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STATE TORTURE: THE ENDURANCE OF DENIAL NARRATIVES IN ITALY

Despite the introduction of a law against torture in 2017, Italy is a State which remains unprepared to face ‘its own’ torture. One way to understand such an issue better is to analyse how Italy has dealt with torture in the past. This case study analyses the only trial on torture ever held in Italy, which involved an accomplice to a terrorist group and a team of State torturers. Adopting the theoretical approach of legal storytelling, the legal process has been analysed using a qualitative method. The analysis showed that events have been construed in two different ways. The first is a story of “literal denial”: the Italian public were told that torture was never used by any of the country's authorities, and the story of the torture victim was not believed and was instead convicted.

The second is a story of “interpretative denial”. When a few policemen partially acknowledged the use of torture, denying it was no longer possible. This led to the authorities trying to neutralise the negativity which arose by adopting strategies of moral disengagement. Torture is almost never mentioned; the term is replaced with labels which are not so morally disturbing, such as common crime. These two stories have been spread by mass media, making dominant a storytelling characterised by literal and interpretative denial. This can be the precursor for a society to be led toward “implicatory denial”: “torture does not concern us”.

Keywords: collective memory, denial, legal storytelling, moral disengagement, political violence, torture.

Introduction. In 1989, Italy ratified the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, committing itself to improving its penal law through the introduction of the crime of torture. Since then, no actual improvement has been made. However, after the sentence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on April 7th 2015¹ regarding the events that occurred during the G8 of 2001 in Genoa's Diaz School, the media hype that arose led the Italian Parliament to hurriedly prepare a controversial bill on torture: Italy's Parliament on July 2017 approved a long-awaited law criminalizing torture, but national and international critics said that it is incompatible with the U.N. Convention against Torture. Before the sentence, independent research projects had already documented that torture was perpetrated during the G8 of Genoa.²⁻⁵

Two of the writers also provided the ECHR with an expert scientific report on the tortures perpetrated in the prison of Bolzaneto.⁶ Thanks to the Court in Strasbourg, the Italian public 'discovered' that torture had been perpetrated in its own country by the police, a shock triggered by TV programmes and newspaper articles.

As demonstrated by Rejali,⁷ torture has not in fact disappeared from society. On the contrary, it evolved, becoming more subtle and hard to identify. Modern methods of torture have been developed during the years by western states, such as United States and France.⁸ In democratic societies torture is kept out of sight of citizens and becomes less bloody-thirsty since nowadays it can rely on medical, psychiatric and psychological knowledge as medical, psychiatric and psychological knowledge. Moreover, in order to conceal torture from citizens, democratic states use specific storytelling strategies. For this reason, Stanley Cohen⁹ argues that the history of torture can be addressed from at least three points of view: (a) the history of the deed: particular forms of human violence that are designated as 'torture' (for instance, the distinction between physical torture and "white" torture; b) the history of the law, with the oscillation between the extreme of tolerance and prohibition; c) the history of torture narratives: the words that hide or justify torture.

Also according to Cohen,⁹ this third story characterises particularly contemporary societies (both dictatorships and democracies); it has been increasingly utilised, especially after Abu-Ghraib and Guantanamo,¹⁰ in the public debate. Even before the rise of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, numerous other events allow the analysis of the vocabulary of concealment and justification of torture. In fact, the modern dimension of torture can be seen in many different conflicts worldwide, too many to mention here. In Korea, for example, the CIA summoned North American psychiatric expertise to develop the model of manipulation of the human psyche which became known by the acronym DDD (Dependency, Debility, Dread).¹¹ After the failure in Indochina, the French saw torture as morally justifiable against "subversive" Algerians. The North American military school in Fort Bragg gathered the experiences gathered in these crisis areas and made them available to Latin American dictatorships, under the legitimate label of "national security". In these cases and others, States have opportunistically used the rhetoric of 'minor evils' in broader conflicts, such as the fight against terrorism, to erode human rights.¹² Few studies have been conducted on denial related to state violations. Most of these studies focus on macro events, such as the denial of the Armenian genocide¹³ and the Holocaust,¹⁴ and military dictatorship,¹⁵ whilst there are only a few examples of crimes committed by democratic states.^{16, 17}

The narrative through which contemporary societies deny, minimize or legitimize torture is worthy of greater investigation. One of these concerns political terrorism in Italy. Adopting the perspective of the history of the

narratives of concealment and justification of torture proposed by Cohen,⁹ this article analyses how histories of torture are intentionally marginalised and excluded from Italian collective memory through a case study. The results will be discussed and related to the issues of the Italian legislation on torture and to a pervading culture of impunity among police forces. Background

A special team of torturers

From the late 1960s, Italy faced a period of socio-political turmoil that lasted for two decades. During this period of time, several extremist groups, both right- and left-wing, started an armed struggle against the state and tried to undermine the democratic system. In this particular socio-political context, Italy witnessed the rise of the Red Brigades (BR), one of the largest and most durable left-wing terrorist organization of the post Second World War period that carried out more than 14,000 acts of violence during the first 10 years of its activity.¹² During its first phase, BR implemented the 'Armed Propaganda', a strategy consisting in actions mainly designed to acquire visibility. They then took the armed struggle to a higher level and targeted the representatives of the democratic system, such as parliamentarians and magistrates. This period started with the kidnapping of the public prosecutor, Mario Sossi, and ended with the murder of Aldo Moro, the leader of the largest political party at that time. After the killing of Aldo Moro, they targeted General James Lee Dozier. At that point in time, he was the deputy Chief of Staff at NATO's Southern Europe land forces headquarters and, in the eyes of BR, he represented the emblem of capitalism and United States power in Europe. On December 17th 1981, he was kidnapped in Verona and taken to a secret location. In order to find Dozier, Italian authorities assembled a pool of investigators, and unofficially asked for the intervention of the 'Hail Mary Five', a special team led by a functionary of the Italian counter-terrorism department Ufficio Centrale per le Investigazioni Generali e Operazioni Speciali (UCIGOS) under the command of 'Professor De Tormentis'. This nickname was given by Vice Commissioner Giuseppe Improta after he assisted on the interrogation techniques adopted by the Professor and his squad; it of course referred to the torment inflicted on suspects. The pool of investigators conducted an interrogation of Paolo Galati, who was not a regular member of BR, who disclosed where Dozier was being held. Then the Italian Special Weapons Attack Team, Nucleo Operativo Centrale Speciale (NOCS), successfully conducted an operation that freed Dozier and led to the arrest of five members of the BR.

NOCS was created by the Minister of the Interior, Francesco Cossiga, in 1974, at the suggestion of Prefect Emilio Santillo. As a special counter-terrorism unit, it has specialized in high-risk operations such as hostage rescue, the capture of dangerous criminals and VIP escorts. Its members are selected from the best martial arts experts that graduate from the Italian

Police Sports Group (Fiamme Oro) and are physically and mentally trained to operate under extreme circumstances. Since its creation, the special unit closely collaborated with the counter-terrorism bureau, then with UCIGOS.

The Vice Commissioner selected men willing to carry out special tasks from NOCS who formed the Hail Mary Five and on several occasions broke the law. In order to acquire information as quickly as possible during the interrogations, they utilized techniques of torture consisting of pouring several liters of water and salt directly in the throat of the detainee, mock executions and threatening death and beatings. All of this was performed under the direction of the Vice Commissioner, who was an expert in such techniques, which were also utilized by French soldiers during the Algerian War of Independence, and by Italian Fascist Police during the Regime.¹⁸

The motto of NOCS 'as silent as the night' (Sicut Nox Silentes) effectively represents the modus operandi of the Hail Mary Five; both their existence and operations were not legally recorded and their actions were covered up by their superiors. During operations, such as retrieving a prisoner from prison, they wore balaclavas and utilized vehicles not belonging to the police to conceal their identity and they took detainees to isolated locations, far from the sight of others (and "as silent as night".)

Enrico Triaca is one of the persons who underwent such treatment. He had been the printmaker in charge of printing the Red Brigades' press releases. After his arrest in 1978, he publicly stated that he had been tortured, but the authorities did not accept this. Moreover, he was prosecuted for calumny. This history illustrates the strategies of storytelling systematically used by the Italian Government to deny the involvement of police officers in acts of torture.

Denial and moral justification

According to Stanley Cohen,¹⁹ declarations of denial are statements that show that something never happened or what happened is of a different nature than what it seems. Denial appears through three main categories: literal, interpretative and implicatory. Literal denial consists of a flat refusal that something has happened, therefore the response is simply that a story is not accepted as true, or is false ("There has never been any violence" for example). In contrast, interpretative denial might recognize that something has happened, but confers on it a different interpretation of its meaning (such as "There has never been any torture, only an enhanced and legal interrogation"). Lastly, implicatory denial rejects every possible moral and psychological implication arising from the event, producing a condition of indifference²⁰ (as in "So what? I can't do anything about the kids being murdered by death squads in the streets of Brazil"). These categories of denial can be employed on three levels: on the personal level, when a single person denies related or familiar events; on the official level, when institutions and governmental organizations, often supported by mass media,

devote themselves to hiding illegalities or massacres; and, on the cultural level, when entire societies let troubling events slip into oblivion. To summarize, denial involves cognitive aspects (not recognizing what happened), emotional aspects (not feeling disturbing emotions), moral aspects (not recognizing injustice and responsibility) and aspects concerning the action (not taking action in order to cope or deal with events).

In the sphere of the official narration about torture, the hegemonic perspective of denial¹⁹ represents the operationalization on a large scale of strategies of moral disengagement.²¹ Albert Bandura²¹ argues that moral self-regulation can be selectively deactivated. He introduced the concept of moral disengagement to describe the process at the bottom of this deactivation; through moral disengagement, people feel free from guilt, an emotion that originates from behaviours that violate certain internalized standards of ethics. People can therefore make unjust and unethical decisions more easily. Moral deactivation is made possible through eight co-related mechanisms of disengagement. These mechanisms include moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, distribution of responsibility, disregarding or distortion of the consequences, dehumanization and attribution of blame. The first three mechanisms (moral justification, euphemistic labeling and advantageous comparison) operate in order to make reprehensible conduct more acceptable. Through euphemistic labeling, people adopt a neutral language in order to describe immoral behaviour as less damaging when such behaviours are compared with more harmful ones, making the perpetrator's actions less despicable.

The next three mechanisms (displacement of responsibility, distribution of responsibility, disregard or distortion of the consequences) are employed to distort or obscure the consequences of harmful actions. When people believe they have acted on the basis of superior orders, they can transfer the responsibility for their own actions to the authority, denying any personal responsibility for the damaging actions. Moreover, negative group behaviour can trigger the spread of responsibility, because not one of its members will feel individually responsible for the collective destructive behaviour. These two tactics of moral disengagement are particularly used in organizations where the members act as a team under the guidance of an authority. People also try to lessen the harmful effects of their actions by not considering or twisting the consequences associated with a particular act. As Milgram²² showed, when people have a clear awareness of the suffering they cause to a defenseless victim, they are less likely to continue their actions.

Finally, the mechanisms of dehumanization and attribution of blame affect those who suffer the harmful actions, altering the perception of others. Research has systematically proved the tendency of individuals to develop a 'us-against-them' mindset, based on the membership of a group;^{23, 24} this means that those who are located outside of the group are more exposed to

damaging actions not regulated by inhibitory ethical standards, since they are perceived as undeserving or even devoid of human qualities.^{4, 25} Similarly, the attribution of blame can exonerate the perpetrator, transferring the blame onto those who suffer damage. Therefore, moral disengagement is an essential precursor of unethical decision-making.

On several occasions, the denial of torture communicated through official discourse was “literal”: the event literally never happened.²⁰ For example, on March 22nd 1982 during a parliamentary session, the Minister of the Interior, Virginio Rognoni, spoke on behalf of the Italian Government, responding to the claim of torture of members of BR:²⁶ “The practice of ‘torture’ – a term which is repugnant, repudiated first of all by our consciousness of men – is extraneous, and so it must be, to the behaviours and rules of a democratic and civil state, in which – without any possible misinterpretation – the absolute respect for laws and for the rule of law must prevail. (...) Even in difficult and harsh periods such as these, of anger and dismay, we never surrender to any authoritarian temptation, nor to any suggestion of reply which goes beyond the institutional borders”. During his speech, Minister Rognoni also stated that such accusations are an attempt to discredit the state in the eyes of its citizens by “A terrorism which hates this state and attributes to it every sort of iniquity and vileness, especially attributing to it a violent face and practice”.²⁶ This example of literal denial seeks not only to state that nothing happened, but also labels the accusations of torture as “subversive propaganda”. Literal denial leads to the silencing of alternative narratives and the attempt to allocate a specific ‘truth’ in a hegemonic position. Political control of torture operates on different levels. Both literal and interpretive denial, the latter being when official discourse recognizes an event but tries to neutralize accusations against the state by giving it a different meaning, can be found in Italy.²⁰ These are discourses repeatedly pronounced inside the Italian Parliament and records of trials for cases of torture.

Method

Conceptual framework

In Italy, criminal proceedings involve a legal process through which the judicial bodies, in several phases, manage to establish and define the existence of a crime. Its starting point is the acquisition of the *notitia criminis* by the criminal police or the enquiring judiciary (public prosecutor). The validity of the crime report is verified during preliminary investigations. This phase involves collecting evidence and either leads to the motion being dismissed due to groundlessness, or the commitment for trial. The conclusion of this phase is a final decision reached by tribunal called the “first grade judgment”. The next step, which is not compulsory but is frequently made use of, corresponds to an appeal of this judgment made on behalf of either the defence or prosecution; it involves a discussion of the

points and arguments of the first verdict which are considered incorrect or an erroneous application of law. Even the final decision of this second stage can be contested, leading to a third stage of judgment named “Cassazione”, which ends the whole criminal proceedings. In all cases, the verdicts pronounced at these three stages are justified with a motivation for the sentences. Story and narration are therefore essential elements in the legal process, as they represent the main instrument available for organizing and interpreting partial information and fragmentary depositions.²⁸ Therefore, during a trial, judges do not just passively record the information gathered, but they actively elaborate on the evidence, which is often produced in a disorderly manner and at different times, and try to give the evidence an internal cohesion, shaping the elements into a story. Based on this story, judges make their decisions.

According to Bennett and Feldman,²⁹ such a story is a reconstruction of events in narrative form. Every story is characterized by five elements: agent, act, scene, agency and purpose. The judge can reconstruct different versions of what happened because several connections can emerge between the various elements of a story, generating different narrative plots. However, among these, one will be more plausible than the others. The criteria that define the plausibility of the story are coherence (as in lack of contradictions), credibility (as in conformity between the story and the knowledge of real or hypothetical events of everyday life), and completeness (a greater amount of considered evidence makes the story more plausible). If a judge builds a story that satisfies these criteria, this story will be accepted as the only explanation of the events and used as a basis to formulate a verdict. Conversely, if different interpretations of the events are equally plausible, the decision will be characterized by a greater level of uncertainty.³⁰

Once the judge chooses the most coherent story, he will compare it with the articles of the penal code, applying the concrete legal situation (namely the story) with the abstract legal situation (namely the code). Moreover, during the reconstruction of a story regarding torture, the argumentative rules utilized by judges to connect the five elements of the narration become crucial. During this process, legalism encourages interpretations and comments, enriching the dispute over the meaning of words and events. Legal discourse also facilitates interpretative denial by using an infinite set of manoeuvres or strategies.³¹ As JR Cohen has argued,³¹ legalism is conducted in a “wholly non-pictorial world” which invariably yields an opaque version of reality. In Italy, in the case of state violence during the Genoa G8 summit, from the beginning, institutions provided denial declarations in a unilateral way with the aim to silence the events. Until the time of the legal processes, when in front of hundreds of victims, dozens of lawyers and million citizens, that required a responsible account for what happened, it was no longer possible to deny all the events. So, as

well as to continue to deny some facts, the legal discourse constructed around the policemen's testimonies during the trials (Diaz and Bolzaneto) has been characterized by a wide range of interpretative denial and moral disengagement strategies supported by an embarrassing series of contradictions, vision changes, silences.⁵ Given the tendency of authorities' official speeches for denial, the strategies of moral disengagement described by Bandura²¹ become a useful instrument to understand the narrative connections utilized by judges to reach the narrative plot of the motivation behind the judgement.

Based on this conceptual framework, we analysed the first and only trial regarding torture held in Italy until now. The agents involved were an accomplice of a terrorist group and a team of state officials expert in the use of torture. The analysis has been conducted on the entire process of the case, from the first grade of judgement to the third.

Data Corpus

Our analysis was based on the content of the sentence pronouncement produced by the Appeal Court of Perugia, Penal Section, on October 15th 2013, through which the final decision was announced. The sentence contains the whole trial procedure, from the first stage of judgement to the third.

The content comprises of 5,614 words which were submitted to a process of thematic analysis. The events covered by the court case were the following. The sentence of the first grade of judgement of 7th September 1978 reports that, on 17th May 1978, Enrico Triaca was arrested in Rome during the investigations of the kidnapping and killing of Hon. Aldo Moro and the men of his escort. On the same day of his arrest, he was interrogated in the police headquarters of Castro Pretorio in Rome. During the interrogation, he spoke about his relationship with a person named Giulio, who he met in the summer of 1976. At that time, Giulio asked Triaca to open a printing works, and revealed himself to be a member of the BR disclosing the names of some of the members of the group. After the agreement, Triaca found a place suitable for opening a printing works and received a gun and an amount of money from Giulio, both recovered later during police searches. On 18th May, the day after his arrest, Enrico Triaca wrote and signed a statement containing some of the names of other BR members.

However, on 19th June the same year, Enrico Triaca retracted all the declarations made up until that moment and declared that he had been subjected to torture immediately before his first questioning. He specified that on the evening of 18th May, he was forced to get into a van with two men wearing vests and helmets. He was blindfolded and, after travelling on a stretch of road, he was taken out, undressed and tied to a desk. At this point someone covered his nose, while somebody else started pouring into his mouth water with powder added, which had an incomprehensible taste; he

was incited to confess. Then, after returning to the police headquarters, he was brought again to the security room. Even after such a retraction, in addition to other crimes, Enrico Triaca was committed for trial.

In 1978, the Tribunal of Rome VIII Penal Section condemned him for calumny due to his recantation and for what he stated about the episode of torture. The sentence was confirmed by the Appeal Court of Rome on October 26th 1984, and became irrevocable after the judgment of the Supreme Court of Cassation on October 4th 1985, which also rejected the related appeal.

Through a deed lodged on December 11th 2012 at the Tribunal of Rome, Enrico Triaca submitted an application for revision of the judgment. The application recalled the different phases of the criminal proceedings that led to the sentence arising from his retraction, which was the first time he spoke about the torture suffered.

On June 18th 2013, the Appeal Court of Perugia acquired the application for a revision and on October 15th 2013 acquitted Enrico Triaca of the crime of calumny.

Instruments and Procedures

The text has been analysed using thematic analysis,³² a qualitative method used for analyzing data by identifying patterns and organizing them into themes.³³ Themes that emerge from the analysis are important to the description of the phenomenon. Initially, the process involves a familiarization with the data by reading and re-reading the text with the creation of initial codes. Then, codes were grouped into potential sub-themes, and sub-themes into themes. Each theme was reviewed to ensure that it reflected both its associated coded extracts and the entire data set. Finally, themes were defined and refined by attributing clear definitions in categories. The coding scheme has been developed through deductive and inductive methods, aimed at including both patterns suggested by literature and patterns arising from textual data. Furthermore, following the narrative model of Bennet and Feldman,²⁹ we identified the elements corresponding to the five categories which constitute a story: agent, action, place, psychological element and method of execution. Bennett and Feldman argue that, in a good story, all elements are connected to a central action and nothing is left standing on its own. The context provides a full and compelling account of why the central action should have developed in the way that it has. The five categories represent the anchor of the story. Lastly, the qualitative analysis software program Atlas-ti facilitated the management and retrieval of information.

Results

Through the narrative analysis of the legal proceedings, we identified two distinct themes inside the corpus of the text, that refer to two different stories, which are described below.

First theme: a story of 'literal denial'

The narrative structure of the legal proceedings from the first grade of judgment to the third is as follows:

1. Agent: Enrico Triaca;
2. Act: pressing charges for torture;
3. Scene: the place where torture was made is unspecified and unknown;
4. Agency: after being blindfolded and taken from the police headquarters, Triaca was put into a van and moved to an unknown place: two men wearing helmets and vests undressed him, tied him to a desk and, after covering his nose, started pouring into his mouth water that had powder added to it, which had an incomprehensible taste, he was incited to confess (waterboarding technique);
5. Purpose: Triaca is described as collaborative, inclined to confession and well-disposed to the questioning.

The first juridical story does not identify any practice of torture while, at the same time, identifies Enrico Triaca guilty of the crime of calumny. The core of the story is structured on the psychological traits of Enrico Triaca: he is described as a collaborative person that makes statements useful for the inquiry. He supplied new elements and his statements were confirmed more than once. Therefore, his spontaneous willingness to confess makes the torture scenario not credible. In juridical-narrative terms, the purposes of the agent would be the logical evidence in order to deny torture. From this analysis, a first theme emerged: literal denial. The Court of Rome, considering useless any additional enquiry called for by the defense, is illustrated by the following extract: "The reason why someone should have committed torture has not arisen"

The policemen called to testify denied that any form of violence was been used against Triaca, leading to the logical conclusion that it was unnecessary to resort to torture as the arrested was cooperative.

Triaca's lawyer tried to challenge such storytelling, inviting an in-depth investigation about the place where the torture had taken place and about the policemen, but without obtaining any result. In fact, the judge ruled unnecessary any sort of in-depth analysis requested by the defence.

The outcome, built on the psychological typology of the arrested, was never questioned and the judgments of the second and third stage confirmed the storytelling utilised during the first stage of the trial.

Second theme: a story of "interpretative denial"

Recently, some police officers and politicians released interviews and wrote books making partial acknowledgements regarding the use of waterboarding (which in the past was named algerina, as the technique was utilized by French soldiers in Algeria) to extort confessions from members of the Red Brigades. The most notorious case concerns Giuliano Amato, who

had already been Chairman of the Board of the Italian Government and Minister several times.³⁴ These new extrajudicial elements helped Triaca's lawyer to ask for the reopening of the calumny case. This is the narrative structure of the revised judgment:

1. Agent: police officers;
2. Act: performing torture;
3. Scene: the place where torture took place is unspecified and unknown;
4. Agency: after being blindfolded and taken from the police headquarters, Triaca was put into a van and moved to an unknown place: two men wearing helmet and vest undressed him, tied him to a desk and after covering his nose started pouring into his mouth water added with powder added to it, which had an incomprehensible taste, he was incited to confess (waterboarding technique);
5. Purpose: state security.

In the second story, elements 3 and 4 are identical to those in the first, while elements 1, 2 and especially 5, that is, agent, act and purpose, are different, as now the focus is on those who committed torture, namely, Professor de Tormentis and his team. In this case, the logical evidence of the first story (there was no reason to commit torture as the arrested party was willing to confess during the interrogation) cannot be invoked as a narrative link. In fact, some of the police officers called to testify confirmed what had already been circulated by the media.

From this analysis, the second theme of interpretative denial emerged, based on a sub-theme: moral disengagement. More specifically, on the one hand, the court supported the truthfulness of the charges made by Triaca (who will be acquitted from the accusation of calumny). On the other hand, the purpose of the second story will be characterised by reasoning concerning moral disengagement, strategies used to neutralise the negative event. This sub-theme includes four strategies classified in: moral justification, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, euphemistic labeling.

The first category, moral justification, revealed that waterboarding was employed in order to cope with the emergency of terrorism, to protect citizens and, more specifically, to bring General Dozier's kidnapping to an end; here, some narrative fragments used to justify torture on the base of a testimony provided by Salvatore Genova (a "Hail May Five" member): "In order to face the emergency represented by General Dozier's kidnapping"; "On several occasions such practices were utilised during the investigation on General Dozier's kidnapping and to bring about Dozier's liberation".

The second category was advantageous comparison; what has been done is compared to events considered more negative than the first, for instance the danger represented by the increasing number of massacres

committed by BR. In a declaration, Nicola Ciocia (alias Professor De Tormentis), not explicitly admitting the practice of torture, reported that “The Red Brigades were the first to commit massacres and if not stopped with a determined action of the State, they would have continued”.

The third category, displacement of responsibility, morally disengages the torturers, shifting responsibility towards the top of the hierarchy; Salvatore Genova, a hail Mary member, declared that he and the other policemen conducted “practices of torture supported by high state officers”; they proved to be flawless executors as they appeared to efficaciously and efficiently accomplish their duties, obeying their orders and did not feel responsible for the harm inflicted.

Lastly, the fourth is euphemistic labeling: the term “torture” is replaced with indirect and ambiguous linguistic forms, such as: “use of peculiar techniques”, “those methods”, “special treatments”, “special practices”, “illicit practices”, “a practice designed to weaken the ability to resist and encourage to collaborate”.

Discussion

The torture suffered by Enrico Triaca analysed in this article is composed of at least two stories. The first one is a story of literal denial; it is a narration that tells Italian public opinion that the legitimate authorities of this country never resorted to torture, not even during the most dramatic moments of the violent 1970s and 1980s. The victim that asked to be considered as a victim of torture was not only ignored, but also condemned.

The second one is a story of interpretative denial. When, over the years, some of the people involved started to talk and acknowledge the truth, it was no longer possible to deny the torture, so (thanks to the strategies of moral disengagement) efforts were employed to neutralize the negative events represented by the torture. The police could no longer pretend that nothing happened, but they put forward the view that events were not as damaging as they appeared. Torture is almost never mentioned, preferring linguistic labels that are more neutral and less disturbing on the moral plane. Even when we talk about “illegal treatment”, the stakes were high: the security of the country against the barbarity of terrorism.

These stories have been elaborated and massively circulated by television and newspapers; for example, a daily newspaper named L'Unità, despite being a left-wing newspaper and usually critical towards the government, on 8th November 1978 published news regarding the sentence of calumny against Triaca with the following comment: “Triaca's trial is therefore closed, also because even one of his lawyers hinted that the story told by the member of the Red Brigades was only a bluff”. In a country where storytelling is dominated by literal and interpretative denial, a cultural base arises which enables the entire society to slip towards implicatory denial, as if torture has nothing to do with the Italian people, as if this issue

did not concern them at all.³⁵ Hence, there is inaction and lack of interest (the interest being depleted by a banal rhetoric of indignation and firmness) that characterize opposition to torture.³⁶

Essentially, Italy is a country that forgets its own torture. After the judgment of 2013 which, despite its limits, acknowledged that Triaca was telling the truth, the authorities did not systematically tackle the problem, nor establish any supervisory committee aimed at preventing torture, so that what happened would not happen again. Speaking about torture in Italy means speaking about removal, a removal that comes back again, as in the case of Genoa's G8 in 2001. In such a case, coherently with the national denial, it was an international institution (the European Court of Human Rights) that pronounced the forbidden words: "Torture in Italy".

Amnesty International³⁷ reported that "The Italian authorities [...] failed to established effective mechanisms to prevent arbitrary and abusive use of force by police. Neither have they adopted concrete measures to ensure investigation and prosecution of all law enforcement agents suspected of torture, excessive use of force and other human rights violations." These statements are consistent with the findings of the European Court, which further assessed that the police operation in the Diaz-Pertini school had been perpetrated with "a punitive aim, an aim of reprisal, seeking to cause the humiliation and the physical and mental suffering of the victims".³⁸ Once again, torture occurred in Italy, the authorities did not take any concrete steps to prosecute the perpetrators and, on the contrary, engaged in denial strategies.³⁸

Italy deals with the issue of torture only through inconclusive public debates, where victims ask for justice and the government denies the crimes. This situation occurred both at the time of the Red Brigades and after G8 2001 in Genoa. In the first circumstance, only the public acknowledgement of officials involved in the crimes led to a reconsideration of the events. On the contrary, after 2001, despite the consistency of evidence and special reports on the event, only the judgment of the European Court was able to properly address the issue and assess that torture had occurred. Even though, in both cases, the individual criminal responsibility of the perpetrators had not been established as a result of the Italian authorities lack of willingness to act.

Echeverria³⁹ states that "These crimes [torture] are systematic and/or widespread precisely in the countries where there are no remedies and safeguards in place to prevent and deter violations." In 2017, Italy has finally made a torture crime in its penal code. But the new law defines torture as a "common" crime (*reato comune*) rather than a "proper" crime strictly related to public officials (*reato proprio*). This, however, do not catch the essence of torture: abuse of power by the public official. It is quite clear that certain political groups and the police unions are inclined to oppose or at least limit criminalization of coercive conduct by law enforcement officials. Against

this background, the present article focused on the denial narratives in Italy, it serves the purpose of illustrating this kind of obstacle when a state is invited to introduce a separately defined offence of torture. In fact, the Italian Parliamentary debate over the definition of torture shows the presence of denial narratives: “torture does not concern us”; “it’s a common crime; “it is a crime already punished by ordinary laws”; and so on. The "bad" Italian law against torture, at least in part, is the result of a widespread culture of denial.

We are witnessing a global crisis on torture. In fact, the refugee crisis is a torture crisis. Many refugees have clear evidence of human rights abuses in the countries from which they came. Organized violence, including torture, is a tool of governments in many countries of the world.

Faced with torture, the task of psychologists is to offer their professional skills, paying particular attention to the articulation of the individual suffering with reference to the social context. Moreover, as researchers, psychologists are required to document and witness the drama of torture, often challenging hegemonic storytelling. In fact, at least regarding Italy, the prevention of torture requires a project of collective memory in order to overcome the current state of social denial. Researchers have the task of deconstructing the language of denial, identifying the methods of communication by which the political authorities and the police try to regulate the public memory of the practices of torture and reveal the strategies employed to delegitimise the testimonies of torture so as to avoid any moral censure. The official line on torture definitely plays a vital role in the construction and preservation of social legitimacy. A speech is closely related to the historical and political circumstances in which the "exceptional measures" were granted to, particularly, law enforcement bodies. So the control over knowledge is a crucial aspect in the exercise of power.

However, no narrative is omnipotent and omnipresent, and, in society, counter-narratives are formed and circulated. Therefore, there is a space for alternative speeches from the official storytelling. In this way, this article hopes to have enriched the debates regarding torture practised by the state, contributing to the knowledge of the processes of denial operating in Italian society.

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