complete Works*, trans. Shirley S, ed. Morgan ML, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.

Stage C (2013) The online crowd: a contradiction in terms? On the potentials of Gustave Le Bon's crowd psychology in an analysis of affective blogging. *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, 14 (2):211-226.

Surowiecki J (2004) *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few*. London: Abacus.

Tarde G (1901[1989]) *L'Opinion et la foule*. Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France.

Tarde G (1902) *Psychologie Économique*. Paris: Félix Alcan.

Tarde G (1903) *The Laws of Imitation*. Trans. Parsons, E. C. New York: Henry Holt and Co.

Thrift, N (1996) *Spatial Formations*. Sage, London.

Toews D (2003) The New Tarde: Sociology after the End of the Social. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 20 (5) 81-98.

Toews D (2010) Tarde and Durkheim and the Non-Sociological Ground of Sociology. In: Candea, Matei (ed.) *The Social after Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 80–92.

Toscano A (2007) Powers of Pacification: State and Empire in Gabriel Tarde. *Economy and Society* 36(4):597–613.

Waterton E and Watson S (2015) Methods in motion: Affecting heritage research. In: Knudsen BT and Stage C (Eds.) *Affective Methodologies*. Palgrave Macmillan: UK.