

The junctions of memory

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Abstract: To teach about the Holocaust represents nowadays one of the most challenging and educational activities a teacher might cope with. In the last ten years the International Master on Holocaust Studies at Roma Tre University has been educating and training teachers and educators to inform, explain and deepen this topic. The Master's graduates have therefore represented a significant resource in the field of Holocaust research and education in Italy and abroad. On October 27, 2017, two teachers, who have been engaged in the Holocaust education for years, graduated from the Master, presenting their dissertations, two extremely interesting studies on the Holocaust education and on memory. Francesca Rennis discussed her work *Aspetti di didattica della Shoah*, focused on the connection between the teaching of history and that of the Holocaust. Luigi Saito presented his dissertation *Sami Modiano e la sindrome del sopravvissuto*, where he dealt with the issues of trauma, resilience and the survivors' syndrome. Sami Modiano and his wife, Selma, attended to the lecture.

Key words: Holocaust, Education, Trauma, Survivor, Survivors' Syndrome, Resilience.

To teach about the Holocaust represents nowadays one of the most challenging and engaging educational activities a teacher or a professor might cope with. The challenge depends on the fact that only in the last two decades the Holocaust has become an autonomous topic whose study needs a specific and peculiar approach, different from that applied to other historical events.

Undoubtedly in the history of mankind the Holocaust may be considered an event whose specificities are not only linked to the event itself, but also to its effects on many aspects of human life and to the long-term consequences concerning the educational approach to the event. It is crucial to remember what happened but, at the same time, it is fundamental to understand how to remember and to let the memory be meaningful.

In the last ten years the International Master on Holocaust Studies at Roma Tre University has been educating and training teachers and educators to inform, explain and deepen this topic which is extremely complex.

The Master's graduates have therefore represented a significant resource in the field of Holocaust research and education in Italy and abroad, both for their specialized knowledge and for their professionalism dealing with a topic, which is sometimes only approximately known. These scholars or teachers are aware that the Holocaust needs to be studied focusing on its several specific features, reflecting on research issues and on educational strategies.

They have played an important role in both these activities, writing essays, lecturing in seminars or schools, and demonstrated how the Holocaust needs to be dealt with in a specialized and pedagogically efficient way.

On October 27th 2017 two teachers, who have been engaged in the Holocaust education for years, graduated from the Master, presenting their dissertations, two extremely interesting studies on the Holocaust education and on memory. Francesca Rennis discussed her work *Aspetti di didattica della Shoah*, where she examined the building and the development of the Holocaust

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education, focusing on some issues which the scholars and the teachers have coped with in the last two decades.

During the debate with the supervisor, Professor David Meghnagi, director of the Master, Mrs. Rennis explained that her purpose was to reflect on the pedagogical and methodological meaning of the Holocaust education and on “the potential which derives from the interconnection between the Holocaust education and the teaching of history.”

The discussion of Luigi Saito’s dissertation, *Sami Modiano e la sindrome del sopravvissuto*, was particularly significant since Sami Modiano and his wife, Selma, attended the lecture.

Sami had been deported from Rhodes to Auschwitz Birkenau when he was thirteen. He is the only survivor of his family and has devoted the last twenty years to be a witness in the schools and during the memory trips to the camp.

Luigi Saito has a deep affection for Sami: with him, for his personal experiences, he shares the burden of trauma, the effort and the need to readjust to life, the attention to the youngsters

To Luigi, Sami and his wife “have been a reference point, they have substituted the overturned parental figure, the elder the son has to take care of. I lived with Sami the most beautiful years of his life, as Sami defines them.”

These are the last years, that Sami has devoted to witnessing his experiences as a deportee and a survivor. He has generously shared his memories with the students, facing his past.

Luigi Saito’s work aimed at recovering “from Sami Modiano’s life his memories of the experiences he had lived, in the light of what he felt at that time ... it is the story of the soul of a man who tried to leave Auschwitz an infinite number of times.”

This is why Saito’s dissertation is focused on resilience: he identified in Sami Modiano’s biography the pathway to cope with “some traumas, even though they have never been totally overcome, starting from the places and the times that had interrupted his life continuum.”

This is what David Meghnagi defines *infranto*, the feeling of being broken, which all the survivors had to try to cope with, and whose devastating impact emerged as the survivor’s syndrome.

Luigi Saito has identified its symptoms in Sami and has proved that “it involves the family, both of the survivor and of the drowned.”

From this point of view, the presence of Selma, to whom a chapter of the dissertation has been devoted, was fundamental and extremely meaningful. To her and to her silent support were dedicated the following words, written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez: "If one day you won't feel like talking to anybody, call me: we will be silent together."

Selma and Sami, silent, holding hands, listened to the discussion of the dissertation. Later they commented, talked with those attending, witnessing once again the bond among history, memory, humanity which has to inspire our work on the Holocaust.