

Trauma and Memory

Four-monthly European Review of Psychoanalysis and Social Science

2021, Volume 9, Number 1 (April)

ISSN 2282-0043

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Registered at the Court of Rome on Nov. 8, 2012, no. 305/2012 (Iscrizione al Tribunale di Roma n. 305/2012 dell'8 novembre 2012)

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The *Other* and memory in Roger Bastide

Teresa Grande*

Abstract. This article investigates the figure of the French sociologist and anthropologist Roger Bastide in relation to the theory of memory that he elaborates in the context of his studies of Afro-Brazilian cultures. Following the studies of Maurice Halbwachs and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bastide elaborates an idea of memory as the result of a dialectic interplay between the processes of collective memory and those of *bricolage*. This idea of memory could be useful in a more general analysis of the role of the past in contacts between different cultures.

Keywords: Otherness; Collective Memory; *Bricolage*.

1. Introduction

In the period between the early 1930s and the early 1970s, Roger Bastide (1898-1974) produced a vast and multiform work, in which he was able to integrate French sociology and anthropology (Comte, Durkheim, Girard, Gurvitch, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss), German sociology (Weber, Tönnies, Simmel), Freud's psychoanalysis and the American social sciences (Cooley, Mead and the Chicago School, Herskovits). In his vast oeuvre, the two perspectives of the social sciences, anthropology and sociology, are always present and often follow innovative twists and turns. In fact, Bastide rejects the rigid academic distinction between sociology and anthropology and defines himself as a sociologist, according to an idea, however - Ravelet (1996, p. 19) points out - that acknowledges him as an anthropologist and ethnologist at the same time, with strong interests in psychology. In the preface to his best-known work, *Les religions africaines au Brésil*, Georges Balandier (1995) defines Bastide's sociology as a «*sociologie de la rencontre*», animated by «a search for differences, curiosity for all forms of otherness, openness to knowledge beyond the limits of disciplinary rationality and rejection of exclusive scientific affiliations» (*Ibid.*, p. VI). For these reasons Bastide's work is richly complex and difficult to catalogue, and perhaps for this considerations it is still not completely known and studied (at least in Italy).

The aim of this article is to investigate the figure of the French sociologist and anthropologist in relation to his theories on the theme of memory assumed in the relationship with the elsewhere and with the other, concretely represented in Bastide's life and thought by the Brazilian lands and its populations of African origin. It was in the connection with Brazil that Bastide made the relations between cultures his primary object of study. And this interest is his starting point for the development of his original approach to memory, starting from the observation that «African remnants in America are a privileged case of collective memory. So we can use it - he says - to test both the relevance and the limits of Maurice Halbwachs' theory [*of memory*]» (Bastide, 2013, p. 46). Hence Bastide starts from a critical assumption of the theory of collective memory elaborated by Halbwachs in the volumes *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), *La Topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre sainte* (1941) and *La mémoire collective* (1950) in order to attain an idea of memory as the result of a dialectical interplay between the processes of collective memory and those of *bricolage* (a notion which, as we shall see, he draws from Lévi-Strauss), and at the same time recognizing a central place for memory in sociology, up to the point of arguing that any sociology of the imaginary and knowledge can only be conceived from a preliminary sociology of memory (Bastide, 2013, p. 38).

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2. A sociologist between two worlds

In a profound interweaving of biographical path, research practice and theoretical reflection, the two worlds Bastide inhabited take on a strong relevance: France, his land of origin and training in the social sciences, and Brazil, the place where he was nourished by the contrasts that this land offered to his gaze, becoming a source of experience and new knowledge.

In the period between the two world wars Bastide studied at the University of Bordeaux - where he got the *Agrégation* of Philosophy in 1924 - taught in several French high schools and wrote his first articles. During these years he was particularly close to Gaston Richard, his professor at the University of Bordeaux, who introduced him to René Worms' *International Institute of Sociology* and the *Revue internationale de sociologie*. From Richard he also drew an interest - rare in the French sociology of those years - in German sociology, in particular Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, Leopold von Wiese and Georg Simmel. Bastide was in these years more influenced by Richard's thought than by Durkheim's. It should be remembered that although Durkheim and Richard had attended together the *École Normale Supérieure* and were later colleagues at the University of Bordeaux, their paths separated in the years around 1910. Later, after Durkheim's death, Richard began to criticize Durkheim's positions and his lack of attention to the individual dimension.

In this context, Bastide emerged as one of the rare French sociologists of his generation who did not recognize himself completely in Durkheim's sociology, which, as we know, was the dominant voice of French sociology in the inter-war years. In an original way, Bastide's sociological thought takes the individual into consideration and refuses to oppose the individual to the collective, a position that indicates him particularly close to Weber's thought. Indeed, as Balandier (1995, p. VIII) points out, Bastide «finds in Weber the reference to the socially situated individual - whom he assumes to be the actor, through interaction, of contacts between cultures - and the demonstration-illustration of the recourse to a interpretative sociology». By articulating, in this perspective, the «individual fact», the «social fact» and the «cultural fact», Bastide fruitfully brings together sociology, anthropology and psychology in an interdisciplinary reflection.

The originality of Bastide's sociological and anthropological outlook was about to strengthen starting from 1938 onwards, the year in which he arrived in Brazil as part of the cultural exchanges that France had with the country in order to take up the chair of sociology at the University of São Paulo, vacated by Lévi-Strauss following his decision to devote himself exclusively to field research. When he arrived in Brazil, Bastide was fascinated by the city of São Paulo and its cultural and ethnic contrasts: he was particularly interested in the city's black population and its social and cultural transformations, and his interdisciplinary outlook and focus on the individual were further consolidated. In Brazil, Bastide found new theoretical and methodological references in North American sociologists and anthropologists, who were at that time neglected in French and European universities, but present in the Brazilian academic world; he thus approached, for example, the epistemological orientations of the Chicago school (like the Chicago sociologists he used a set of qualitative methods, endorsing direct observation) and the acculturation theory of American cultural anthropology, from which he drew the idea that cultures that come into contact one another undergo reciprocal modifications.

Bastide remained in Brazil until 1951, when he was called back to France by Lucien Febvre to take up the chair of director of studies at the VI section of the *Ecole Pratiques des Hautes Etudes*. Until 1953, however, he spent his time between France and Brazil, where he still taught at the University of São Paulo, before settling definitively in France in 1954. In the following years, Bastide made other short trips to Brazil (in 1962 and 1973) and Africa (in 1958) to visit the original places of the Afro-Brazilian populations he had studied. The experience of living and working in Brazil, particularly during his first long stay there, left an enormous mark on Bastide's intellectual profile, and transformed, as has been written (Simon, 1994, pp. 61-62), the philosopher-sociologist of the library into a participant observer, capable of speaking from within a lived experience; having a base in experience itself, Bastide noticeably contributed to introducing the topic of inter-ethnic relations and contacts between cultures into French academia.

3. A sociology of otherness and memory

After his arrival in Brazil, and above all from the 1950s onwards, Bastide's writings drew up a true sociology of otherness and inter-ethnic relations, which can be found (as well as in many other writings of various kinds) mainly in the volumes *Le Candomblé de Bahia, rite nagô* (1958), *Les religions africaines au Brésil* (1960) and *Les Amériques noires. Les civilisations africaines dans le nouveau monde* (1967).

Bastide asked himself what would happen when men belonging to different socio-cultural groups come into contact, and presents the great theme of the relationship with the Other, which he addresses by combining historical-cultural and intra-psychic aspects, with the idea, that in order to better understand the Other, the researcher must place himself at the centre of the culture he proposes to study, living and communicating in it and taking an interest even in the banal facts of everyday life. Moreover, he invites the researcher to adopt an authentic research attitude, first of all by following a path of self-reflexivity in order to use an interpretative perspective free of prejudice, capable of taking into account factors that do not belong to our mentality and able to unveil the psychological mechanisms and the cognitive dimension that, all in all, make us all a little racist (Bastide, 1970a and 1971). With this encouragement to «unlearn racism» (cf. Siebert 2003), Bastide embraces a view of the Other that leads towards the search for the «total man», to whom contacts between cultures confer - according to his idea - a new personality, unified rather than interrupted. Specifically, Bastide studies the "total man" produced by Afro-Brazilian cultures, investigating more precisely syncretic religions, i.e. religions born from the encounter between the original African religions and those of America and Christianity. For example, he studied *Candomblé*, an Afro-Brazilian religion (but also present in other South American countries) that mixes indigenous rites, African beliefs and Christianity (Bastide, 1958).

Bastide explains that syncretism consists in «a mixture of several cultures that, instead of clashing, marry; in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru between Christian and Indian traditions - in Cuba, Haiti, Brazil between Catholicism and African traditions. Religious syncretism is selective» (Bastide, 1965, p. 166). By virtue of this selective union between different traditions, religions and cultures, the *Candomblé* adept overcomes the marginality of his condition by operating on a double participation dimension in social life that is devoid of inner conflicts, which features his simultaneity and harmony of behaviour, albeit its differences.

Bastide was aware of the fact, as Pierre Bourdieu (1995, pp. 11-15) summarizes in his commentary on *Les religions africaines au Brésil*, that «society functions because it has a past, and it has a past as long as it functions», in this investigation of the Other as «total man», a central role is given to the past of groups. As we will try to explain, he specifically focuses on what he identifies as the *bricolage* work carried out by memory in situations of contact between different cultures or in the presence of cultural trauma.

As we mentioned earlier, Bastide's starting point for talking about memory is represented by the pioneering studies on the relations between memory and society suggested by the Durkheimian sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Commenting and criticizing these studies, but never in a polemical way, Bastide elaborates his theory of memory in several contributions, mainly in the chapter "*Les problèmes de la mémoire collective*" contained in his most famous work, *Les religions africaines au Brésil* (1960), and in the article *Mémoire collective et sociologie du bricolage* (1970b). Other considerations can also be found in the article *Groupes sociaux et transmission des légendes* (1949), in the volumes *Sociologie et psychanalyse* (1950) and *Les Amériques noires* (1967) and in the collection of essays *Le sacré sauvage et autres essais* (1975).

On the subject of memory, Bastide intends to demonstrate how, in the encounter between two different cultures, where we are used to consider simply the relationship between them, it would also be good to have a look at the relationship that each of them, and especially the marginalized or dominated culture, has with its own past. This important passage in his thought appears to be articulated in particular with one of the first original concepts he developed and which became a key

concept in all his work: the «principle of *coupure*», which we can translate as «fracture» or «cut» (Bastide, 1955; Cf. Cuche, 1994). In his idea, if, in the encounter between different cultures, the social marginality of individuals is not transformed into psychological marginality, it is the conceptual operation represented by the «principle of *coupure*» which allows the individual, deprived of a single identity, to live simultaneously and without particular worries in two different worlds. More precisely, it is not the individual who is «cut» in two, but the individual who cuts reality into several spheres in which he or she realizes different forms of participation that are experienced as non-contradictory. For example, Bastide (1955, p. 9) writes: «The Afro-Brazilian escapes through the principle of *coupure* the misfortune of marginality. What is sometimes interpreted as Black's ambivalence is indeed the sign of his greatest sincerity; if he plays within two frames, it is because there are two frames». It is in this logic that the Afro-Brazilian studied by Bastide «realizes the presence of all these holes that have been dug and slowly enlarged by the myth and strives to fill them. But since he has changed place, he can only fill them with new elements, heterogeneous in comparison with the African culture, borrowed from the Western society in which he lives» (Bastide, 1995, p. 359).

Thus, based on his researches on the myths and rituals of African origin still present, albeit transformed and readapted, in the communities of descendants of the ancient slaves in Brazil, Bastide throws new light on Halbwachs' theory, making it possible to re-evaluate elements normally overlooked by the commentators of the famous volumes *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* and *La mémoire collective* (Cf. Lavabre, 2013). Particularly in his article *Mémoire collective et sociologie du bricolage*, Bastide notes in Halbwachs' texts an advance on Durkheimian sociology; according to him, Halbwachs sometimes writes in his texts «what he does not want to say» (Bastide, 2013, p. 44), hence making it possible, after a careful reading, for individual consciences to interpenetrate against the idea of impermeable consciences. Halbwachs (2001, pp. 79-122) argues at times for the idea that, in order for the collective memory of a certain social group to endure, the actual presence of its members, the habit and the faculty «to think and remember as members of the group to which we belong» (*Ibid.*, p. 83) is necessary. Nevertheless, Bastide indicates, Halbwachs is unable to exploit this perspective of the permeability of consciences and to detach himself from the Durkheimian conception of a collective consciousness superior to and external to individuals. Taking into account this passage - of which Halbwachs gives a recurrent outline, but doesn't elaborate a definitive development - Bastide specifies that Halbwachsian theory of memory oscillates between a conception that emphasizes the group as a group (and which corresponds to the one mainly recognized by Halbwachs' scholars) and another that, on the contrary, stresses the individuals that form the group, who, in the progress of their interactions, preserve, reconstruct and transmit what we call collective memory. This second perspective makes Bastide recognize in Halbwachs' theory an idea of memory as a mere fact of communication between individuals. On this basis, Bastide arrives at the formulation of a general theory of collective memory which he develops from the notion of *bricolage*, reworked by Lévi-Strauss (1962) and investigated with strong references to Mauss, the first to have glimpsed the theory of *bricolage* from African-American phenomena (Bastide, 2013, p. 61). To this notion, and starting essentially from *bricolage* as a practice, as defined by Lévi-Strauss, Bastide dedicated an extensive reflection to explain what a «sociology of *bricolage*» might consist of (*Ibid.*, pp. 60-75).

In the study of the cults of syncretic religions, Bastide thinks of some kind of creation through *bricolage*. Following Lévi-Strauss, he observes that the character of mythical thought, as well as, on a practical level, of *bricolage*, is to elaborate structured sets by relating them not directly to other structured sets, but by using residues and traces of specific events, more precisely of memories separated from their chronology. *Bricolage* thus utilizes memory in order to reorganize the contents. However, the *bricolage* operation neither «extends nor renews what is considered from the past; it merely obtains the group from its transformations. This paramount importance of collective memory is far more enhanced when we move from the phenomena of the permanence of Africanisms to the one of the creation of an African-American culture [...] by black men or, conversely, of the maintenance of a destructive memory by whites" (*Ibid.*, p. 68).

On this basis, Bastide introduces a perspective which, reinforcing Halbwachs' theoretical proposal, suggest to think about the reciprocity of points of view and the interaction between the group as a group and the individuals who make it up, with their experiences and memories. This is based on the idea that collective memory can only exist on condition that continuity centers and social conversation are materially rebuilt, and that the group functions through communication between its members, not only through their communion, furthermore it is necessary to consider that it is not only the individual who is the meeting place of the groups to which he is linked, but that the group is also a place of exchanges between people (*Ibid.*, p. 54). Bastide indicates that memory exists only insofar as it is articulated among the members of the group, thus as a fact of «interpenetration of consciousnesses», and that in the end it is always the individual who remembers. In essence, in a sort of rehabilitation of the interpersonal over the collective, for Bastide memory is collective not because it belongs to the group as a group, transcendent in relation to the individuals that form it, but since the collective is the condition within which individuals exist, cooperating and relating to one another. Bastide thus advances a new conception of collective memory not based on the group as such, but based on its organization and structure: this means that the group's structure provides the frameworks for collective memory, no longer represented as collective consciousness, but as a system of interrelations of individual memories. If as Halbwachs thinks, others are needed to remember, it is not because «I» and «the others» are immersed in the same social thought, but because, according to Bastide, «our personal memories are concatenated with the memories of other people in a well-regulated game of reciprocal and complementary images» (*Ibid.*, p. 57) and these images can re-emerge whenever the community rediscovers its structure; Bastide, in fact, demonstrates that the African memories that can subsist in the communities of descendants of the ancient slaves in Brazil are those most adaptable and functional to the Brazilian global society, articulated in a mechanism in which the «collective memory of the Blacks is linked to the collective memory of the global society» (*Ibid.*, p. 70). This is because, he continues to explain, «every memory is manipulated by society, or by a group of this society; the White (while hypocritically claiming the need for their assimilation to Western values), does not want them to lose the collection of memories, even deconstructed ones, that the slaves were able to preserve in the New World, because if they lost them there would now be equality between the black man and the white man. In order to belittle the Black man, it is therefore necessary to destroy the symmetry of behaviour and mentality between the two competing groups» (*Ibid.*, p. 68).

Another element overlooked by Halbwachs (since he was interested in the phenomena of memory preservation, but not in the processes of forgetting) is the «consciousness of the holes in collective memory. [...] I have shown – Bastide states - that, since certain communication threads were cut by slavery, the scenario of African ceremonies cannot always restore itself in its organic globality, which is certainly reconstructed, but in a more or less lacunose way» (*Ibid.*, p. 58). Bastide argues, in fact, that it is wrong to define oblivion as an absence; instead, it should be acknowledged as a «full void» of something. African-American culture, he explains, is constituted by borrowing its elements from the White past to fill the gaps in the collective memory of slavery. This filling of an absence has a meaning for the group which, in terms of a *bricolage* work, undertakes to organize a new memorial configuration, which above all carries a future from the point of view of the interests of the group in question. Indeed, Bastide suggests, we should not speak of oblivion by relating to a culture, but we should simply study the forms of content substitution. Oblivion is a form of censorship, but thanks to this process of content substitution, it can also be a tool that encourages the individual or group to construct or re-establish a globally satisfactory self-image.

In conclusion, in the approach to memory that Bastide proposes, it emerges the idea that there is neither a strictly individual nor a strictly collective memory, and that what the group preserves is the structure of the connections between the different individual memories. Halbwachs himself, he observes (*Ibid.*, p. 54), was very close to this idea of structure or communication system in his study on the collective memory of musicians (Halbwachs, 2001, pp. 47-77), where he explains how in an

orchestra each musician has his own role, i.e. the pieces of the score he has to play according to a previously fixed sequence. This means that the whole score is not simply a mere fusion of sounds, but the exhibition of a system in which each musician has a place in relation to the other musicians, within a well-structured whole. For Bastide, this structure corresponds to a fabric of images and languages that function as social transmitters and within which memory can be reactivated. Collective memory is thus presented as «the memory of a structure of remembrance, the voids that can be opened there are felt as full voids, filled with something that is needed for the totality of the scenario to regain its meaning» (Bastide, 2013, pp. 59-60).

4. Concluding remarks

Among the classical studies on memory, Bastide's work is one of the first to have offered interesting theoretical and methodological ideas for analyzing the role of memory in the relationship with the Other within complex and heterogeneous societies, and particularly within the phenomena of social change produced by the encounter between different cultures. The idea of memory as *bricolage* as a profound interconnection between the individual and the institutional, between the psychic and the social, seems to be a useful perspective from which to read and interpret the endless comparison with the Other, the elsewhere and the relative memories generated by the phenomena of mobility and exchange favoured by the process of globalization.

Through his research, Bastide suggests, for example, that migration is not only a displacement in space, but it is also an operation that leads towards a complex transformation of individuals, thus proposing a study of their specific psychological attitudes resulting from their migratory projects and their reactions to the living and working conditions they have to confront with. He also recommends, as he demonstrates in *Les religions africaines au Brésil*, never to lose sight of the fact that relations always take place «within a certain global structure» (Bastide, 1995, p. 14).

In the context of contemporary migration flows, with their load of cultures and memories of others, Bastide's lesson seems to be clear: in front of situations of social change, as well as in the uprooting phenomena that make the migrant divorce from his own habitual world, individuals are forced to reconfigure an identity that has become - on a subjective and social level - problematic, more precisely, as Floriani suggests (2004, p. 13), «as a *frontier identity* [...] *between the before and the after, between the elsewhere and the here*». Characterizing the migration phenomenon as a spatial and social recomposition of individual and collective identities and relations rises questions about frames of reference and belonging, the specific ways of mobilizing the past and building new «communities of memory» (Margalit, 2006, pp. 62-66), whether this is a spontaneous construction or, sometimes, supported by some form of manipulation. It should be noted, however, that the study of the role of the past in today's phenomena of mobility of individuals and groups belonging to different cultures needs to be compared with new problems. In fact, as Rampazi (2020, p. 135) well summarizes, «Mass global connectivity, the mobility intensification, the transnationality of work, the globalization of distribution/consumption processes are progressively detaching people's lives from belonging exclusively to a reference community whose territorial boundaries are also cultural frames. This tendency raises many questions about the future of cultural differences». Among these questions, the survival of cultural tradition emerges, especially when it becomes detached from the territory of the original community, where tradition was nourished by the evocative power of places. «The example of the diasporas - Rampazi further explains (*Ibid.*, p. 137) - shows that this possibility exists, provided that the tradition in question continues to be an integral part of the daily practices and relations of a group of people who represent themselves as a community. [...] In similar cases, the identity value of the place of origin does not disappear but is preserved by changing its configuration. From being a place where communities are physically rooted, it becomes the imagined spatial reference of a collective identity, an entity transfigured by the myth of its origins». In order to investigate this renewed relationship between memory and space, Bastide can provide useful avenues of analysis by virtue of the clarifications it suggests on the mechanisms of anchoring memories in space and the

constitution of new material centers, which are to be linked with mental images. «The *Candomblés* - Bastide explains - with their *temples*, their *pegi*, their sacred tree forests, their houses of the dead, the source of *Oshalà*, embody the sacred topographical reconstruction of lost Africa, adding that the first sacred stones were brought from Africa, still drenched in the supernatural force of the *orisha*, a force which, by mystical participation, is transmitted to all surrounding environment» (Bastide, 1995, p. 345).

In line with Halbwachs (1941) - who analyzed the religious memory linked to the sites of the Gospels in the Holy Land in order to explain the process that makes it possible to pass from material space to symbolic space - Bastide thus highlights the passage from the physical place of rootedness of a community to an imagined spatial reference of a collective identity, transfigured by the myth of origins. In this way he shows how the remodeling of space in the *elsewhere* in which the individual finds himself living provides the material anchors that allow memories to re-emerge from the depths of what we call collective memory.

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Research lines and the origin of the sociology of memory

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Abstract. It is now more than forty years that the study of memory has become a real sector of sociology with its paradigms and its research methodology. The paper outlines some lines of contemporary research starting from the legacy of what is commonly called the founding father of the sociology of memory: Maurice Halbwachs. For this epigon?(allievo) of Durkheim, in fact, memory is a social fact that takes shape in space and time and which is connected to the needs of the present. The analysis between dream and memory is significant for distancing his research from Bergson and from a subjectivistic cultural trend of memory.

Keywords: memory; sociology of memory; Maurice Halbwachs

The wide-encompassing title certainly doesn't have the presumption to be exhaustive on the topic, but aims to be an invitation to embark on a short journey across the land of memory, of which I would like to describe certain elements I consider core concepts, and certain actors. Above all, I would like to describe one protagonist of this branch of sociology that is certainly a niche category, but is nevertheless fertile and active. This vitality is certified by a strongly interdisciplinary interest, in fact the topic touches multiple fields. The topic of memory has been dealt with long before that of sociology; nevertheless, it may be – perhaps with the same confidence level – stated that an investigation on the subjects to which memories are attributed to has never performed, and the statement that memory is strictly personal has never been debated. It is hard to deny this statement by Ricoeur. (Ricoeur 2003). Despite the subjectivist radicality of the many and different perspectives on memory, it may be claimed that memory is not only the purely subjective and secret basis of our identity, but a social product that takes shape and structure, and mutates over time and across social spaces. (Sciolla, 2005). We usually relate the birth of sociology of memory to Maurice Halbwachs, one of Durkheim's most brilliant scholars. In fact, Durkheim never used the term "collective memory" explicitly; he spoke of memory in contraposition to the philosophers of the time, certainly within a social dimension. (Misztal, 2003). Collective memory was certainly not the core of his philosophy as it would be for Halbwachs, who placed the topic fully within sociology, considering recollection a social act, and memory its result, and above all he inserted memory within social frameworks. (Halbwachs, 1980). Despite the concept of collective memory is fully ascribable to Halbwachs, Durkheim had a deep intuition on the need for a relationship with the past marking a continuity with the present. (Misztal, 2003). The past creates identity, and memory is an elementary form of social life. Rituals and memorials are social and collective dimensions of the present, solidly anchored in the past. *The elementary forms of the religious life* perfectly highlights such link with the past in the section dedicated to representative and commemorative rites where the myth of the ancestor Thalaualla is performed. (Durkheim, 2005). Before we focus the discussion on he who is considered the father of sociology of memory – Maurice Halbwachs – I would like to preface the vitality of his heritage thanks to certain interpreters of his thought, although more often than not very critical, but who never disregard his writings and, instead, use them as a starting point or an element of comparison. I thus wish to outline just few of the research paths that appear to me as the most

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fertile and interesting today. They are only partial and geographically limited paths, but are nevertheless rather influential. In this scope, the reconstruction made by Cossu and Misztal on the lines of research of sociology of memory appears to be quite useful: some of such scholars, though building on Halbwachs' philosophy, criticized its excessive presentism or that which is considered as such. Sociology of memory has three main lines of research : a historic sociology involving a reconstruction of the past; a structuralist analysis; and a sociology of practice, whose research focuses on the search for the practices inscribed and incorporated in memory.(Cossu,2008) Of course, the barriers are not always so clear, and we often find works lying between the first and third line. In any case, such lines of research often begin with a critique of Halbwachs' assumption that there is a general prominence of the present in defining the past, and recalling the idea that the past may somehow be a constraint limiting an arbitrary construction of the present. There is a certain perplexity in accepting the idea that it is the present that makes up the past in its most radical versions, and all the various articulations are widely disputed. This is facilitated by the fact that Halbwachs – very intuitive and convincing in the individual parts of his discussion, even thanks to a high writing quality – is not at all a developer of rigorous systems. The idea that the present makes up the past is counterpoised (Olik, 1998) by the idea of memory as a process in a relational dimension. Upon ascertaining that research on memory is centreless, non-paradigmatic, and interdisciplinary, Olik reconstructs the sociological principles concerning statics and dynamics of social memory. Every memory of the past affects the subsequent memories, thus the memories stratify and create a sedimentary layer. In this game of past and present, a mythical dimension of the past is one where it has a strength and influence that does not allow the interests of the present to tarnish it. The opposite occurs when the present pushes to reconstruct the past. Despite its issues, presentism has been widely used in historical sociology of memory to understand the formation of memory throughout the different phases of history. I would thus focus research on difficult pasts or ones generating divided memories. In this context, it clearly stands out how memory is a complex process in which different memories may cohabit or collide in the public sphere. (Wagner-Pacifci, 1996) (Wagner –Pacifci-Swartz 1991). Cultural trauma studies represent a central current. (Alexander, 2004). Cultural trauma occurs when members of a community feel they have undergone an event leaving permanent scars on their group conscience. Trauma stains individual and collective memory. It is a concept that sheds a light on the ethical dimension of collective responsibility and explains connections that had not been considered before. (Alexander, 2004). In this scope, the reparation of trauma occurs through empathy and solidarity. Likewise, social groups may – and often do – refuse to acknowledge the existence of the suffering of others, or ascribe the responsibility to people other than themselves. Alexander thus investigates cultural trauma from the moment it occurs to when it is recognized, incorporated, and overcome, and of course even analyses its conveyance. Another context is that of research studies that have dealt with the topic of reconciliation. In *American Memories: Atrocities and the Law*, Savelsberg and King – referencing Halbwachs' research – analysed the role the institutions and laws can play in moulding collective memory of atrocities. Collective memory is strengthened in the cases where it is legitimized by institutions, and is weakened when institutions are bypassed. Institutions and the legislation may thus have a fundamental role in the prevention of mass atrocities and violence. (Savelsberg and King, 2007). The dynamic approach of memory sees the relationship between the past and present as a continuous argumentation, and the historical dimension is central. (Olick, 1998). The present does not only interact with the past, but even with the different interpretations of the past that have come in succession throughout history. The current of new structural memory insists in a greatly organized manner on the systemic relationship between events and reconstructions, focusing on the analysis of the recognizable form of the past. In addition, it concentrates on the cognitive mechanisms that regulate processes building such form. (Zerubavel, 2004). Zerubavel examines memory from a sociological perspective, focusing – in particular – on

impersonal, conventional, collective, and normative aspects of the memory process. Along with the social context of memory and traditions, Zerubavel examines the process of mnemonic socialization within the family, the working context, the ethnic group, and the nation. The politics of memory is key to comprehending public memory within a temporal organization. This setup has often been linked to the idea of tangibility of memory, which is a means to organize continuity and discontinuity between past and present: museum artefacts, monuments, remembrances, books, and names of places. (Schudson, 1994; Wagner-Pacifici, 1996). Such a setup makes memory autonomous and real. Nonetheless, it is a powerful methodological option, especially if one wishes to reconstruct an inventory of current objects of memory or ones possibly existing in a given society. Memory and representations of the past are organized in a system, and this system is of fundamental importance in making possible the organization and promotion of meanings related to the past assigning them specific signs. This structural vision is not well aware of the historical context and mechanisms. The social construction of collective memory calls into play both production processes of representations of the past and the way in which such representations are communicated to the various audiences. The latter are selective, and may in turn actively affect the representations by selecting which to use, which to reject, and which to transform by assigning them a new meaning.

The third line of research, certainly more aware of the practices of memory, is integrated in a general performative turning point in social theory. This line marks the return of the tangible individual as the subject of collective memory, and highlights the emotional features of memory. All three lines of research stand out for a multidimensionality in which the individual and society intertwine and compose the past, just like history and memory, mythical dimension and instrumentality fight a battle of meaning in the present to define their view towards the past.

Maurice Halbwachs

I shall return upon my steps in this unusual introduction which begins from the end, and start from Maurice Halbwachs again. Halbwachs was born in 1877. He was a student of Durkheim and is a classic actor in sociology. In the context of his school, he cooperated with Mauss and others to promote the magazine *Les annales sociologiques*. From 1919 to 1935 he taught at the University of Strasbourg, active and rich more than ever at the time. There, he met Marc Bloch, then he was hired by the Sorbonne. He spent time in the United States, in Chicago, studying with Park. He was close to the socialist environment, though he never became an active member, unlike his son who fought in the French Resistance. He was arrested by the Gestapo and taken to Buchenwald – the camp mostly for political deportees – where he died in 1945. He was an eclectic author, with his publications touching on economic and legal topics, as well as social morphology. He treated the sociological method with extreme flexibility, he did not have a systematic spirit and discussed urban sociology, Keynesian theory, suicide, and war in the social sense. Little-known at first, Halbwachs was rediscovered in the 1980s, following the re-edition of his works and a number of papers on him. He worked on the topic of memory for about 20 years, and radically debated the traditional internal perspective of memory. The belief that memory is strictly personal has remained untarnished for centuries, whether interpreted as an ability related to imagination, as a repository, or as a wax tablet. (Grande, Migliorati, 2016)

Halbwachs thus claimed this change of perspective. He stated that the memory of a group does not correspond to the sum of its individual memories. He therefore reverted the logical antecedence and asserted that in the process of memory formation, social conditioning has a preponderant role compared to personal experience. Men are not alone with their memory, because memories do not resurface from individual conscience. Memories form in a social context. His main argument was that memory – both at an individual level and at a collective level – is essentially composed of reconstruction processes: memory is supported by that of others, by their families, and by society.

Halbwachs described the independence of the social level from the psychological level in a field – that of memory – where sociology had yet to enter. The focus was thus to understand the link between individual memory and collective memory, identifying the conceptual – but even operative – bridge defining the notion of social frameworks of memory. *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* is the title of Halbwachs' first book dedicated to memory. The other two are *The Legendary Topography of the Holy Land*, published in 1941, and *The Collective Memory*, published posthumously in 1949.

Social frameworks and collective meaning frameworks are the languages of the collective representations of space and time. They are true mediators between individuals and the social context, and they allow people to share the meaning of the act of remembering.

Every memory, even the most personal, is mediated by a system of values, beliefs, and standards that make that circumstance worthy of being remembered.

Language as a value system is the social sharing tool that turns a thought into shared signs. Collective memory is thus not merely a means of storing the past: it is not a semantic memory, but it is the product of continuous and incessant reconstruction of the past that groups perform through frameworks of the present and functional to the future.

Halbwachs does not specifically and comprehensively dedicate a part of his work to memory and its definition. He rather discusses it in comparison with dreams and imagination in the first chapter of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*.

Halbwachs claims that memory may be distinguished from imagination given that the event is consciously attributed to the past and the self.

Imagination and dreams are used as benchmarks to trace the limits and possibilities of memory: they promote the event and make it verifiable by an intersubjective community. In fact, Halbwachs wrote that the memory operation presupposes a constructive and rational ability of the mind, which the latter would be incapable of during a dream, thus when there doesn't exist an orderly, coherent social and natural environment of which we recognize the totality of every second. Every memory – even those we are mere witnesses of, even those of unexpressed thoughts and feelings – interrelates with other notions we own or with people, groups, places, dates, words, and language forms, or with thought processes and ideas: all the material and social life which we belong to or have belonged to in the past.”

As with other claims, the target is Bergson. As well as considering the past permanently available, unmodified, and unmodifiable, Bergson – pursuant to his concept of memory – rejects the incompatibility of memory and dream. Oppositely, he states that the very self of dreams may approach and correspond with the past as a whole, much more than the conscious self while awake.

Halbwachs, on the other hand, states that “dreams are composed of fragments of memory [...] mixed up with others” (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 46), whose parts slide over one another, or remain in balance by coincidence or as a gamble. Memories are “walls of an edifice maintained by a whole armature, supported and reinforced by neighboring edifices. The dream is based only upon itself, whereas our recollections depend on those of all our fellows, and on the great social frameworks of the memory” (Halbwachs, 1980 p. 47). A similar condition applies to language, disorderly and incoherent throughout a dream: the loss of language brings us back to a condition of incommunicability and isolation that, according to Halbwachs and opposing Bergson, makes us more incapable of remembering. Language represents the quintessential collective function of thought, thus – being only conceivable within a society as hypothesized by Durkheim – it can only appear in a state of consciousness and affect the set of connected functions including, indeed, memory.

The memory of an object requires a commitment to reality. It is only so that previous location, determination of form, attributing a name and reflecting on it, and the subsequent reconstruction of such data starting from the system of ideas and language adopted by society presents our intelligence, and our memory may come to grips with the past clearly and distinctly.

Therefore, Halbwachs views memory as the product of a constructive and rational action on the past, which occurs in the present and takes inspiration from it thanks to our intellectual abilities, and whose objectiveness and coherence shall be guaranteed at any time by the presence of a community of conscious subjects that have established frameworks among themselves. Halbwachs believes that the language, the calendar, and the images of space are forms in which the contents of individual memories sediment. They are always social categories and not universal preconceptions.

It is indeed in his references to space that Halbwachs' originality finds full expression. His analysis of the relationship between memory and localization – described in his research on the collective memory of Christians in the Holy Land – remains widely unknown or underestimated.

Nevertheless, the sociological importance of the dynamic relationship between memories and places cannot be explained through the study of “places of memory” alone. The work of memory needs spatialization: “It may well be difficult to evoke the event if we do not think about the place itself” (*The Collective Memory*, p. 136). A memory lacking localization runs the risk of not being attested as true, thus to get lost. The definition of that which has occurred in the past is thus the result of a cognitive process in which the past is no less preserved than it is constructed. Defining the past is in any case problematic for memory. B. believed that the past may be stored unchanged, while Halbwachs. believed that the past is accessible each time only by means of a reconstruction process. This reconstruction always occurs starting with the categories of thought in the present, and the feelings acting in the present. This is the essence of Halbwachs' contribution: the past that becomes present in the act of remembering is not a past returning, but its reconstruction; a different reformulation each time depending on the perspective of the present time or the various present times. Memory is dynamic, with continuous reformulations. Its function is not so much that of providing faithful images of the past, but to preserve the elements that provide subjects with a sense of their continuity and identity. Nonetheless, this setup of social frameworks of memory is considered problematic by Halbwachs himself in his posthumous book on collective memory – a book published after fierce criticism of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Yet, while in *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Halbwachs often tends to underline the fact that every individual experience, as part of a social framework, becomes a collective memory, and that anyone could find them in another's perspective, in *The Collective Memory* he goes one step further: he does not deny the existence of an individual memory, but postulates it as an intersection of all memories in the social circles which the individual takes part in. The invincible symmetry there was in *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* is shattered in *The Collective Memory*. The reconstruction made by Grande appears to be useful: the social memory fragmentizes in a multiplicity of local collective memories, and the individual memory is the junction between different collective memories. Here, Halbwachs changes his perspective and introduces the concept of multiple memories. Each social group has its own collective memory. The more complex a society is, the more memories there are. In this view, the idea of a social memory is rather difficult to picture. Where it exists, it is the result of mediation between the various groups. Therefore, the author abandons the idea that there are abstract frameworks applicable to all, and the focus on content is not at all taken for granted: it may become a battle and negotiation ground; an arena of different meanings. This is where the memory of dominant classes comes into play, not to forget non-dominant classes. In line with Durkheim, Halbwachs states that collective memory and its practices have an integrating function, and it gains its power from “the affection” that the individual has for its group and vice versa. The end of an affective relationship with a group is responsible for the passage into oblivion of certain elements of that very memory. Thus, Halbwachs believed that individual memory is exercised as a selective authority of memory within the framework of interpretation and analytical structures of a social nature. Therefore we do not need to look inside our brains or souls or our conscience in its deepest states, in that we are reminded of memories from

outside. Collective memory is thus greater than and different to the sums of individual memories. Memory is a social process, and is not a re-emergence of the conscience of past images.

Memory is not remembrance, but works on the past. In our memories, we do not remember the past, but we interpret it in the present. This highlights the central role of communicability of memory. As Assmann states: without communication of memory, there is oblivion. Communicability explains collective memory on one hand and oblivion on the other. Oblivion may come about in two ways: for lack of interest, or for alteration of a structure. Lack of interest exists when a social group mutates in its form and structure, with the change also causing a mutation of memories. Structural alteration occurs when the group remembering disappears and memories lose their sense, because the subjects of memories no longer exist or deeply mutate. Halbwachs considers spatialization a central element of such process: a memory must be recognized and localized in order to be communicated. Thus memories are located within space and time coordinates. Localization has to do with that which is relevant for a group at a certain time. A memory may be individual, but localization has a collective nature. In fact, that which connects memories is not the time continuum – the series of events – but the belonging of those memories to a vision of the common world and to a common philosophy. In this sense, the memory concerns and reflects a group interest, and has a social value. To conclude the description of these lines of thought, we may state that with his first book – *les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* – Halbwachs broke with a tradition of thought that viewed memory as a prerogative of individuals, and introduced the topic of memory as a social experience to social science. In *The Collective Memory* Halbwachs honed, and partially even mutated, his discussion. He received strong criticism from the likes of Bloch and Blondel, which touched him deeply and led him to adjust some of his overly rigid positions or statements. Memory is thus a social aspect, and individual memory is at an intersection of collective memories. Collective memory thus does not require psychology to explain individual memory, which is fully embedded in the social dimension. Halbwachs always highlights the social core of the self, and erects it to current of thought, intended as a social thought full of individual and collective meaning. This was his response to the criticism by Blondel on the absence of the individual dimension of memory (Blondel 1926), which Halbwachs sees as dynamic and open to different perceptions. (Marcel 2001). In fact – as Halbwachs also explained in his article on the expression of emotions (1947) – belonging to a community exposes the individual to social current of thoughts that adjust and influence actions, memories, and passions: even when we are isolated, we act as if others were beside us. According to Halbwachs, affective states are locked inside currents of thought that reach our minds from the outside: they are in us because they belong to others. It is us who feel emotions, but the latter come about and develop in our relationships with others, who approve and acknowledge them. Society thus exerts a strong action on individual emotions and feelings that exist within a specific range of value. In conclusion, I would like to state that H. has doubtlessly been the pioneer of the sociological thought on memory, with all the merits and even the limitations this implies. The most interesting aspect is the idea of memory as a form of reconstruction, or the subject of such. He overturned the way in which common knowledge and even thought have viewed memory before him. The past is not an inheritance or a bequest, but is a projection of the present. I believe this new setup of the concept of memory has given prolific results in a field in which Halbwachs was actually rather deficient: public, institutional memory. In any case, this line of research gives much more space than that considered by Halbwachs to the threats that the structure of the past poses to its restorability. Such limits are in fact the context in which memory may manifest itself. Halbwachs has ignored such aspect, but it is indeed on this deficiency that subsequent sociology of memory has built its thesis on.

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Portraying slavery: Visual art and cultural trauma*

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Abstract. This article, aimed at presenting the effectiveness of the arts in the transformation of cultural trauma, presents how Ellen Gallagher's visual art intervenes in the transformation of the cultural trauma of slavery. Hence, first of all, we investigate the implications of cultural trauma, and how these can be enhanced by memory studies, to recognise the substantial value given by the analysis of the shape-shifting nature of the events. Secondly, we propose how the theory of cultural trauma can benefit from the feminist debate on bodies and cultural boundaries, which insists on the interruption of hegemonic and dominant narrations. To achieve this goal, we stress the role of visibility and present an artist who mobilizes the public meanings of slavery and intervenes on the still open wounds of a controversial past.

Keywords: Public memory, Cultural trauma theories, Visual arts.

Introduction

This article addresses the potential of the arts in the reconfiguration of cultural trauma, a process mediated through several forms of representation, which can lead to the reworking of collective identity and controversial pasts. In particular, we address this theoretical issue through the exploration of Ellen Gallagher's visual art. Internationally known for her mixed-media artworks and her intervention in the debate on the foundation of an Afro-centred identity, Gallagher offers a critical reflection on the way art practices can generate alternative ways of recalling and reimagining the past. Indeed, she reworks the cultural trauma of slavery and colonialism by experimenting something new and by using art as a tool to build a new vision for the future. In this article we combine two different theoretical perspectives for the analysis of the potential of the arts: the sociological approach and the postcolonial one.

As we know from several theoretical traditions that have highlighted from different perspectives the efficacy of the aesthetic paradigm in the controversies of the public discourse, aesthetic codes are particularly effective when they are used as a powerful dispositif for alternative forms of reconciliation and healing. In particular, aesthetic codes can allow a different access to the knowledge of the past, or a modality that is not possible otherwise and gives voice to the minorities who are silenced in dominant national narratives (Goldfarb, 2017). Therefore, we claim that art is crucial both for the social condition and for understanding it. It is precisely in art that contemporary societies address the challenges of memory and have the possibility to transform cultural trauma, by using alternative methods of inquiry (Dekel & Tota, 2017).

The fragments of a traumatic past can be put together in the negotiated arena of the aesthetic domain, where rights, social identities and definitions are questioned and claimed. Furthermore, the practices of artistic production and consumption concretely become places in which to imagine social change and spaces in which to experiment new forms of reparation. It is precisely for these reasons that at the core of this article there are artworks that are significantly effective in their use of art as repair. In particular, from a methodological point of view, our contribution is based on an

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autoethnographic work, with reference to a research method that, departing from the analysis of the researcher's biographical experiences, contributes to the situated comprehension of cultural and social phenomena (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015). Specifically, one of the two authors of this article spent five days at Gallagher's exhibition "AXME" (held at Tate Modern, London, from 1 May to 1 September 2013), by becoming a participant observer in the gallery space and taking field notes on the artworks and the conception of the exhibiting space.

The visit at the exhibition represented both a critical wandering and a moment of absolute astonishment, to quote Elspeth Van Veen's suggestion (2019). This article, aimed at presenting the effectiveness of the arts in the transformation of cultural trauma, presents how visual art can intervene in the transformation of the cultural trauma of slavery. Hence, first of all, we investigate the implications of cultural trauma, and how this perspective can be enhanced by memory studies, to recognise the substantial value given by the analysis of the shape-shifting nature of the events. Secondly, we propose how the theory of cultural trauma can benefit from the feminist debate on bodies and cultural boundaries, which insists on the interruption of hegemonic and dominant narrations. To achieve this goal, we stress the role of visibility and present an artist who works on the female body and mobilises the public meanings of slavery and colonialism to intervene on the still open wounds of a controversial past.

I. The Theoretical Framework: Cultural Trauma and the "Restlessness" of Events

In this article we propose that the arts have the capacity to transform cultural trauma and intervene in the reworking of controversial memories. According to the theory of cultural trauma, formulated by Eyerman (2001) and Alexander *et al.* (2004) and applied in many studies since its first formulations, trauma is not the result of a group that experiences sorrow, but the consequence of a pain that breaks into the core of the collective identity. Thus, cultural trauma is an empirical and a scientific concept, as well as an attribution that is socially given either before the occurrence of an event or after its conclusion, taking the form of a social reconstruction or reworking. Imagination plays a crucial role in the process of representation and informs the social work on the construction of cultural trauma, because through the imaginative process actors experience the trauma.

The process of cultural trauma necessarily brings to the fore unconventional strategies and alternative voices if the community's identity has been dramatically affected. In this sense, cultural trauma can be understood as a meaning struggle, where actors define a particular situation by proposing interpretations. As Eyerman suggests (2001), an event can be traumatic on reflection and recollection, thus having the potential to establish an identity-formation process and a reconfiguration of collective memory, differently from a psychological or physical trauma, which causes a physical wound in the individual. Therefore, in our contribution we refer to slavery as a socially constructed cultural trauma, linked to a dramatic hole in the social fabric, by proposing alternative possibilities of healing and repair that take place in the aesthetic domain.¹ Through the recognition of cultural trauma, the artist we present in this article acknowledges a shared sorrow and takes responsibility for a social reconstruction, in which the mediated and delayed reflection of art plays a key role.

The social work of reconstruction – of assembling the pieces together – can be very painful, because the trauma is also given by the others' indifference towards the marginalised groups' suffering; in this case, the process of recollection can be very problematic (Eyerman, 2019). Certainly, as Maurice Halbwachs, following Durkheim, states (1968), the past is not a static object, but a dynamic and shared construction, whose public narration is formed by several individuals, social groups, communities, institutions, and factors. The different individual, collective, and public forms of memory are analysed as a constant work in progress or as a transformative force, which functions to create social bonds in the present. How a past is recollected is a never-ending process.

¹ In our contribution we use the term "aesthetics" to encompass the languages of art forms, such as visual arts, photography, filmmaking, music, painting, among the others, and to emphasize the expressive domains of art. Though we refer to art practices in general, in this work we will focus on visual arts, in which the artist expresses an alternative regime of knowledge production.

Most memory studies scholars direct their attention to the process of meaning formation, in particular to the meanings emerging from the representation of difficult and controversial pasts (Wagner-Pacifci & Schwartz, 1991; Olick & Levy, 1997; Zolberg, 1998; Tota, 2002; Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2002; Tota & Hagen, 2016). Wagner-Pacifci and Schwartz, in particular, investigate how the structure of commemoration, which plays an important role in repairing the holes caused by cultural trauma, is often characterized by dissent (1991). In this sense, within the investigation of the cultural implications of trauma, enhanced by the studies of public memory, it is particularly relevant for us, here, to recognise the substantial value given by Wagner-Pacifci's analysis of the restless nature of events (2010). In order to investigate the shared practices of reparation and transformation that emerge from the aesthetic field, it is very important to register the meanings and the on-going consequences of the events because they can never be considered as concluded once and for all. The consideration of the fluid and shape-shifting nature of the events enables a very productive way of assessing the interaction between cultural trauma and socio-cultural mediations. In this way, events are investigated in their capacity of living through different forms and reconfigurations.

Since the meaning is always provisional, public memory assumes a political role and represents a multidisciplinary tool that, instead of being locked to the idea of simply narrating the past, contributes to new definitions. In this regard, by inscribing the process of cultural trauma in the public discourse, art practices contribute to the visibility of representations and perceptions, to the transformations of events, places, and people, and to a broader recognition of social justice. Their efficacy can have a significant impact on issues such as migration, gender and ethnic inequalities. Artistic forms have a crucial role in countering social injustices and a significant potential in intervening on both a local and a global scale on questions of democracy and memory. They can materially contribute to an alternative point of view on the compelling complexity of the contemporary world, thus making the social conditions for a more comprehensive sense of justice possible.

II. Visuality and Cultural Trauma: The Challenge of the Gender Perspective

Another important issue raised in this article concerns visibility as a central sensory channel of knowledge (Evans & Hall 1999; Zelizer 2004; Harper 2012; Shevchenko 2014; Tota 2014). Methodologically speaking, this issue has important implications for our research. In this regard, a visual approach to social theory can enrich the research and investigate the crucial role played by images in the public discourse. We do not intend to speak about the images, indeed we propose a work *with* and *on* culturally produced images, which are investigated as an additional medium of the intersubjective transmission of memory and as an effective strategy of making sense of the cultural trauma of slavery. Ellen Gallagher, born in the US in 1965, to a black father from Cape Verde and a white Irish mother, produces highly politicised visual imaginaries, established on the idea of an Afro-centred black identity and the deconstruction of the white male gaze. In her work the legacy of slavery – in particular the memory of the so-called Middle Passage – is reconfigured and given new representations.² To quote Eyerman, slavery is a cultural trauma: it is obviously traumatic for those who experienced it directly, but it is also painful across generations and geographical spaces “in retrospect” (2001). Through an emergent collective memory, slavery formed the roots and the routes of a collective identity, a sense of belonging that established and distinguished a whole people and community, in particular in the US in the later decades of the nineteenth century. At that time a new generation of black intellectuals, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, contributed to the formation of African American identity and to the debate on ethnicity, as well as to the support of organizations for black Americans (1903).

Arts, such as music, literature, painting, filmmaking, among the others, play a crucial role not only to recollect, but also to re-imagine and rework the past, connecting individual biographies into a more unified collective narration. While generations of artists such as those belonging to the so-called

² The Middle Passage refers to the trans-Atlantic shipment of slaves from the African continent to the Americas, experienced by the estimated 11 million Africans who went through enslavement, transportation, waiting for shipment on the African coasts, arrival in American port cities, and then being sent to plantations (Heuman & Burnard 2011).

Harlem Renaissance from the 1920s to the 1940s insisted on the demand for dignity and equality for African American people, by questioning the cultural and political white hegemony, contemporary African American artists generally seem more interested in redefining the very notion of blackness inherited by previous generations (Shur, 2007). In 2001 the artist Glenn Ligon and Thelma Golden, director and curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (the renowned cultural institution devoted to the visual art of African descent) coined the term “post-black”, to describe younger generations of artists who were no more interested in the positive or negative representation of black people, but in questioning the very foundation of African American identity and in exhibiting the black body with new strategies and paradigms.

Gallagher shares with other artists a consistent interest in the black body, in particular in the female body, thus proposing a counterpoint to the stereotypes of the feminine. Her work contributes to the feminist critical debate and politics, for which the interest in corporeality is very common, in particular when we refer to the struggle over the meanings of the female body, considered as a crucial site of negotiations and agency. In her effort to build a common language for women and to propose an alternative politics for gender and feminism, Donna Haraway highlights the image of the cyborg as a hybrid organism (produced by fiction as well as by concrete experiences) that engenders unexpected possibilities and transgresses boundaries (1991). Or, as Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément suggest (1986), we could highlight a liminal feminist positioning, an in-between condition that interrupts dominant and hegemonic narrations, thus producing something new.

If for Cixous “women’s writing” (*écriture féminine*) is particularly characterized by the desire of eluding cultural boundaries, with an emphasis on thresholds and crossings, in accordance with her influential thinking, we claim that Gallagher’s art practices engender liminal strategies between cultures, languages, and countries. As Ella Shohat argues (2001), the socio-cultural conditions of women do not have to be investigated in isolated and geographically defined domains, but in a relational understanding of feminism, responsive to the actual conditions of living the present. Gallagher proposes in her art making new strategies of exhibiting female bodies and subverting racial and gender stereotypes within the regime of representation. Her production is characterised by montages of images and juxtapositions of different elements, cut-outs and collages, in which the black body — often distorted and provocative — is a recurrent theme. In particular, in foregrounding a female black body that is often transgressive and unpleasant, Gallagher’s artworks react to the patriarchal voyeuristic gaze and rewrite the traditional stereotyped representation of black women, inherited from slavery and adopted by colonial discourse and knowledge.

During European imperial and civilizing missions the representation of the black woman as the sexual other was legitimised by scientific knowledge on female bodies. For example, the depiction of colonised women as exotic and lustful black Venuses was often presented as an ethnographical work aimed at classifying human beings (Ponzanesi, 2005). An example of this racist and colonial oppression is Sarah Bartmann, known as the Hottentot Venus, a South African woman who was displayed in 1810 in Europe and studied as an abnormal sexualised freak. The white viewers paid to see her protuberant buttocks, thus her body was reduced to her sexual parts and exhibited to function as the main representation of black women in the nineteenth century (Gilman, 1985). Very different from a multicultural and white-centred rhetoric of integration, Gallagher expresses the necessity to reconfigure the legacy coming from a past of oppression by exhibiting monstrous and transgressive bodies.³ As we will see, she also demonstrates that the feminist strategies of cutting and assembling – typical traits of the artistic collage – can stimulate an on-going process of signification and boost an active production of public memory.

³ Abnormal representations of female bodies represent common tools in women’s fiction and art. Among the others, the hybrid bird-woman who is the protagonist of Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* (1984) is particularly significant. She is a freak, both angelical and diabolical, between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, the male and the female. Fevvers, part woman, part swan, delights the European spectators at the end of the nineteenth century with her acrobatic spectacles, provided by her hybrid gigantic body with heavy arms and superb wings. Jack Walser, an American journalist, wants to discover the truth behind her mysterious identity: hypnotized by her love for her, he decides to join the circus on its magical tour through London, St Petersburg and Siberia.

III. Ellen Gallagher's Subversive Bodies

Ellen Gallagher's exhibition "AxME", held at Tate Modern in 2013, is her first important solo show in the UK (Tate, 2013). Half Irish and half African American, Gallagher shows a deep concern about questions of racism and gender. Cape Verde, the home country of her father's family, is an island in West Africa with a traumatic past of slave trade. Under Portuguese rule from 1460 to 1975, this island was a particularly important centre during the expansion of slave trading and worked as a crucial transit point for human beings who were enslaved and brought to North and South America (Carter & Aulette, 2009). Institutionalised by colonialism and persisted as a crucial element in the foundation and the economy of modern Western nation-states, slavery is deeply linked to the consolidation of racism and "race" prejudices in their modern articulations.

Born in USA, Gallagher reconfigures the latent legacy of colonialism and slavery in her society. Since her early works in the Nineties she has been confounding easy classifications through the combination of different techniques, such as oil on canvas, pencil, plasticine, cut paper on paper, watercolour, and more recently video. In *Oh! Susanna* (1993), for example, she reproduces uninterrupted lines on canvas that appear as an abstract outline at a distance. However, on a closer look the viewer realizes that these lines are made of thick lips and wide eyes. These isolated parts of the black body are obsessively and meticulously repeated to function as a synecdoche. Indeed, they stand for the whole body and play with the stereotypical meanings associated to the black body, especially those experienced by African American women. As Paul Gilroy would suggest, at a distance "blackness" may appear as a homogeneous and neat condition, but at a closer look or "in the frog's perspective", it is possible to perceive the "fractal geometry of black life's rifts and crevices" (1993, p. 112). Therefore, Gallagher's *Oh! Susanna* plays with the stereotypical representation of black women's bodies and the obsession with isolated parts of these bodies. At the same time, this artwork demonstrates that the condition of blackness is far from being neat and abstract: it is constantly marked by a multiplicity of differences that coexist in the complex context of cultural hybridity and migration.

Given this concern, we might argue that from her early works Gallagher does not allow a linear reading of the content. Indeed, her work is a recollection of fragments, pieces of a past of slavery and European colonialism that still resonates in the present. We could define her work "transcultural" and we use this term with reference to the Vietnamese and USA-based feminist filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha (2013). Rather than talking of multiculturalism, as in the mainstream meaning, which seems to normalize cultural difference and deny the latent racism and sexism, we wish to emphasize the importance of the prefix "trans", which stresses, not merely the movement across boundaries, but traveling as the site of dwelling. Instead of juxtaposing different cultures, the transcultural perspective expressed by Gallagher's work challenges fixed notions of border and belonging, as it questions the obvious meanings inscribed in the public discourse on ethnicity.

While visiting Gallagher's exhibition "AxME", held in the post-industrial Tate gallery space, located in London, on the bank of the River Thames, we cannot help but thinking of the crucial role that this town had in the administration of the historical British Empire and the consequences of the colonial experience in the formation of British contemporary society. First of all, we are struck by the title: "AxME", as we read in the exhibition guide, plays with the word "ask" in the Afro-American dialect (Tate, 2013). Actually, while visiting the exhibition and wandering through the rooms, we acknowledge that the textual strategy inscribed by the curators on the walls of the gallery space envisages a visitor who is aware of the tensions that work below the obvious meanings. The viewer is invited to contribute to the process of signification, wandering through the rooms of the London gallery. Nevertheless, in her autoethnographic work within the exhibition, the scholar registers that the choice of the title "AxME" also seems to invite the viewer to ask Gallagher for *her* intervention and discover *her* point of view. Indeed, within the aesthetic domain, the artist contributes to a social work of collective reconfiguration and reparation of still bleeding wounds in the social fabric.

It is for a reason that in the first room of the gallery space the viewer encounters *Odalisque* (2005), a black and white print with gold leaf, which registers the clear intention of foregrounding Gallagher's point of view in the complex intersection of gender and "race". In fact, this work is the artist's ironical self-portrait: Gallagher is reclined on a couch and wears harem-style clothes. She is close to Sigmund Freud, who sits with a sketchbook in his hands, and looks ironically at him. In the exhibition guide we read that this print is based on a 1928 photograph by the American visual artist and photographer Man Ray, who took a picture of Henri Matisse while drawing a model in a harem-like setting (Tate, 2013). In the original print the white model wears the stereotypical harem garments and jewels, lying on a bed surrounded by luxurious oriental-style fabrics and curtains in Matisse's French studio. In the print exhibited at Tate, Freud replaces the French painter, while Gallagher substitutes Matisse's model face with her own face and returns the gaze back on Freud, the father of psychoanalysis.

This artwork reconfigures the question of the gaze and the central role of visual power in the process of identity formation. As Frantz Fanon demonstrates, the racial Other is materially defined when confronted with the racist Western gaze (1952). As a Martinican psychiatrist who moved to Paris in the 1940s, Fanon describes the inescapable and traumatic process of the experience of racism: he feels fixed by the white gaze and discovers for the first time his black body whose lacerated presence constantly obsesses him. Furthermore, as a result of this process, the black subject feels the racial construction of blackness on his/her own skin and register that his/her story is connected to the history of ancestors, who were enslaved and subjugated during European colonial experiences.

To further complicate the intricate relation between the viewing subject and the viewed object, feminist film theory introduces the importance of pleasure and sexuality implicated in the process of looking: the silent image of the woman can become the object of a fantasising and active male gaze who fixes the female subject in a passive position (Mulvey, 1975; Rose, 1986; Silverman, 1988). In the interrelation of representation and power, the sexual and/or racialised difference is crystallized in a condition of otherness: together with the above-mentioned example of the Hottentot Venus, visual representations of sexualised female subjects are very common in European painting. If we think of the famous paintings *La Grande Odalisque* (1814) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres or *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834) by Eugène Delacroix, both exhibited at the Louvre, the connection between the seductive female body and a lascivious and feminised Orient is palpable. The imprecise and definite label of "Orient" reflects a colonial discourse, consolidated by stereotypical and crystallized representations that do not correspond to the variety of populations included under this term. In the reports of the first British anthropologists at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the civilizing mission is supported by a scientific knowledge that sustains and legitimizes the inferiority of the human beings under the British rule (Said, 1978). Furthermore, it is through a return to Fanon (1952) that postcolonial critics find a new impulse to demonstrate the centrality of the gaze in the subjectivising processes engendered by stereotypical representations (Bhabha, 1983). In Delacroix's painting, women are depicted as lazy, voluptuous and passive subjects in a static setting that evokes otherness and subjugation (Ponzanesi, 2005).

Both the naked odalisque depicted by Ingres and Delacroix's clothed women are portrayed in a "harem", which represents an important trope in the discourse on gender. Writers such as Assia Djebar (1980) and Fatema Mernissi (1994) demonstrate the empowering and trespassing practices engendered by women who lived in domestic harems, which differed from the institutions of the imperial dynasties. The European fascination with the harem is linked to the ideological formation of psychoanalysis and the criticized description of female sexuality as the "dark continent". Freud depicts women's adult sexual life as a "dark continent" for psychology by turning the specificity of the female body into a "fetishized metaphor of the unknown" (Khanna, 2003, p. 49). In this way psychoanalysis conceptualises Otherness. We are not suggesting that for Freud the Other is necessarily racialised, however colonial missions and explorations implemented a scientific knowledge according to which otherness was constructed as inferior, lacking and feminised. By sitting on the couch looking intensely at Freud, Gallagher ironically re-signifies the "dark continent"

and simultaneously performs a female character who has the freedom to look, not only to be looked at (Chan, 2017). As bell hooks recalls in her *Black Looks* (1992), during slavery blacks were severely punished for looking, so following generations had to learn to recuperate the rebellious desire of an “oppositional” gaze. Here, we suggest that not only does Gallagher courageously stare at Freud, but also through her gaze she reconfigures the metaphor of the dark continent - the repressed unconscious of colonialism - and re-signifies, in the present, the cultural trauma of slavery.

As Robin D. G. Kelley suggests, Gallagher’s project is a “deep examination, meditation, dissembling, disassembling, and remixing of modernity” (2013, p. 8). Indeed, Gallagher confuses the viewers who consider her as one of the several black artists who investigate racial stereotypes. She shows that the violence of colonialism and slavery is at the very foundation of modernity. Moreover, the invention of a sexual and racialised inferior Other is an essential requisite for the justification of a coherent, superior and white Western subject. Following the questions presented by the exhibition, another piece that strikes the viewer’s attention is a work on paper, which is strangely entitled *Negroes ask for German Colonies* (2002). Through the use of cut paper, oil and plasticine Gallagher creates a matrix of twenty female heads, with different skin colours and white wigs carved in relief on a white background. Their faces are frightening and uncanny: Gallagher put pink plasticine on the models’ eyes, so the viewer is asked to interpret their ghosting presence in the exhibition. Moreover, the viewer is tempted to touch the surface of the artwork and the different models’ hairstyles, which are meticulously forged on paper. At a closer look the viewer realises that each of the heads has a name: “Afro-Swirly”, “Flippant”, “All-over Roll Up”, “E-Bangs”, “Innocence”, “Fifi”, “Pixette”, etc. The viewer acknowledges that for this artwork Gallagher is inspired by an article written in 1919 by Hubert Harrison (1883-1927), a brilliant political activist and critic (Tate, 2013). Harrison’s life is marked by his struggle against racial oppression and his contribution to promote social justice for Black people. At the Paris Peace Conference held in 1919 he questioned the idea of giving self-rule to the African territories belonging to defeated Germany: since they were not a power, he warned black people not to believe in impossible expectations (Perry, 2001; Kelley, 2013). In mixing up Harrison’s era with a grid of urban style wigs, Gallagher finds new modes of dealing with a controversial past. Moreover, in foregrounding hairstyling as a cultural practice, Gallagher invests it with meaning and value. Where “race” is a constitutive part of social division, hair functions like skin and it is burdened with a symbolic dimension. During the slave trade – whose plantation economy was crucial for the formation of New World societies – scientific racism developed around skin colours and skull variations, as well as hair texture differences, according to which different categories of human beings were organised and classified (Mercer, 1994). Contrary to the skin colour or facial features that cannot be modified, “hair functions as a key *ethnic signifier*” because, due to its malleability, it can easily be changed, as in the practice of straightening (*ivi*, p. 103). This theoretical perspective informs Gallagher’s artwork *Negroes ask for German Colonies*: the wigs of her models rework the latent legacy of slavery and racial division and show hair as a powerful field of expression. Thus, hair is presented as a controversial site on which Gallagher shapes, forges and negotiates meanings.

Another work that strikes the viewer’s attention and asks her to interpret what she sees is the *Watery Ecstatic* series, started in 2001 and including beautiful drawings realised with watercolour, ink, oil, and plasticine on cut paper. In this series Gallagher allows the viewer to contemplate a variety of marine creatures: fish, jellyfish and free-swimming and translucent sea creatures with tentacles populate the gallery space and overwhelm the viewer. In the exhibition guide we read that in this work Gallagher develops her longstanding interest in marine life, because as a student she spent a semester on an oceanographic research vessel investigating the life of microscopic creatures (Tate, 2013). The colours of these drawings are extremely delicate and transmit a lyrical sensation of wellbeing and peacefulness to the viewer. However, at a closer look, we perceive tiny wigs, eyes and lips: what at a distance seems an intrinsic part of the swimming sea creatures reveals, at a careful observation, several faces of black people drowning in the water. The viewer feels again

overwhelmed: this time it is not the beauty of the drawings that affects her, but the grimace of pain distinguished on the minuscule faces. Suddenly a thought comes up in the viewer's mind: Gallagher re-actualises the history of the ancestors of African American people, human beings who drowned in the Atlantic Ocean during the Middle Passage slave trade. This is a history of violence, death and oppression, or an afterlife of slavery, re-signified by Gallagher in one of the most prestigious gallery spaces in the West. The "heart of darkness" of Europe is thus materially palpable. Furthermore, this representation of death inevitably resonates with other lives that are tragically interrupted in a sea crossing: those of the human beings who die while crossing the Mediterranean, the sea that touches the shores of Italy, the viewer's home country. At this point a "critical mourning" (Chambers, 2008) is necessary, to register the resonance between the past and the present, or the Black Atlantic and the contemporary Black Mediterranean.

In *Watery Ecstatic* Gallagher makes the descendants of the African slaves re-emerge from the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. She is inspired by a legend created by James Stinson, the founder of a techno band based in Detroit, according to which the children of African women who were thrown from ships during the slave trade established "Drexciya", a mythic black Atlantis at the bottom of the ocean (Kelly, 2013; Chan, 2017). Rather than revengeful characters, the people who inhabit Gallagher's drawings are floating tiny faces or resuscitated women with Afro wigs made of coral, surrounded by marine vegetation. Moreover, these imagined characters confound and confuse the binary logic of black and white – which the viewers would be used to – because they are characterised by pastel paints. Gallagher uses the blankness of the white paper "as a layered, double-sided material ground", on which different meanings can be inscribed (Armstrong, 2013, p. 28). When she cuts more or less deeply she shows the viewer the multiple layers that are revealed through the sculpting of the paper surface, as if the uppermost layer could be really felt and touched. Surprisingly, the viewer really feels for one second the urgent desire to caress the drawings, in particular the scales protecting the skin fish or the floating wigs covering the drowned women's heads. In this way, paper functions as a porous membrane of trauma, in a process that involves both the artist's perspective and the viewer's reception.

Another work that expresses an archaeological practice of unveiling the past in the present is the outstanding and large-scale piece entitled *DeLuxe* (2004–5), exhibited in the last room of the exhibition. Here, Gallagher presents a series of sixty printed images composed of advertisements creatively cut out from magazines and re-assembled to transform their meanings. For example, upon closer examination, the viewer discerns ads for black women and men, such as pomades, tips for a "lighter skin" and hair attachments, straighteners, and different choices of female wigs. The amount of materials used by Gallagher to articulate the surface of each plate is really stunning and demonstrates a massive work of collage. What is more, each image is distorted – in some cases decoding is really difficult – because Gallagher makes an extensive use of creative artifices to alter the original prints that refer to beauty routines. For example, she adds yellow plasticine on black hair, she erases the models' eyes to confer them a ghostly, unfamiliar and frightening appearance, or still she pastes wide eyes and thick lips on the ads to hide their messages. The viewer is astonished by the impressive use of materials and reads that Gallagher's intention is to present a map of a "lost world" she discovered in "the black magazines of the 1950s and 1960s" (Tate, 2013). Mid-century publications such as *Our World*, *Black Digest*, and *Ebony* offered tips for skincare and beauty, thus demonstrating their readers' anxiety to conform to a white supremacist norm and to overcome the humiliation of their own features (Heartney *et al.*, 2007). Through an incessant manipulation of plasticine, hair and wigs, lips and eyes, Gallagher plays with the transformation of blackness and turns her characters, in particular black women, into monstrous and unrecognizable creatures. In the last room of the exhibition, the subversive bodies presented in *DeLuxe* haunt the gallery space and demand a considerable effort to understand their reconfigurations in the present time.

Conclusions

In this article we have presented an art exhibition that asks the viewer to be a participant who actively produces and shares meanings. Indeed, by adopting an autoethnographic strategy and becoming an active viewer, the researcher contributes to the comprehension of the role of the arts in a social work of healing and repair. Starting from the idea that aesthetic codes can be an efficient method of inquiry, which can give voice to silenced narratives, we have claimed that it is precisely in art that contemporary societies have the chance to reconfigure cultural trauma, as well as to deal with controversial pasts. To achieve this goal, we have chosen an artist who directly engages with the painful past of slavery and proposes new modalities for reflecting on a cultural trauma that has caused a deep hole in the social fabric. Thus, by proposing Ellen Gallagher in particular, we argue that the theoretical perspective on cultural trauma and memory can also be enhanced by the contribution of the feminist debate. By foregrounding a shape-shifting and transgressive female black body, Gallagher interrupts the patriarchal dominant narrations of women: the unpleasant and unfamiliar bodies of her artworks show the viewers a different strategy of expressing the feminine.

Furthermore, we suggest that Gallagher reworks the traditional representation of black women, inherited from slavery and then adopted by colonial discourse. Actually, she offers new opportunities to create and to share meanings on the trauma of slavery, by proposing aesthetic codes that mobilise alternative forms of public memory. In her exhibition, the Atlantic Ocean – where the Middle Passage slave trade is tremendously inscribed – engenders a process of counter-memory, in which the viewer is asked to further interpret the violent deportation of millions of Africans and their tragic ocean crossings. As we have seen, the artist's intention to disrupt the expectations has been fulfilled: Gallagher's strategies totally confound previous assumptions and contribute to a thought-provoking art practice of transformation and regeneration.

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Libia. Alla riscoperta della memoria e dell'identità ebraica*

Intervista a cura di Michele Lipori**

Libya: Rediscovering the Jewish memory and identity. An interview by Michele Lipori

David Meghnagi***

Riassunto. L'intervista di Michele Lipori a David Meghnagi ripercorre la storia e la memoria degli ebrei di Libia dal periodo più antico a quello più recente. Con riferimento a un periodo più recente, si interroga sui rapporti tra memoria e storia. In particolare analizza la catena di traumi che hanno profondamente segnato la vita della comunità nell'arco di tre decenni: le "Leggi razziali" del 1938, le deportazioni per l'Italia e per la Tunisia, la deportazione della Comunità degli ebrei della Cirenaica a Giado, con la morte per malattie e denutrizione di 560 persone. Dopo la liberazione, si verificarono due sanguinosi pogrom (1945 e 1948). Con la nascita di Israele l'85 per cento degli ebrei lasciarono definitivamente il Paese. I pochi ebrei rimasti lasciarono il Paese dopo il pogrom seguito allo scoppio della guerra araboisraeliana del giugno 1967. Nell'intervista, Meghnagi mette a fuoco i processi di rielaborazione individuale e collettiva del trauma e i percorsi della resilienza messi in atto per ricostruire l'esistenza.

Parole chiave: Antisemitismo, Colonialismo italiano, Comunità ebraiche di Libia, Fascismo, Nazismo, Sionismo.

Abstract. Michele Lipori's interview with David Meghnagi traces the history and memory of the Jews of Libya from the earliest to the most recent period. With reference to a more recent period, Meghnagi interrogates the relationship between memory and history. In particular, he analyzed the chain of traumas that have profoundly marked the life of the community over three decades: the "Racial Laws" of 1938, deportations to Italy and Tunisia, deportation of the Community of Jews of Cyrenaica in Giado, with the death of 560 people from disease and malnutrition. After the liberation, two bloody pogroms occurred (1945 and 1948). With the birth of Israel, 85 percent of Jews left the country permanently. The few remaining Jews left the country after the pogrom following the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967. Meghnagi focuses on the processes of individual and collective re-elaboration of trauma and the paths of resilience put in place to rebuild existence.

Keywords: Antisemitism, Italian Colonialism, Fascism, Jewish Community of Libya, Nazism, Zionism.

Nel volume *Libia ebraica. Memoria e identità. Testi e immagini* (Livorno: Salomone Belforte, 2020) si racconta la storia esemplare degli ebrei di Libia, dalle origini all'epoca della dominazione romana fino al 1967, anno in cui la popolazione ebraica fu costretta a lasciare il Paese a causa della difficile situazione politica che nel giro di poco portò al potere Gheddafi. La storia viene raccontata con particolare attenzione alle tradizioni culturali religiose e linguistiche, la condizione delle donne, le testimonianze, le persecuzioni fasciste e i pogrom attuati dalla popolazione locale.

Pubblicato la prima volta nel 2018 in lingua inglese dalla *Syracuse University Press*, la versione italiana – sempre a cura di Jacques e Judith Roumani e di David Meghnagi – risulta arricchita da alcuni saggi (come quello di Liliana Picciotto sulla deportazione degli ebrei del Mediterraneo

* A shorter version of this interview appeared in the journal *Confronti* (<https://confronti.net>) on April 19, 2021, pp. 17-21 (Una versione ridotta della presente intervista è apparsa sulla rivista *Confronti* [<https://confronti.net>] il 19 aprile 2021, pp. 17-21): <https://confronti.net/2021/04/libia-alla-riscoperta-della-memoria-e-identita-ebraica>.

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dall'Italia a Bergen-Belsen) che affrontano con particolare attenzione il rapporto tra storia e memoria degli ebrei di Libia. Ne abbiamo parlato con David Meghnagi, co-curatore del volume nonché psicologo e psicanalista, ideatore e direttore del Master internazionale di secondo livello in Didattica della Shoah presso l'Università Roma Tre.

*LA MEMORIA È UN PROCESSO DINAMICO IN CUI I DATI SONO DI CONTINUO
RIMODELLATI SULLA BASE DI CIÒ CHE SI VIENE A SAPERE DOPO*

La metodologia alla base del libro prevede un affiancamento tra la memoria familiare e individuale e la storia, che presuppone la ricerca dei dati scientifici. Come si possono far convivere storia e memoria?

Il libro è per certi aspetti, abbastanza atipico. Pur essendo rigoroso sul piano scientifico, come si confà del resto a una pubblicazione accademica, accoglie al suo interno molte testimonianze dirette. Nonostante questa ibridazione, il controllo dei testi è stato molto rigoroso e, laddove sono state individuate delle *défaillance* nella testimonianza o nel racconto, siamo intervenuti con un apparato di note esplicative di carattere storico. La memoria . un processo dinamico in cui i dati sono di continuo rimodellati sulla base di ciò che si viene a sapere dopo. Un'intervista fatta sul momento, riflette l'esperienza di quel momento. Chi parla anni dopo, lo fa alla luce anche di quello che ha appreso in seguito. La rielaborazione del passato non avviene nel vuoto. E' frutto di un'interazione costante con il mondo esterno e quello interno che ha come sfondo il tentativo di dare un senso al passato e al futuro. Ovviamente dobbiamo distinguere tra il ricordo individuale di un evento e la memoria collettiva. Il primo appartiene alla storia personale. Nella memoria collettiva sono in gioco processi più ampi di carattere sociale, culturale e politico. Come i due aspetti interagiscono fra loro . una delle grandi sfide per la ricerca. La dialettica fra memoria, testimonianza e ricerca è complessa. Si tratta di ambiti diversi che per. Dialogano fra loro. La testimonianza obbliga lo storico ad approfondire i fatti. A sua volta la ricerca contribuisce a rimodellare il processo attraverso cui una società ricorda. Quando i fatti sono del tutto svincolati dal ricordo e dalla memoria che una società ne conserva, cessano di essere "significativi" all'interno della storia di una determinata civiltà.

Nonostante questa *ibridazione*, il controllo dei testi è stato molto rigoroso e, laddove sono state individuate delle *défaillance* nella testimonianza o nel racconto, siamo intervenuti con un apparato di note esplicative di carattere storico. La memoria è un processo dinamico in cui i dati sono di continuo rimodellati sulla base di ciò che si viene a sapere dopo. Un'intervista fatta sul momento, riflette l'esperienza di quel momento. Chi parla anni dopo, lo fa alla luce anche di quello che ha appreso in seguito. La rielaborazione del passato non avviene nel vuoto. È frutto di un'interazione costante con il mondo esterno e quello interno che ha come sfondo il tentativo di dare un senso al passato e al futuro. Ovviamente dobbiamo distinguere tra il ricordo individuale di un evento e la memoria collettiva. Il primo appartiene alla storia personale. Nella memoria collettiva sono in gioco processi più ampi di carattere sociale, culturale e politico. Come i due aspetti interagiscono fra loro è una delle grandi sfide per la ricerca. La dialettica fra memoria, testimonianza e ricerca è complessa. Si tratta di ambiti diversi che però dialogano fra loro. La testimonianza obbliga lo storico ad approfondire i fatti. A sua volta la ricerca contribuisce a rimodellare il processo attraverso cui una società ricorda. Quando i fatti sono del tutto svincolati dal ricordo e dalla memoria che una società ne conserva, cessano di essere "significativi" all'interno della storia di una determinata civiltà.

JACQUES ROUMANI, DAVID MEGHNAGI,
JUDITH ROUMANI
(A CURA DI)

LIBIA EBRAICA

*Memoria e identità
Testi e immagini*



LIVORNO
Salomon Belforti & C.
Edison Librai dal 1895

In che modo quella delle comunità ebraiche in Libia rappresenta una “storia esemplare”?

Il libro è articolato in cinque sezioni che affrontano aspetti diversi della vita degli ebrei di Libia. Nella prima si affronta la storia più antica, poco conosciuta e che arriva all’epoca della dominazione romana e di cui a parlare sono in particolare i resti archeologici e le testimonianze scritte di quel passato. Le altre quattro sono rispettivamente dedicate alle tradizioni culturali religiose e linguistiche, alla condizione delle donne, alle testimonianze, alle persecuzioni fasciste e ai *pogrom* arabi. La storia degli ebrei di Libia ha un che di esemplare. Rispetto alle comunità del *Maghreb* (Tunisia, Marocco e Algeria), e all’Egitto con cui confina a Oriente, la Comunità degli ebrei di Libia era numericamente più piccola. La percentuale rispetto al resto della popolazione era però alta se paragonata per esempio alla percentuale degli ebrei italiani, circa l’1 per mille della popolazione. Fino alla scoperta del petrolio, la Libia era un grande “scatolone di sabbia”, la cui zona costiera collegava il Maghreb all’Egitto. Presenti nell’artigianato e nel commercio, gli ebrei vivevano in larga parte nella città di Tripoli, dove alla fine degli anni Trenta costituivano un quarto circa della popolazione. Ma c’erano anche presenze nell’interno, dove gli ebrei si erano rifugiati all’epoca della dominazione spagnola (molti furono deportati e venduti come schiavi), che i piccoli venditori ambulanti, camminando a piedi accompagnati da un somaro, impiegavano giorni per raggiungere.

Con l’occupazione italiana, gli ebrei di Libia escono dalla condizione di inferiorità in cui erano stati per secoli relegati dalla dominazione araba e ottomana. Soprattutto agli inizi, gli ebrei furono visti come un elemento potenzialmente filoitaliano. Si trattava però di un rapporto ambivalente in conflitto con la necessità di non innescare una reazione araba collegata a una perdita di *status* rispetto

ad una posizione di dominio che per secoli avevano esercitato sugli ebrei. Il sogno dell'emancipazione dura in realtà poco. Con le "Leggi razziali" del 1938 gli ebrei sono espulsi dalle scuole italiane. L'estensione di tali Leggi in Libia è agli inizi parzialmente frenata. Ma con lo scoppio della guerra, la situazione precipita. Chi ha un documento britannico o francese è considerato – da un giorno all'altro – come un nemico. E così iniziano le reclusioni e le deportazioni verso l'Italia e la Tunisia di Vichy. Dall'Italia gli ebrei libici con passaporto inglese sono trasferiti nel '44 a Bergen-Belsen e altre località. Gli ebrei con documenti francesi finiranno nei duri campi di lavoro istituiti dal regime di Vichy. Per gli ebrei della Cirenaica, data la collocazione strategica, con ritiri e avanzamenti delle truppe italiane, è un incubo. Gli ebrei della Cirenaica sono deportati a Giado, in una località a 175 km a sud di Tripoli. Sarebbero morti tutti, se – nel frattempo – il Paese non fosse stato liberato dagli Alleati. Al loro arrivo dopo la vittoria di El Alamein, circa 600 ebrei – un quarto della comunità – erano morti per le pessime condizioni vita nel campo e per il tifo. L'arrivo degli Alleati a Tripoli fu salutato con gioia. Ma la "normalità" ritrovata ha breve durata. Nel '45 vi è un violento pogrom ideato e condotto dai nazionalisti arabi. Le truppe inglesi, di stanza nel Paese, sedano le violenze solo al terzo giorno, quando il peggio è accaduto.

Per gli ebrei di Libia è la fine di un mondo. Il violento pogrom non è isolato e ha parallelismi profondi con quanto accade in altre parti del mondo arabo. Per citare degli esempi i moti antiebraici in Egitto e le devastazioni subite dalla Comunità ebraica irakena con il colpo di stato filonazista del 1941 e le persecuzioni subite lungo l'arco degli anni quaranta. Il pogrom giunge inatteso – quando si pensava che il peggio era alle spalle – e rappresenta una frattura nel tempo e nello spazio. Lasciare il Paese non è però possibile. Le frontiere verso il nascente Stato di Israele, a cui l'intera comunità guarda come alla realizzazione di una profezia messianica, sono ermeticamente chiuse. Molti giovani sfideranno il mare, raggiungendone fortunatamente le coste. Consapevole dei pericoli, la comunità si organizza. Si procura armi e nell'attesa di una nuova aggressione – che si verifica puntualmente tre anni dopo –, si addestra in segreto. L'addestramento condotto dalle organizzazioni giovanili sioniste, coinvolge giovani maschi e femmine che avranno un ruolo decisivo nella difesa del quartiere ebraico e nella controffensiva contro gli aggressori. L'intervento delle truppe britanniche riporta il Paese alla calma ma la presenza millenaria degli ebrei in Libia volge al termine. Con l'accordo siglato – sotto gli auspici anglo americani – fra le autorità del nascente Stato libico e la Direzione comunitaria, gli ebrei potranno lasciare in massa il Paese per Israele. Nel giro di pochi anni l'85% degli ebrei di Libia lascerà il Paese per Israele.

Un'epopea dell'emigrazione in cui il dolore per le perdite subite è trasfigurato in un sogno di rinascita messianico, le sofferenze per un decennio di persecuzioni ininterrotte sono sublimati dalla speranza di una vita diversa nella "Terra dei Padri". L'esilio e la fuga vengono rappresentati come esodo e rinascita. In base all'accordo con le autorità del futuro Stato libico, per potere lasciare il Paese, gli artigiani ebrei sono tenuti a insegnare a chi è loro subentrato per pochi soldi, le segrete arti di un mestiere che per secoli ha profondamente caratterizzato la presenza ebraica nel mondo arabo. Il terzo pogrom del '67 avviene in presenza di una comunità ormai piccola, di poche migliaia di persone, molti dei quali avevano un passaporto europeo, italiano, britannico o francese. Per chi non disponeva di un passaporto europeo, la condizione era particolarmente difficile. La cittadinanza libica (l'ambito passaporto nero con cui poter viaggiare) fu concessa solo a pochi ebrei. Col passare degli anni, i passaporti libici tendevano a non essere rinnovati alla scadenza naturale. In questa situazione chi non aveva un passaporto europeo, rischiava di ritrovarsi nella condizione di apolide. Giunti in Italia dopo il pogrom del '67, gli ebrei "apolidi" non furono riconosciuti come tali dall'Alto commissariato delle Nazioni unite, in quanto la loro fuga non era avvenuta da un Paese dell'area sovietica.

Qual è il rapporto fra arabi ed ebrei in Libia tra Ottocento e Novecento?

La riconquista ottomana della Libia verso la metà dell'Ottocento rappresentò per gli ebrei libici un grande miglioramento rispetto agli arbitri della precedente condizione sotto gli arabi. Il regime ottomano era più tollerante nei confronti delle minoranze. Aveva una visione imperiale in cui le minoranze avevano un loro status riconosciuto che in pieno Ottocento – sotto la spinta delle pressioni esercitate dalle Potenze europee – si era andato ampliando, creando per reazione un crescente

malessere e ostilità fra la popolazione araba, con esplosioni crescenti di violenze ai danni delle minoranze cristiane nel *Mashraq*. Con il ritorno degli Ottomani, il miglioramento delle condizioni di vita della minoranza ebraica in Libia, avveniva all'interno di un quadro istituzionale di dominazione islamica, che non modificava l'assunto attraverso cui la maggioranza islamica si autorappresentava rispetto agli ebrei. Non per caso quando il regime ottomano discusse dell'arruolamento militare degli ebrei, una delegazione ebraica si rivolse alle autorità sottolineando che gli ebrei non avrebbero potuto svolgere una tale funzione fintanto che non fosse stata estesa agli arabi locali.

Con l'arrivo degli italiani, in analogia a quanto accadeva per altre minoranze religiose nel mondo arabo con il passaggio sotto il dominio francese e britannico, gli ebrei cessavano di essere sudditi dell'islam, con tutto ciò che questo comportava in termini psicologici. Il cambiamento di status degli ebrei è stato largamente percepito dalla maggioranza islamica come una fonte di "umiliazioni" aggiuntive, che stravolgevano gerarchie di rapporti e di dominio considerate come "naturali" e imm modificabili. In questa logica gli ebrei, diventavano ontologicamente "colpevoli" per "avere violato" l'ordine su cui poggiavano i rapporti tra maggioranza islamica e minoranze "protette" e "tollerate".

Nel libro si parla degli ebrei di Libia attribuendo loro un'identità religiosa molto solida, facendo poi un parallelismo con gli ebrei che erano in Italia. Può dire di più a questo proposito?

Gli ebrei di Libia subiscono certamente l'impatto della dominazione italiana, ma se le altre dominazioni europee nel mondo arabo hanno prodotto nel tempo delle fratture all'interno delle comunità e della vita ebraica, in Libia tutto questo processo non ha avuto il tempo per decantarsi. Per fare un parallelismo, in Algeria – dove la dominazione francese . iniziata ben prima, ovvero nel 1830 – la "francesizzazione" degli ebrei algerini ha creato all'interno della comunità strati diversi. Per cui, in Algeria troviamo persone che chiederanno di partire volontari per la Grande guerra. Nel dibattito sul sionismo ci sono esponenti di spicco che sono contrari o neutrali, nazionalisti francesi e universalisti che declinano la loro appartenenza in opposizione alla vita comunitaria.

In Tunisia (protettorato francese dal 1881), troviamo una piccola comunità dentro la comunità, composta da ebrei di origine sefardita livornese, che parlano toscano, spagnolo e portoghese. Grazie ai contatti con Livorno sono un importante veicolo della presenza culturale italiana nel *Maghreb*. Una comunità colta e cosmopolita di cui ritroveremo alcuni esponenti nel Parlamento italiano all'indomani della Liberazione (il sindaco Maurizio Valenzi di Napoli è solo un esempio). Una comunità piccola e italianizzante che all'epoca del regime di Vichy troverà, paradossalmente (ma non più di tanto), protezione da parte delle autorità italiane, preoccupate del fatto che l'eliminazione della loro presenza dal tessuto sociale, economico e culturale del Paese, avrebbe danneggiato gli interessi italiani. Una comunità nella comunità con una sua autonomia e separatezza (di fatto erano due comunità distinte con forti tensioni) che all'indomani della guerra cesserà nei fatti di esistere. Una storia complessa in cui ci sono ebrei radicati nella cultura locale ed ebrei profondamente radicati nella civiltà e nella cultura europea. Una storia complessa da raccontare.

Nel caso specifico della Libia, la dominazione italiana è durata 32 anni (dal 1911 al 1943): un periodo relativamente breve in cui gli ebrei, dopo essere stati ambigualmente considerati come un ponte tra il mondo arabo e l'Italia, saranno emarginati e apertamente perseguitati. L'arrivo degli Alleati a Tripoli dopo la sconfitta delle potenze dell'Asse a El Alamein, rappresenta la fine di un incubo. Ma, due anni dopo, c'è fu un sanguinoso pogrom, che sconvolse l'idea stessa di una convivenza futura con la maggioranza islamica. La storia ebraica nel Paese volge al termine e se le porte di Israele non fossero ancora ermeticamente chiuse dalle batterie costiere britanniche, la comunità vi si sarebbe trasferita in massa.

Tre anni dopo c'è un secondo pogrom, cui gli ebrei di Tripoli sapranno opporre un'efficace resistenza ma appena possibile circa l'85% degli ebrei di Libia deciderà di trasferirsi nell'appena nato Stato d'Israele. Restano circa 4.000 ebrei, una buona parte dei quali può contare all'occorrenza sulla protezione di un'ambasciata europea, e che due decenni dopo – in seguito a un altro pogrom – troveranno in larga parte rifugio in Italia e in Israele. Una storia che ha molti punti di contatto con quella dell'ebraismo italiano, ma che rimane profondamente diversa perché gli ebrei italiani erano

parte integrante della comunità nazionale, avendo attivamente partecipato al movimento risorgimentale, con cui erano pienamente identificati e a cui devono la loro emancipazione dopo secoli di esclusioni e persecuzioni della Chiesa. Pari ad appena l'uno per mille della popolazione, prima delle "Leggi razziali", gli ebrei italiani costituivano il 7% del corpo docente universitario ed erano presenti con ruoli importanti in ogni ambito della vita del Paese, dalla politica all'esercito e alle professioni.

Caso unico in Europa, a parte l'Unione sovietica (ma quella è un'altra storia), gli ebrei potevano assurgere alla carica di ministri e in un caso alla Presidenza del Consiglio. Diventare da un giorno all'altro dei paria sociali, bollati come "razza nemica" e "straniera" da escludere e combattere, comportava una frattura psicologica insanabile che obbligava a un ripensamento generale della propria storia ed esistenza. Negli anni Venti e Trenta, dunque, il sionismo aveva rappresentato per molti giovani una via di uscita al clima culturale e politico asfittico che il fascismo aveva violentemente imposto in tutto il Paese, in cui il sogno di una rinascita nazionale nella "Terra dei padri" si accompagnava a una riscoperta religiosa e identitaria dell'appartenenza che fu di grande aiuto psicologico nel momento più buio delle persecuzioni.

Sebbene i segni della deriva antisemita del Paese appaiano retrospettivamente visibili alla fine degli anni Venti (il Concordato segnerà una cesura importante), la violenza delle persecuzioni si era abbattuta come un fulmine trasformando la vita in un vero e proprio incubo. Dopo di che con il crollo del Regime nel settembre del '43 e l'occupazione nazista del Centro nord del Paese, si vedranno braccati al fine di essere deportati e sterminati in massa.

All'indomani della guerra, chi è fuggito difficilmente farà ritorno. Chi si è trasferito in Israele ha là una patria ritrovata. Chi ha trovato rifugio in America Latina, in Usa e nel Regno Unito, ricostruirà la sua vita spezzata, conservando i rapporti con chi è rimasto e si è salvato nascondendosi o combattendo nelle fila della Resistenza. Nonostante la rappresentazione che se ne fece nel dopo guerra, il contributo ebraico alla lotta di Liberazione fu in percentuale enorme. I partigiani furono circa duemila, 100 i decorati. All'indomani della guerra per frenare il declino demografico, le comunità ebraiche italiane potranno contare sull'arrivo di ebrei dall'Est Europa. Negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta sarà la volta degli ebrei in fuga dal mondo arabo e islamico (libanesi, siriani, irakeni, persiani, egiziani, libici) che sono oggi un elemento costitutivo dell'Ebraismo italiano.

*«L'ALBA CI COLSE COME UN TRADIMENTO; COME SE IL NUOVO SOLE
SI ASSOCIASSE AGLI UOMINI NELLA DELIBERAZIONE DI DISTRUGGERCI»*

Nel libro troviamo una citazione di Se questo è un uomo in cui Primo Levi vede gli ebrei libici reclusi – come lui era stato nel campo di Fossoli – , in preghiera la notte prima della deportazione, provando per loro una grande empatia.

Il brano in cui Levi descrive il lutto degli ebrei di Tripoli e la preghiera funebre prima della deportazione è di una bellezza unica e di una grande valenza poetica e letteraria. Intenso e carico di empatia verso quella povera gente trascinata prima dalla periferia dell'Impero. Un brano che segna uno spartiacque con la descrizione successiva ("L'alba ci colse come un tradimento; come se il nuovo sole si associasse agli uomini nella deliberazione di distruggerci"). Ho conosciuto Levi agli inizi degli anni '80, e dalla conoscenza nacque un'amicizia fatta di poche parole, ma intensa. Non dimenticherò mai il nostro primo incontro al convegno sulla rivolta del Ghetto di Varsavia del gennaio del 1984 che avevo organizzato con Guido e Anna Maria Fubini e Marco Brunazzi. Levi ci aveva dato una grande mano, scrivendo una delle introduzioni agli Atti del Convegno. "Adesso ci possiamo abbracciare", furono queste le sue parole. Il ricordo per la sua tragica scomparsa non ha cessato di tormentarmi. Letta retrospettivamente la sua ultima grande opera (*I sommersi e i salvati*), ha fatto emergere un lato che la sua prosa marmorea aveva in parte "occultato", consegnandolo alla poesia e alle tante *mezuzoth* con cui ha costellato le sue opere di prosa e di invenzione. Come nella poesia di apertura di *Se questo è un uomo* in cui rilegge laicamente i brani dello *Shema*, non c'è opera del grande scrittore torinese in cui il testo della prosa e del racconto non sia illuminato da un rimando poetico che suona come il controcanto di una *mezuzah* posta sugli stipiti della porta di ingresso.

Qual è stato il suo vissuto del percorso di integrazione in Italia?

La mia infanzia è stata segnata da un pensiero angosciante che non mi ha mai abbandonato. La memoria familiare delle persecuzioni fasciste e dei *pogrom* del '45 e del '48 erano parte dei miei pensieri e delle mie meditazioni. Ero parte di una comunità che aveva abbandonato in massa il Paese per la "Terra promessa". I nonni, gli zii, i cugini di cui sentivo parlare in casa erano andati via, mentre noi eravamo intrappolati in un Paese che parallelamente al crescente benessere, era ogni giorno più insicuro. Una insicurezza che percepivo nelle viscere e che era parte di un vissuto familiare largamente condiviso. Mi sentivo come tagliato in due. Da un lato la famiglia gli amici con cui giocavo e a cui ero legato. Dall'altra il sogno di una vita altrove e lontana. Guardavo il mare sognando di essere in una nave che mi avrebbe portato nel paese dei sogni, dove avrei incontrato i nonni, gli zii e i cugini, un paese in cui sarei vissuto libero dalle paure quotidiane in cui era avvolta l'esistenza quotidiana. In un sogno fatto tra i dodici e i tredici anni, dal balcone di casa, illuminato dalle stelle, una grande mano bianca come le nuvole, si muoveva nel cielo, proteggendo e benedicendo le persone affacciate alle finestre. Mio padre intonava il canto *Vaikhullù*, che si recita la sera del venerdì prima del pasto sabbatico.

Nel sogno l'esilio e la fuga che di lì a qualche anno si sarebbero ripetuti anche per noi, erano un esodo. La mano bianca che ci proteggeva era la stessa che aveva reso l'arsura del deserto più sopportabile per coloro che avevano lasciato l'Egitto. Come loro anch'io avrei trovato la manna sulla mia strada. La mia esistenza ferita e il sentimento di estraneità in cui ero avvolto, non sarebbero durati per sempre. Un giorno avrei anch'io lasciato il luogo in cui ero nato per il Paese dei miei sogni. Il *pogrom* del 1967 fu per me la conferma di quel che avevo sempre temuto. Nulla di inatteso. Il problema vero era come uscirne vivi.

Nelle pagine conclusive del Suo saggio parla della frattura che si produce nella coscienza di chi lascia per sempre i luoghi di nascita, senza mai più farvi ritorno.

Come ho sottolineato nella pagina conclusiva del mio saggio, per molti anni ho vissuto come se l'esperienza della mia infanzia appartenesse al passato più remoto. Un grande spartiacque divideva la mia vita: il prima e il dopo erano fra loro irriducibili, anche se erano trascorsi pochi anni. Una frattura nel tempo e nello spazio. Nel dormiveglia, sentivo i rumori che arrivavano dalla strada e dalle case dei vicini, si sovrapponevano ai ricordi dei rumori che sentivo a casa a Tripoli. Ho poi compreso che il mio sentire risponde a uno schema. Nel mio dolore non ero solo. Decine di migliaia di ebrei che avevano forzatamente lasciato i Paesi arabi ne condividevano la struttura. Gli attori dei ricordi possono avere trascorso l'infanzia, la giovinezza, a mille e più chilometri di distanza dai luoghi in cui vivono ora – Roma, Parigi, New York, Londra o Tel-Aviv. Lo schema non cambia. La frattura coinvolge il tempo e lo spazio. Solo a distanza di molti anni, le generazioni che non hanno conosciuto direttamente quel passato, hanno cominciato timidamente a riannodare i legami con quel passato, rinnovando l'interesse per i luoghi, per le abitudini e per la lingua. Impegnato a sostegno del dialogo e per una composizione politica e pacifica del conflitto mediorientale, l'idea di un ritorno al mio Paese natale, anche per una breve visita, non mi aveva mai sfiorato. Non c'era più nulla che mi legasse a quel passato. Mi ritenevo fortunato e lo sono fortunato perché sono era uscito con i miei famigliari.

Il legame tra le generazioni non si è spezzato, i figli hanno potuto conoscere i nonni, la gente ha potuto crearsi una nuova vita libera in luoghi più ospitali. Tuttavia vi è sempre qualcosa d'inquietante nel ritenersi fortunati, perché altri hanno avuto un destino inenarrabile. Le emozioni possono però sciogliersi quando meno te l'aspetti, nell'incontro con i profumi dell'infanzia, nell'attesa a uno scalo aereo. Sul tabellone che indica i voli in partenza, due scritte ben distinte (Roma-Tel-Aviv, Roma-Tripoli) mi apparvero un giorno come sovrapposte. Mi sembrava che un luogo portasse all'altro e da uno si potesse tornare all'altro. Come in sogno ero lì, qui e altrove. La mia Tripoli aveva viaggiato con me, era parte del mio mondo onirico, con la sua musica, le sue sinagoghe, il deserto e la brezza marina. La mia coscienza vigile poteva cedere a una piacevole fantasia.