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Notes in Italian Studies

Notes in Italian Studies is an online, open-access journal which publishes note-length studies by postgraduate and early-career researchers working in the field of Italian Studies, with a particular focus on research from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The guiding ethos of the journal is academic rigour, ensured by a process of internal double-blind peer review. It is edited by postgraduate and early-career members of the Society for Italian Studies (SIS) and aims to publish one volume each year, linked to the annual SIS Postgraduate Colloquium. The colloquium on which this third issue is based, 'Memory in Italian Culture', took place in December 2024 and was organised by Noreen Kane (University College Cork) and Francesca Nieddu (University College Cork).

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Foreword From the Chair of the Society for Italian Studies

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As Chair of the Society for Italian Studies, a subject association with a mission to further the academic study of Italy and the Italian language across all fields of study in the United Kingdom and Ireland, I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce this latest volume of the online postgraduate journal sponsored by the Society: *Notes in Italian Studies*. The Society is strongly committed to supporting postgraduate students working in all fields of Italian Studies: it sponsors an annual postgraduate colloquium; it offers bursaries for attendance at its biennial conference; it runs postgraduate prizes (in partnership with the British Italian Society); and—crucially—postgraduates are full members of its executive committee, feeding into all the discussions and initiatives of the Society. This journal represents one outcome of such discussions, the inaugural issue being published in 2021.

Notes in Italian Studies, with its focus on postgraduate work in progress, complements the work of the Society's main journal, *Italian Studies*, founded in 1937. *Italian Studies* publishes four issues per year, including at least one special themed issue, on diverse aspects of Italian culture from the Middle Ages to the contemporary. These include Italy's literary culture and linguistics, history, politics, film and art history, and gender and cultural studies. *Notes in Italian Studies* represents a model of intensive collaboration amongst the Society's postgraduate students, as well as of their ability to find a conceptual and thematic nexus across chronological and disciplinary boundaries. This year's issue brings together papers delivered at the Society's 2024 Postgraduate Colloquium, which was held at the University College Cork and focused on the theme of 'Memory and Italian Culture'. The volume explores questions of national and transnational Italian memory as they manifest in diverse objects of enquiry (historical, cultural, urban, political), assorted cultural media (literature, visual culture, music) and across historical contexts ranging from the nineteenth century to the present. Written in an agile short-format form, peer reviewed and edited by the postgraduate community itself, the essays published here also embrace a wealth of theoretical perspectives from scholars at the outset of their academic careers. Their contributions illustrate the strength of Italian Studies as a discipline and as it intersects with cultural memory studies. It is a great pleasure to read the individual contributions and to celebrate the collective achievement of the volume. I am immensely grateful not only to our contributing authors but also to the volume

editors, the anonymous reviewers, and the Society's Postgraduate Representatives who oversee the publication process. On behalf of the Society, I applaud the creativity, collegiality and hard work that have brought this latest volume of the journal to publication.

Memory and Italian Culture

Noreen Kane and Francesca Nieddu
University College Cork

The interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies is a vibrant and expanding research area, as evidenced by the multitude of international journals, conferences, and scholarly networks that have emerged over the past two decades.[1] Astrid Erll defines 'memory' as 'an umbrella term for all those processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts.'[2] While the 'boom' in Memory Studies can be traced to the turn of the twenty-first century, the field itself is often described as developing across three main phases.[3]

The first dates back to the 1920s and is associated with French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who developed the notion of collective memory. Halbwachs used this term to explain how memory, while occurring within the individual mind, is always shaped by social frameworks—that is, by the environment in which remembering takes place, such as the family, the nation, educational institutions, and religious or cultural affiliations.

The second phase is characterised by Pierre Nora's nation-based *lieux de mémoire,* while a third phase, emerging in the 2000s, moved beyond a focus on the nation to explore memory as a dynamic, transcultural, and transnational process.[4] More recently, Stef Craps has identified a fourth phase, concerned with environmental, ecocritical, and post-humanist issues.[5] Among the many pivotal concepts to emerge from the field are Marianne

[1] These include the journals *Memory Studies* (established 2008), *Memory, Mind & Media* (established 2022) and *Memory Studies Review* (established 2024), the hugely-attended annual Memory Studies Association conferences, and the dMSA online weekly seminar series.

[2] Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture,* trans. by Sara Young (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 7.

[3] Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory', *Parallax*, 17.4 (2011), pp. 4–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Stef Craps et al, 'Memory Studies and the Anthropocene: A Roundtable', *Memory Studies*, 11.4 (2018), p. 500, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017731106.

Hirsh's postmemory, which provides a framework for understanding how memories are transmitted across generations,[6] while Michael Rothberg's multidirectional memory opens up possibilities for examining how diverse temporal and geographical memory cultures can interact and influence each other.[7]

Italy is a particularly compelling case study when it comes to the dynamics of collective remembering and forgetting. Since Unification in 1861, phenomena such as mass emigration, colonial expansion, Fascism, the Holocaust, the women's movement of the 1970s, Genoa 2001, and the imminent threat of climate change—all explored in this special issue—have posed challenges to the development of a coherent national identity, resulting in what John Foot has termed 'Italy's divided memory'.[8] Early career researchers in Italian Studies have recently applied theoretical and methodological insights from Memory Studies to reveal the complex mnemonic processes at work in Axis War literature (Bartolini),[9] and in the literary memory of the Shoah (Josi).[10] The generative term 'multidimensional forgetting' has been offered to encapsulate the 'interconnected network of self-absolving narratives' stemming from processes of 'erasure, disavowal, covering up, silencing, overlooking, displacing, occluding, blame-shifting, and rewriting the [Italian] past'.[11] Cultural production with a critical stance plays a crucial role in dismantling and reconfiguring such narratives, opening pathways towards greater historical responsibility.

The vitality and innovation evident within the field of Memory Studies are reflected in the work of postgraduate scholars in Italian Studies. The 2024 Society for Italian Studies (SIS) Postgraduate Colloquium, held at University College Cork, provided a forum for the presentation and discussion of this emerging scholarship. This special issue brings together seven Notes dedicated to Memory in Italian Culture, ranging across media—song lyrics, (post)colonial literature, watercolour paintings, a Holocaust memoir, feminist archives, journalistic writing, and a cli-fi novel—and encompassing various historical contexts from

[6] Hirsch, Marianne, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

[7] Micheal Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

[8] John Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[9] Guido Bartolini, *The Italian Literature of the Axis War: Memories of Self-Absolution and the Quest for Responsibility* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2021).

[10] Mara Josi, *Rome 16 October 1943: History, Memory, Literature* (Legenda, 2023).

[11] Stefano Bellin and Guido Bartolini, 'Italy's Multidimensional Forgetting: Narratives, Contested Memories, and Solidarity', *Italian Culture*, 42.2 (2024), pp. 91–108, https://doi.org/10.1080/01614622.2024.2429216, p. 92.

the late 1880s to the imagined future. Applying theoretical tools from Memory Studies to each medium and context, the articles reveal the ways in which personal and collective memory are constructed, transmitted, and contested. These critical approaches to hegemonic memory narratives ensure that marginalised voices, such as those of southern Italians forced to leave their homes during the so-called Great Migration (post-Unification–WW1), colonised subjects, Holocaust victims, women, and victims of the widely documented police brutality at Genoa 2001, are heard. At the same time, rather than imposing a fixed 'victim identity' on any of the groups in question, the Notes demonstrate the need for continuous self-reflection, lest memory be instrumentalised against those who are currently Othered in contemporary Italian society.

This special issue opens with Elisabetta Visaggio's 'Singing *La Grande Emigrazione*: Watery Myths, Symbols, and *Metastoria* in Southern Italy'. The Note sheds light on the work of Ernesto de Martino (1908-1965), considered the "founding figure of contemporary Italian cultural anthropology".[12] Visaggio explores how sung oral culture in Southern Italy, a form of communicative memory,[13] serves to secure 'human presence', a term coined by de Martino to refer to what goes beyond the merely biological aspects of human life. In moments of societal rupture, such as widespread migration, human presence can be strengthened by repeating rituals that draw on a place's *metastoria*: the practices and beliefs that remain fixed in a cultural landscape over time. Visaggio analyses how Southern Italian song lyrics remediate water symbolism belonging to the region's *metastoria*, thus providing stability for societies at risk of depopulation.

Zoe Fox's Note, 'The Eternal(ly Changing) City: Demolition and *Roma Sparita* in Visual Culture from the Risorgimento to Fascism', provides close readings of paintings by Ettore Roesler Franz (1845-1907) and Maria Barosso (1879-1960), revealing how the medium of watercolour painting played a role in the development of the collective memory of Rome in a period of rapid urban transformation, from the late 1800s to the 1940s. While Roesler Franz's romantic works portray nostalgia over vanishing ways of life, those of Barosso expose the top-down attempts to control public memory, in which the Risorgimento-era notion of *Roma sparita* with its emphasis on what was *lost,* shifts to what

[12] Dorothy Louise Zinn. 'An Introduction to Ernesto de Martino's Relevance for the Study of Folklore'. *The Journal of American Folklore* 128, no. 507 (2015): 3–17. https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerfolk.128.507.0003, p. 4.

[13] Jan Assman. 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning (De Gruyter, 2008), pp. 109–18.

was *in the process of transformation*. As Fox affirms, this was indicative of the Fascist authorities' instrumentalisation of the arts to control an overarching narrative of Fascist progress.

Michele Baldaro focuses on memories of Italy's colonial past in 'Memory and Narrative Positionality. Depicting the Italian Doctor/Colonial Other Relationship in the Post-war Period'. Through an analysis of three literary texts published in the 1950s, Baldaro demonstrates how the figure of the doctor serves both to justify the colonial 'civilising' mission by presenting colonialism as a humanitarian endeavour, while at the same time rendering invisible structural racial and gender violence. Drawing on a theoretical framework encompassing narratology and postcolonial studies, Baldaro shows that the narrative point-of-view employed by the authors provides insight into how colonial memory is formed and transmitted. Careful attention to this construction allows for a decolonial reading of these ambivalent texts.

Matilde Piu offers a close reading of Włodock Goldkorn's hybrid memoir *Il bambino della neve* (2017) in her Note, 'Włodek Goldkorn "acrobata del tempo": Imaginative Memory and the Ethics of Remembrance'. Drawing on Hirsch's postmemory, Piu's analysis brings to the fore Goldkorn's desire to meet the void of the horror of the Holocaust with imaginative empathy: a means of relating to suffering that does not protect one with a closed historical narrative, but links the suffering of *then* to the dehumanisation of multiple ethnic groups in Europe *now*. Goldkorn's work encourages readers to undertake the work of historical responsibility by reflecting, as Piu points out, 'not only the trauma of the past, but the ethical failures of the present'.

Francesca Passasseo's Note, 'Archive as Memory: The Role of Repositories in Shaping the History of the Wages for Housework Movement' focuses on the archival preservation of memories of the transnational women's movement of the 1970s. In a comparative analysis of the 'highly curated selection' of mainly photocopied documents at the International Wages for Housework archive at the Bishopsgate Institute (London) and the overflowing array of sources at the *Lotta Femminista* archive (Padua), Passasseo explores how the curation of archives shapes and transmits the memory of social movements. While the *Lotta Femminista* archive resists a tidy, linear narrative of transnational feminist movements, the Bishopsgate Institute favours a chronological approach that excludes dissenting voices. Rather than pitting these diverging archival processes against each other, Passasseo embraces the contradictions that they lay bare, arguing that such a comparative

approach allows us to appreciate how archives function not only as a record of the past, but as active agents in the construction of collective memory.

Cristian Bergonzo and Giuliana Pala's contribution, 'An "Improper Medium" for Memory: Exploring a Recent Case of Memory Remediation', draws on Rothberg's multidirectional memory to analyse two journalistic texts by Massimo Palma: *Happy Diaz: Sette giorni di gioia e divisione a Genova 2001* (2021) and *Olanda, 1945: Anne Frank e i Neutral Milk Hotel* (2023). The authors' exploration of the former investigates how Palma refers to the suicide of Joy Division's lead singer, Ian Curtis, in 1980 as a means of expressing the tragedy of Genoa 2001. Curtis' death, signifying the shattering of the dreams of a generation, facilitated mourning for the as-yet unprocessed collective trauma of Genoa 2001. Their analysis of American indie band *Neutral Milk Hotel's* reference to Anne Frank in their lyrics reveals how the institutionalisation of Holocaust memory implies not a means of coming to terms with the past, but a blockage in traumatic time. Only music can make memory mobile, providing solidarity for the 'Genoa generation' and a means of expressing their lost ideals.

Giulia Bernuzzi's Note, 'Memory as Resistance: Contesting Climate Crisis and Identity', falls within what has been described as the 'fourth wave' of memory studies. Bernuzzi examines Antonio Scurati's *La seconda mezzanotte* (2011), a cli-fi novel set in post-apocalyptic Venice devastated by climate change and ruled by corporate elites, to explore memory as an active force of opposition and survival. Through this analysis, the paper demonstrates how cli-fi serves a dual purpose: projecting possible futures while revealing how collective memory can challenge dominant narratives and shape urban resistance to environmental destruction.

Adopting perspectives from multiple disciplines, historical periods, and media, this special issue furthers scholarship on the complex relationship between Italian cultural production and memory formation, while demonstrating that what constitutes 'Italian memory' far exceeds a national framework. We wish to acknowledge all those who have contributed to making this special issue of *Notes in Italian Studies* possible. We are particularly grateful to the Department of Italian at University College Cork for their unwavering support. Our appreciation extends to the Centre for Advanced Studies in Languages and Cultures at UCC and the SIS for generously funding the 2024 SIS Postgraduate Colloquium, and to the SIS Postgraduate Representatives Dario Galassini, Silvia Vari, Elisa Vivaldi and Max Fletcher for their dynamic involvement in organising the colloquium and coordinating this special issue. Finally, we extend our thanks to the two

keynote speakers, Professor Stefania Lucamante (University of Cagliari and Professor Emerita at the Catholic University of America) whose insightful talk was entitled 'The Natural History of the Dead: from Ernest Hemingway's WWl Narratives to Contemporary Historiographical Novels. History through the Lens of Nicoletta Verna and Ilaria Rossetti', and Professor Silvia Ross (University College Cork), whose thought-provoking address focused on 'Remembering World War Il through Ruins: Wounded Bodies, Memory and Regeneration in the Postwar Florence of Aldo Palazzeschi and Michael Ondaatje'

Singing La Grande Emigrazione: Watery Myths, Symbols and Metastoria in Southern Italy

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This paper proposes an exploratory analysis of sung oral culture in the age of the *Grande Emigrazione* (post-Italian Unification until the start of WWI) from Southern Italy, with a particular focus on Cilento (Campania). It is part of a wider research project that interrogates how oral culture remembering emigration deploys symbols belonging to the South's *metastoria.* According to Ernesto De Martino, *metastoria* refers to a cultural horizon shaped by events, symbols and practices that perdure throughout the course of history.[1] This text will specifically address itself to the trope of water. It will demonstrate how fluids, sources, bodies of water and other elements related to watery ecosystems are marshalled to articulate and cope with difficult memories of migration. To do so, I will draw on the mnemonic implications of De Martino's nexus between the '*ritualismo dell'agire*' and the preservation of 'human presence': repetitive (ritual) practices that, by being periodically remembered and performed, uphold a community's socio-cultural life (presence). Essentially, I will implement De Martino's work to expose the importance of *remembering* and *remediating* watery symbols for the consolidation of Southern Italian socio-cultural landscapes. I will show that water (amongst other symbols) *mnemonically* anchors the experience of emigration to an over-arching, mythicised cultural environment (*metastoria*). The case study chosen, a *canto di spartenza*[2] from Montecorice (Cilento), will efficiently illustrate this cultural framework.

Music underpinned the *Grande Emigrazione* from Southern Italy in two key ways: either as a professional opportunity (and therefore a reason to relocate), or as a tool to remember

[1] Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo: Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, ed. by Giordana Charuty, Daniel Fabre e Marcello Massenzio, 3rd edn (Torino: Einaudi, 2019), p. 151.

[2] Lit. song of separation/departure. While 'partenza' implies a return, 'spartenza' is intended as a permanent relocation. See Gianluca Zammarelli, *Craùni: canti tradizionali del Cilento* (etnomalía: 2014).

and negotiate the hardships of emigration.[3] At the time, the latter was mainly associated with a communal and generational transmission of oral culture, consequently aligning with the dynamics of communicative memory.[4] Drawing attention to the symbolic, social and cultural manifestations of memory in sung oral culture (specifically when it remembers migration) is significant for various reasons. These include heeding a relatively understudied field of inquiry, highlighting the mnemonic value of methodologies historically confined to Italian cultural anthropology, as well as deconstructing a monolithic view of the *Mezzogiorno* by illustrating the differences and intersections between its local cultures.

LIFE, PRESENCE AND 'CRITICAL MOMENTS'

De Martino describes 'presence' as a *conscious* experience of life which generates the different cultural, social and economic practices organising and defining the human condition. Essentially, 'presence' encompasses all human endeavours that transcend mere biological and physiological functions. Because of its ability to shape the fundamentals of human 'organised' life, presence operates by a logic of constant 're-affirmation'. To preserve a structured life, presence must be continuously secured through the enactment of the mores and principles of organised cultural and social co-existence. However, similarly to worldly biota and insofar as presence is an expression of life itself, it is precarious and can be vulnerable on a physical and cultural level. The instances that jeopardise presence are identified by De Martino as '*momenti critici*' (critical moments). These are specific events (such as death, migration, births and weddings) that make apparent the 'passage', the 'becoming', the transition from one existential condition to the other. Critical moments are junctures where the flow of history manifests itself and irremediably alters life, consequently disrupting the continuous re-affirmation of presence. Critical moments can also be circumstances unfamiliar to an individual or community, making them events that

[3] See Giuliana Fugazzotto, *Sta terra nun fa pi mia* (Udine: Nota, 2010); Michele Colucci and Stefano Gallo, *L'emigrazione italiana*, 2nd edn (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2023); Virgilio Savona and Michele Straniero, *Canti dell'Emigrazione* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976).

[4] See Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning and Sara Young (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2008), pp. 109-118.

cannot be negotiated through 'quotidian' or '(re)current' cultural practices.[5] 'Quotidian' or 'mundane' practices are intended as everyday manifestations of cultural life that are not specifically dedicated to commemorative rituals and/or providing stability during critical moments. For instance, sung oral culture can be considered both 'mundane' (when it narrates and is practiced in everyday circumstances to support that constant 're-affirmation of presence'), and 'ritualistic' (when it remembers and provides guidance during critical moments, i.e. funeral laments).

METASTORIA: MYTHS, RITUALS AND 'REMEDIATION'

De Martino posits that the uncertainty caused by the 'novelty of becoming' can be coped with by mitigating or temporarily concealing the 'critical' passage from one condition to another.[6] This can be done by approaching life through a cultural framework that 'freezes' or 'smooths out' time to hide the dreaded transition.[7] Put simply, to withstand critical moments, cultural consumption and production are situated in an alternate, dedicated dimension belonging to the sphere of myths and rituals: stories, symbols and practices that are cyclically revisited and remembered throughout history as they offer moral or spiritual guidance.[8] 'Myth is everlasting' and a-temporal, it 'explains the present and the past as well as the future', providing a solid foundation for navigating uncertain times.[9] Therefore, when negotiated in this dimension, presence (as 'way of life') anchors itself to a horizon of symbols and practices that provide it with temporal continuity and do not call for its constant re-affirming.

The alternate dimension of myth can be defined as *metastoria* and is implemented through the *ritualismo dell'agire*: 'rigid' behaviours and practices aimed at reclaiming and repeating culturally meaningful symbols that mediate and negotiate the experience of an event. Ritualistic behaviours access and summon the contents of the *metastoria* in 'precarious' circumstances to provide stability. Because of its periodic revisiting, *metastoria* is subject to individual or communal reinterpretation, processes which, while keeping it

[5] Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, ed. by Giordana Charuty, Daniel Fabre e Marcello Massenzio, 3rd edn (Torino: Einaudi, 2019), pp. 426-433.

[6] De Martino, *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, pp. 433-435.

[7] Marcello Massenzio, 'L'orizzonte formale del partire', in *Morte e pianto rituale*, ed. by Marcello Massenzio (Einaudi, 2021), pp. XV-LXX (p. XXV).

[8] De Martino, *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, p. 435.

[9] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *Journal of American Folklore*, 68 (1955), p. 430.

alive, also leave a mark reflecting the flow of historical time. Therefore, while *metastoria* is not swept away by the course of history, it is still subject to its effects and threaded within its matrix.[10]

The *metastoria* and the ritualistic behaviours used to access it can be regarded as fundamental mnemonic tools to preserve the presence and cultural integrity of an individual or community. Indeed, this framework relies on following 'what is narrated to have been done before': that is, an individual or community's critical moment is negotiated through the memory of relevant cultural products belonging to the *metastoria* (i.e. myths or other symbolic forms).[11] 'Myths re-member...history', they are 'patterns' of 'powerful symbols' creating the 'mental maps that we refer to when we want to place something'.[12] Consequently, the contents of the *metastoria* knit an important mnemonic fabric that can be explored, shared and used as a yardstick to interpret or cope with the complexities of human existence. Revisiting such myths-memories and circulating them within a community through ritualistic behaviours implies a process of 'remediation' whereby this cultural material is not only remembered, but also reconfigured to address a specific audience and situation. Remediation refers to the process of remembering, of re-elaboration, re-inscription and consequent alteration of symbolic forms and the memories they point to. It is inherently intermedial, transmedial and diachronic, as it progressively articulates mediated memories and mnemonic tools. In doing so, remediation supports the travels of memory – in this case also of the *metastoria* – through time and space, ultimately guaranteeing its survival.[13] Hence, diachronic reinterpretations leave their temporal and spatial impression on the *metastoria*, consolidating its entanglement with history.

In *La fine del mondo* (1977) De Martino examines the *metastoria* and *ritualismo dell'agire* in connection with religion. Nonetheless, his earlier writings prove these frameworks can also be applied to cultural practices that transcend the canonical bounds of religion, such as *tarantismo*, oral culture, 'magic' rituals and beliefs.[14] I therefore draw from this analytical structure to interpret a song remembering late 19th and early 20th Century mass emigration from Southern Italy. I will demonstrate how the 'watery' symbols

[10] De Martino, *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, pp. 433-435.

[11] Ibid., p. 435.

[12] Debbie Blake and Carmen Ábrego, 'An interview with Gloria Anzaldúa', *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14 (1995), p. 16; Mary Midgley, *The Myths We Live By* (Routledge, 2011), p. 5.

[13] Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney, Laura Basu and Paulus Bijl*, Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney, Laura Basu and Paulus Bijl (de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 8-9.

[14] See *Morte e pianto rituale* (1958); *Sud e magia* (1959); *La terra del rimorso* (1961).

encompassed by the South's *metastoria* codify a set of ritualistic behaviours specifically used to remember and cope with the precariousness of displacement. In turn, this will shed light on the ability of these symbols to be remediated and effectively convey difficult memories linked to emigration.

'NOW THE SHIP IS LEAVING THE HARBOUR'

The *Grande Emigrazione* (late 1800s – WWI) can be regarded as a critical moment, a juncture in historical time that jeopardised the cultural and physical existence of communities (particularly rural ones). The depopulation of towns and villages, the precarious political and socio-economic conditions of the newly unified South, and the hardship resulting from emigration constituted moments in time that would irreversibly alter the region's landscape.[15] As previously explained, these events could not be overcome nor remembered through 'quotidian' cultural practices, since the latter were themselves at risk of being erased by precarious living conditions. Cilento was one of the territories that emigration hit earliest and most harshly in the *Mezzogiorno*.[16] Because of this, emigration is a recurrent topic in the traditional music of Cilento. *Mo se parte la nave ra lo porto* ('Now the ship is leaving the harbour', song A), uses 'watery' tropes to preserve presence in the face of departure. Recorded in Montecorice, it has been transcribed and preserved by Alfonso and Maddalena Toscano on an online independent archive dedicated to the musical, linguistic and culinary culture of Cilento.[17] This archive is partly inspired by a complex family history of transoceanic mobility toward the United States during the *Grande Emigrazione*, and features an extensive record of the motives, patterns and personal histories of emigration from Cilento towns to North and South America. This song was performed and passed on by Maddalena Toscano's own grandmother.[18]

[15] For a comprehensive historical analysis, see Michele Colucci and Stefano Gallo, *L'emigrazione italiana*, 2nd edn. (Morcelliana, 2023).

[16] Vittorio Cappelli, 'Regioni migratorie e regioni politico-amministrative. L'emigrazione verso le "altre Americhe" da un territorio di frontiera calabro-lucano-campano', *Archivio storico dell'emigrazione italiana*, 3 (2007).

[17] 'Il Cilento e la poesia', n.d., http://www.alfonsotoscano.it/poesia.htm.

[18] I attempted to contact the owners of the archive regarding my use of this material for an academic publication but was unable to reach them. The song here featured is credited and used according to the values and principles of the original webpage.

Song A

Mo se parte la nave ra lo porto	*Now the ship is leaving the harbour*
resta quest' alma sconsolata e scura	*This sad soul stays behind*
parte ninnillo mio ch'è lo chiù caro	*My most beloved is leaving*
nienti vorria sapé, ca va sicuro.	*He will not change his mind*
L'acqua ca te vivi te sia chiara	*May the water you drink be clear (pure)*
ca into non ce fosse na fattura	*May it not contain a curse*
spartenza dolorosa è quanto fai	*You are causing a painful separation*
chi sa domani sera addò ti scura.	*Who knows where you will be tomorrow night.*

As reported by Toscano, chants could be sung or recited, and followed a *repetitive* scheme.[19] This tune is sung from the perspective of a person who did not emigrate and voices the grief caused by the departure of a loved one. Because of the gendered character of emigration[20] and the use of 'masculine' words of endearment ('*ninnillo mio*') to refer to the beloved, the lyrics conceivably lend voice to a woman. This trope is common in emigration songs, which often stage conversations, laments or addresses between masculine and feminine figures – although it is not always clear if these take place in marital or filial relationships. In this case, the singer attempts to beg a loved one to stay, but he is convinced to emigrate anyway.

A compelling aspect of the song is the agency that water is given. The ship is buoyed up by water; water also quenches the loved one's thirst and is even capable of casting a curse (*fattura*). It is the vehicle through which the loved one emigrates, it is what eradicates him from his place of origin and other kin. Yet, water simultaneously links him back to *home* and channels the singer's well-wishes. In this context, it is relevant to think of bodies of water as instruments that are part of a ritualistic engagement, which moors both singer and migrant to the cultural landscape of 'home' by evidently drawing on the South's mythical and magic *metastoria*.

After evoking water, the last verse asks about the future location of the migrant. This line transforms the destination into a locus onto which, as Teti puts it, 'the ones who did not emigrate can project their fears, hopes, dreams and wishes'.[21] The idealised destination

[19] 'Il Cilento e la poesia', n.d., http://www.alfonsotoscano.it/poesia.htm.

[20] Women would often stay behind in the sender country, particularly during seasonal migrations. See Vito Teti, *La restanza* (Einaudi, 2022); Vito Teti, *Pietre di pane: un'antropologia del restare* (Quodlibet, 2024).

[21] Teti, *La restanza,* p. 13.

thus becomes a mythicised anchor point for the apprehension felt by those who stayed behind in the sender country. Equally, the singer's question could be read as a form of 'divination' or 'hydromancy', since the divinatory powers of water were at times mobilised to bear with the uncertainty fostered by departure. A formula from Grottole (Basilicata) implores Saint Monica to show the fate of the loved one 'far away'; if upon reciting the lines a gush of water was heard, it indicated a future of 'tears' and 'blood'.[22] Accordingly, water can be read as a metaphor for death, plausibly bridging the gap with the afterlife in a near-mythological sense, as did for example, the river Styx.[23] In the process of transoceanic emigration, the sea performs a similar role. Indeed, mobility was understood as a process inevitably unfolding alongside death, nearly mirroring stepping into the afterlife. A 1912 newspaper states that the lives claimed by emigration 'far outnumber' war victims.[24] Similarly, *Michel 'u camposant'*,[25] a migrant song recorded in Vieste, features Michele, a figure facilitating the journey toward a port of departure. The song criticises emigration and metaphorically equates Michele to a 'cemetery', as he claims his fellow countrymen's lives by encouraging them to relocate. Interestingly, a partial version of this song is also remediated in Cilento.[26]

Crucially, song A foregrounds the link between water and curses, as well as the 'purity' of water itself. Water was often used as an instrument to 'cure' a *fattura* (a curse deliberately inflicted upon someone) or *fascinazione* (a psychosomatic ailment induced by a supernatural force). *Fatture* and *fascinazioni* are key elements in the South's *metastoria*, as they were held responsible for most afflictions that could not be attributed to 'earthly' factors but entailed an interaction with supernatural forces. As a curative device, water could figure symbolically in spells (*scongiuri*) or songs. For example, a Lucanian *scongiuro* demands the *fascino* drowns in the sea to stop troubling its victim.[27] In other psychosomatic-magic afflictions such as *tarantismo* in southern Puglia, water sources and

[22] Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e magia*, 11th ed. (Feltrinelli, 2013), pp. 25-26.

[23] See Ifor Duncan, 'Hydroreflexivity - Necro-Hydrology', *e-flux* (2023).

[24] *L'Italia*, 19 July 1912 cited in Lorella Viola, 'Narratives of Italian Transatlantic (Re)Migration, 1897–1936', *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (2023), p. 11.

[25] Accessed at Bibliomediateca di Santa Cecilia, https://bibliomediateca.santacecilia.it/bibliomediateca/cms.view?munu_str=0_1_0&numDoc=5.

[26] Virgilio Savona and Michele Straniero, *Canti dell'emigrazione* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976), p. 153.

[27] De Martino, *Sud e magia,* p. 30.

bodies of water (i.e. the sea, fountains, rivers) were used in songs as thaumaturgic symbols that, once mentioned, alleviated the suffering of those who were 'bitten by the spider'.[28]

Furthermore, water was used in its physical form to reduce the effects of curses and physical illnesses, to cure forms of *tarantismo* in northern Campania, and in southern Puglia, where the *tarantati* were partially submerged in the shallow sea or immersed in water-filled barrels.[29] However, water was also the vector of physical and spiritual illnesses, especially if 'contaminated' with other substances. In the Lucanian Apennines, it was believed pregnant women were more susceptible to birth defects if they stepped over water that had been used to clean fish.[30] Hence, it is possible to 'go below' the meaning of the wishes the singer expresses for the migrant. 'May the water he drinks be *clear* or *pure*', may it always be beneficial and not be *physically* or *spiritually* contaminated. Clearly, this is an attempt to 'mitigate' the critical moment of his departure, mooring it to a cultural horizon that sees water as a means to interpret, conceal or beat uncertainty. The singer and migrant, already aware of the powers water holds, can find in it both mythical and divinatory guidance.

VARIATIONS

An untitled variant of song A had already been reported as early as 1872 in a compilation of traditional chants from Southern Italy.[31] This version (song B), recorded in Bagnoli Irpino (100km northwest of Montecorice), combines formulas related to water used in both song A and in other chants recorded in Campania, Apulia, Sicily and Calabria (song C).[32]

[28] Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso* (EST, 1996), pp. 145, 152.

[29] De Martino, *Sud e magia*, pp. 17, 52; Annabella Rossi, Patrizia Ciambelli and Enrico Bassano, *U 'nciarmë* (Field recording, 1976); De Martino, *La terra del rimorso*, pp. 127, 145.

[30] De Martino, *Sud e magia*, p. 41.

[31] Antonio Casetti and Vittorio Imbriani, *Canti delle provincie meridionali Vol. II* (Ermanno Loescher, 1872) p. 297.

[32] Ibid., pp. 297-300; Anna L. Chairetakis, *Calabria Bella, Dove T'hai Lasciate?* (Folkways, 1979). This tune is linked to both emigration and a rift between lovers.

Song B

Partenza dolorosa quanto è cara!	*This departure is painful as much as it is costly!*
È giunta l'ora re lo mmio partire	*The time for me to leave has come*
'No vasciello a puorto mo' ssi prepara,	*A ship in the harbour is getting ready,*
Pe' 'no stennardo ri partenza scura.	*For a long, dark absence.*
L'acqua ch'aggio ra passa' non so ss'è chiara.	*I do not know if the water I must cross is clear.*
No' so domani a sera addò' mmi scura.	*I do not know where I will be tomorrow night.*
A quelle parti che te ne hai ra ire	*Where you must go*
Re fontanelle possono assecca',	*May the fountains dry out,*
No ' puozzi trovà' lietto pe' dormire	*May you not find a bed to sleep in*
Manco tavola posta pe' mangià'.	*Nor a table set for you to eat at.*

Response

The first six lines of song B are related to song A. However, the singer of version B remembers his own departure. Other symbols persist, namely the ship being ready to sail from the harbour, the doubts expressed on the 'clarity' or 'purity' of water, the pain of departure and the 'darkness' of future nights. In the last four lines of song B, the identity of the singer changes to that of a person who remained in the territory of origin, as seen in song A. The second singer responds to the fears expressed about departure in a scornful tone, consistent with the genre of *canti di sdegno* ('songs of contempt'), which often coincide with songs of departure – see i.e. *Michel 'u camposant'*. The last singer of song B *curses* her interlocutor, specifically by hoping *fountains* in the host country *dry out*.[33] This response is related to the different regional variations of song C, as they all wish for fountains to be dry. Furthermore, versions recorded in Naples, Airola, Morciano, Catania and amongst Calabrian immigrants in New York, hope for deluge and torrential rain to hit the land the loved one will reach (see Appendix). Interestingly, in a version of song C recorded in the region of Aci, the singer hopes for the contents of the migrant's glass to turn to poison. References to drinking contaminated water are also present in song A, although they are not made with malicious intent.

Fountains are a recurrent trope in the sung *metastoria* of Southern Italy: they can either symbolise prosperity – as they supply potable ('*pure*') water, or represent the social and romantic interactions that traditionally unfolded in their vicinity. Conversely, deluge and rain are arguably indicative of the hardship ensuing from floods and landslides. These hydrological disasters are common across the rural mountainous areas of the South, and

[33] Assuming song B presents a gendered dynamic, as does song A.

have historically led to the displacement of entire villages.[34] Hence, in song C, fountains and rain are used as tools to curse the prospective migrant, as the singer wishes him a time of scarcity, ill fortune and the collapse of his social relations. Importantly, the reproval of emigration plausibly conceals the desire for the loved one's return. Poison, water and fountains are also central themes of *Chiantu de l'emigranti* (song D), a migration song from Cosenza.[35] This tune also features two voices: first, the migrant laments his departure, then the loved one who stayed behind implores his return (as in song B). The last two lines of the first verse use a similitude to equate fountains to the singer-migrant's tears. The second verse opens by stating that these tears are not fountains, but 'bitterness' and 'poison' that have contaminated the migrant's life.

The centrality of water in songs A, B, C, and D demonstrates the importance of these tropes in the commemoration and negotiation of the migratory experience, as well as an engagement with ritualistic behaviour. Indeed, once identified within the broader *metastoria*, 'watery' symbols are reformulated and reassimilated within a specific context and cultural practice to provide stability. Water establishes and reinforces a social and mnemonic hydrography in which these songs can be anchored and passed on. In a few lines it is possible to re-member not only a particular event, but also a mythical image of the cultural lifeworld that mediated its perception. Water leads into other events, such as death or psychosomatic afflictions, carving out connective paths between 'critical moments' and the meaningful symbols used to process them. In song A, water follows the same prescribed cultural patterns featured in other magic-religious rituals that guarantee and preserve human presence. As a mythical symbol and thaumaturgic tool, it bears the power to guide and protect those who are suffering. Since, as previously mentioned, the condition of being a migrant is perceived as a precarious balance between life and death, water is fundamental in the negotiation of this 'third' state. However, because of its symbolic ambivalence, water

[34] Teti, *La restanza*.

[35] Virgilio Savona and Michele Straniero, *Canti dell'emigrazione* (Garzanti, 1976), p. 72.

can also be associated with possible difficulties encountered during emigration, and used as a metaphorical repository in which anxieties and worries are externalised.

Song D

Strada mia abbandunata, mo te lassu, chiagnennu me ne vaju le vie vie. O quanti passi che da tia m'arrassu, tante funtane faru l'uocchie mie.	*My lonely road, now I leave you,* *crying I walk away.* *O how many steps separate me from you,* *my eyes turned to fountains.*
Nun so' funtane, no, ma fele e tassu, tassu che m'entassau la vita mia. Io partu pe' l'America luntana, nun sacciu adduje me porta la fortuna.	*They are not fountains, but bitterness and poison,* *poison that contaminated my whole life.* *I am leaving to the far away America,* *I do not know where destiny will lead me to.*
O Sant'Antuone mio fallo venire, e non mi fa' pigliare cchiù de pena! } *Response*	*O Saint Anthony, make him return,* *and do not make me full of woe again!*

CONCLUSION

I have strived to unearth the thread connecting the symbols present in Southern Italian migration songs with the wider *metastoria* of this territory. Oral culture singing the *Grande Emigrazione* identified, isolated and mobilised meaningful tropes to steadily anchor, remember and remediate this transgenerational experience. In doing so, it preserved the 'presence' of communities at risk of depopulation. While Erll's 'remediation' alludes to mnemonic narratives, I have shown that mythical-ritualistic symbols can also be remediated and adapted to specific historical circumstances to reconstruct the memory of a social and cultural matrix. These symbolic forms shape a codified framework that can be repeated to stabilise a 'critical moment' and sediment its memory within a cultural landscape. Ritualistic behaviours are also inherently present in the modalities of transmission of oral culture. To be transmitted, oral culture must be continuously remediated and its verses repeated. *Mo se parte la nave ra lo porto* and the symbolic references it contains, once only remediated within familial or community boundaries, are now kept alive through an independent initiative (and hopefully this text). The continuity provided by ritualistic behaviours and the symbols loaned from the broader *metastoria*, make migration songs a powerful tool for the consolidation of presence and the processing of difficult events and/or memories. *Mo se parte la nave ra lo porto* has served as a point of entry into this intricate

web of symbolic references, whose mutual interaction generates and upholds vital cultural meaning and relevance.[36]

36 Unless specified, all translations are mine.

Appendix, variations of song C.

Antonio Casetti and Vittorio Imbriani, Canti delle provincie meridionali Vol. II, pp. 297-300.

Song C (Arnesano)

Aggiu saputo ca te nd'hai de 'scire,	*I have learnt that you must leave,*
O promituru mmiu, nu' mme lu fare!	*O my beloved, do not do this to me!*
A quiddhe parti, addhù' spieri de 'scire,	*Where you hope to go,*
Pozzanu ssaccarire le funtane:	*May fountains dry out:*
Segge nu' puezzi 'cchiare pe' sidire,	*May you never get chairs to sit down,*
Nimmenu taula cu puezzi mangiare.	*Nor a table where to eat*
...	...

Song C (Lecce and Cavallino

...	...
A quiddha terra addhu' te nde voi 'scire,	*Where you hope to go,*
Pozzanu saccarire le funtane.	*May fountains dry out.*
...	...

Song C (Morciano di Leuca)

Aggiu saputu ca te nd'hai de scire,	*I have learnt that you must leave,*
Acqua, treni, e derlampi pozza fare!	*May there be water, thunder and lightning!*
A quiddhu locu ci te nd'hai de 'scire	*Where you must go,*
Funtane e puzzi pozzanu seccare.	*May fountains dry out.*
...	...

Song C (Airola)

Aggio Saputo ca te ne vuo' ire,	*I have learnt that you must leave,*
Chiovere, e maletiempo pozza fare!	*May there be rain and bad weather!*
Da chelle parti addò' te ne vuoi ire	*Where you want to go,*
Sse pozzano seccà' puzze e fontane;	*May fountains dry out;*
...	...

Song C (Napoli)

Aggio saputo che te ne vuo' ire;	*I have learnt that you want to leave;*
Chiovere e malo tiempo pozza fare!	*May there be rain and bad weather!*
Da chella parte che te n'haje a ghire	*Where you must go*
Sse puozzano seccà' puzze e fontane!	*May fountains dry out!*
...	...

Song C (Catania and Aci region)

Sacciu, figghiuzzi, ch'aviti a partiri;	*I know, son, that you must leave;*
Sciroccu e malu tiempu pozza fari!	*May there be sirocco and bad weather!*
'Ntra 'ddu paisi unni aviti a ghiri	*In the country where you must go*
...	...
'Ntra 'dda funtana ch'aviti a veviri,	*May in the fountain that you must drink from,*
L'acqua davanti vi possa siccari;	*The water evaporate in front of you;*
...	...
Hassi saputu ca vi n'hâti a ghiri,	*I have learnt that you must leave,*
...	...
'Ntra 'ddu paisi ca spirati iri,	*In the country where you hope to go,*
...	...
E 'ntra 'dda tazza ca speri viviri,	*And in the cup you hope to drink from,*
Vilenu, ca ti pozza invilinari.	*May you find poison, and may it intoxicate you.*

Anna L. Chairetakis, Villanella di Acri, 1979. (original translation)

'E saputo ca a l'America vu jire	*I have learnt that you want to go to America*
ji lu diluvio pe ttía se	*May deluge rain down upon you*
...	...
'U bu troveare nè d'acquá nè vino,	*May you not find water nor wine,*
si vuanno di siccheare li funteane.	*fountains will dry out.*

The Eternal(ly Changing) City: Demolition and Roma Sparita in Visual Culture from the Risorgimento to Fascism

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Roma sparita, or 'vanished Rome', is a particular phrase that encapsulates the unique power of memory in a city comprised of so many layers.1 The term started to appear in discourse about the city at the turn of the twentieth century, and was made popular by the watercolour collection of the Risorgimento-era artist Ettore Roesler Franz (1845-1907), which now bears the phrase as its title. Throughout the end of the Risorgimento and the rise of the Fascist period, the term came to be used to encompass the entirety of what was demolished in the modernisation of Rome, and it is still used today. Above all, the invocation of Roma sparita invited audiences and artists to participate in the process of remembering and documenting what was being lost — both the tangible and intangible. That being said, who was remembering, what was remembered, and why, all shifted from the end of the nineteenth century through the rise of the Fascist regime. This article will chart the rise of Roma sparita as a concept by considering the Risorgimento-era works of Franz alongside the works of Maria Barosso (1879-1960), a watercolourist who was employed by the Fascist regime. By viewing the works of these artists together, we can see the shift away from Risorgimento-era nostalgic documentation of Roma pittoresca, which was created out of anxiety about change, towards a celebration of this change and the dramatic Fascist demolition process. More broadly, this shift helps us understand how the process of remembering the disappearing city was transformed—and manipulated— as it first became a capital, and then the heart of Fascist Italy.

[1] This paper is dedicated to my mom, Melissa Fox, who so desperately wanted to live long enough to see my name in print. I hope I make you proud forever.

BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

The rise of *Roma sparita* took place within the context of the drastic transformation of Rome over the period heralded in by the unification of Italy, and especially during the Fascist *Ventennio.* From 1870 through 1945, the urban fabric of Rome became the most important tool with which numerous politicians and urban planners communicated their new ideals for a modern Italy.[2] During the Risorgimento, the city was transformed through various iterations of the *piano regolatore*, which, while including dramatic interventions in the city, generally adhered to the principle of respecting the existing urban layout. In the Fascist period, Mussolini moved from these "surgical" interventions in the urban fabric to *sventramento*, which encouraged all-encompassing demolition of entire neighbourhoods in order to both "liberate" ancient monuments and to make space to create the "Third Rome" of Fascism.[3] Such a policy left both physical and social devastation in its wake— a problem with which Rome continues to grapple today.

Scholars have continuously analysed the ideology, iconography, and consequences of the Fascist urban project in the city of Rome since the post-war period. Journalist Antonio Cederna established the precedent for the denunciation of Fascist *sventramento* on both social and aesthetic grounds, while architectural historian Spiro Kostof led the first foray into the study of Fascist demolition within the context of urban design.[4] Both of these scholars placed the focus upon the demolition process itself as a key element of Fascist ideology, and not simply what was built in its wake. However, no scholarship has examined in depth the broader wave of cultural production that accompanied demolition in the Fascist period, and the various types of media that were employed to promote it. Yet, woven

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[2] See the classic text about Rome's modern transformation: Italo Insolera, Roma Moderna (Einaudi, 1962).

[3] For Mussolini's role in Rome's urban planning, see Borden W. Painter Jr., Mussolini's Rome (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), and Paolo Nicolosi, *Mussolini, Architect* (University of Toronto Press, 2002). For the "Third Rome", see Aristotle Kallis, in particular *The Third Rome, 1922-1943* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and R.J.B. Bosworth, *Whispering City: Rome and its Histories* (Yale University Press, 2011). For Fascist urban planning's relationship to ancient Rome, see Paul Baxa, *Roads and Ruins* (University of Toronto Press, 2010) and Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

[4] Antonio Cederna, *I vandali in casa* (Laterza, 1956), and *Mussolini urbanista* (Laterza, 1979). See also Bruno Bonomo, ''The vandals at home': Antonio Cederna's denunciation of the devastation of Italian cities in the postwar period', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies,* 21.5 (2016).

Spiro Kostof, *The Third Rome, 1870-1950: Traffic and Glory* (University Art Museum, Berkeley, 1973), and 'His Majesty the Pick: the Aesthetics of Demolition', *Design Quarterly* 118/9 (1982).

into the Fascist demolition process was a vast body of written sources and artistic depictions of Rome's transformation, which have not benefitted from the same scrutiny as their Risorgimento predecessors. In particular, Maria Barosso, the artist whose works form the backbone of this article, has not been the subject of any sustained scholarship, nor any major exhibitions, before 2025.[5] Similarly, although Antonio Muñoz was an immensely influential figure in the visual culture of Fascist Rome through his leadership of both the Soprintendenza ai Monumenti di Roma and the Direzione Generale di Antichità e Belle Arti, there is only one substantial monograph dedicated to his activities.[6] Finally, despite its ubiquitous invocation in the parlance of Rome's modern urban development, no scholars have considered the rise and power of the term *Roma sparita*. It is these lacunae that this article hopes to address in the following analysis.

In order to do so, this article will utilise the lens of Henri Lefebvre's conceptual triad of space— spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space— and in particular the tension between representations of space (conceptualised space) and representational (lived) space.[7] The demolition activity in Rome, and especially *sventramento*, completely upended both types of space of the city as those in power tried to assert their control over the urban fabric. This destabilisation acted as a catalyst for Risorgimento artists such as Roesler Franz to try to preserve their memories of the disappearing conceptualised space through paintings, which engaged in the creation of representational lived space through their emphasis of certain emotions and activities. In the Fascist period, as *Roma sparita* grew out of this initial artistic impulse, competing visions of these lived spaces arose: the nostalgic version in the style of Roesler Franz, and the new, celebratory version of the Regime. As this article will show, Muñoz's manipulation of *Roma sparita* served as an attempt to control the social space of the city; through his actions, he was able to establish an "official" representational space for the residents who had to make sense of the new conceptualised space of Fascist Rome.

RISORGIMENTO-ERA ROMA SPARITA

[5] This situation is thankfully changing with the exhibition *Maria Barosso, artista e archeologa nella Roma in trasformazione,* and the publication of its accompanying catalogue in Autumn 2025 at Musei Capitolini Centrale Montemartini.

[6] Calogero Bellanca, *Antonio Muñoz* (L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2003).

[7] Henri Lefebvre (trans. Nicholson-Smith), *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991), pp. 38-39.

With the creation of Rome as Italy's capital city in 1871, and the development of the first *piano regolatore*, which was ratified in 1873, residents, scholars, and artists grew increasingly anxious about remembering the old Rome that was slated for disappearance. This fear was triggered by the impending transformation that would be created by extensive demolition for the sake of modernity, and was rooted in a deep nostalgia for a certain traditional way of life. By the early 1880s, writers, architects, and artists were publicly sharing their desire to preserve the memory of the disappearing city, for fear that it would be completely forgotten.[8] These concerned residents found their champion in the watercolourist Roesler Franz, who had already embarked upon his first series of paintings that faithfully documented those areas that were about to be demolished. In 1883, the city itself took interest in his paintings, and bought 40 watercolours for the opening of Palazzo delle Esposizioni; after this purchase, Roesler Franz created 80 more paintings of Rome, all of which were purchased by the government after his death in 1907.[9]

The 120 paintings that resulted from Roesler Franz's two decades of work are remarkable images of Rome's pre-modern representational space, which sought to preserve the emotions and perception of the city before its transformation (Fig. 1-4). In terms of subject matter and location, Roesler Franz concentrated upon scenes that viewers might have regarded as mundane, and almost exclusively upon working class locales, the built environment of which exhibited details such as crumbling facades, detritus and debris, roofs overgrown with weeds, and other less-than-idealistic elements. Such depictions engaged with a certain perception of Rome— what the Fascists would later call the *colore locale*, and others would call picturesque. Indeed, the initial title that Roesler Franz gave to his collection was '*Roma pittoresca, Memorie di un'era che passa*'; the title *Roma Sparita* only appeared over a decade later, thus eliding the picturesque and *Roma sparita* into one.[10] However, this quaint version of Rome was exactly what the *piano regolatore* was working to dismantle with the new conceived space of the modernised city, and its endangerment was precisely why Roesler Franz committed it to memory on paper.

Beyond the built environment, however, the paintings blur the line between documentation and emotion through his inclusion of people, and it is this blend that enabled Roesler Franz to truly engage in the preservation of the pre-modern representational space of Rome. While the paintings are seemingly faithful, realistic views

[8] Maria Elisa Tittoni, 'Ettore Roesler Franz', in *Paesaggi della Memoria* (Mandragora, 2007).

[9] Francesco Roesler Franz, Ettore Roesler Franz: biografia romanzata del pittore di Roma sparita (Intra Moenia, 2017), pp. 151, 229.

[10] Francesco Roesler Franz, *Ettore Roesler Franz*, p. 151.

of the urban fabric that was about to be demolished, it is the residents that he depicts, and the activities in which they are engaged, which preserve the memory of the intangible aspect of *Roma sparita*— that is, the social, representational space of the city. This is particularly true of the watercolours that depict hubs of traditional activity that were wiped out by demolition, such as the *pescheria* in the Portico of Octavia, fishermen on the banks of the Tiber, and street vendors in the Jewish Ghetto (Fig. 1-3). In these cases, it was not simply the buildings themselves that had to be remembered, but also a way of life. There is also a potent sense of melancholy in the apparent unawareness of the subjects; in these images, there is no hint of the demolition to come. The only exception is one painting of via Rua, made in 1888, in which there is a torn-up, camouflaged notice about the demolition of the Ghetto hung on the wall; its presence is ominous, yet barely detectable amidst the rest of the bustling scene (Fig. 4).

Thus, Roesler Franz's images, although spurred on in their creation by the demolition works, exist in a world in which nothing has yet changed. They are a snapshot of a particular vision of Rome, somewhere between picturesque fantasy and detailed reality, that are meant to encompass and epitomise the way of life in Rome that was disappearing — both the environment and the daily lives of the people within it. The timeframe of Roesler Franz's world ends when demolition begins, and does not depict any part of the process of disappearance. This omission of the demolition process will put Roesler Franz's works in stark contrast with later depictions of *Roma sparita*.

FASCIST-ERA ROMA SPARITA

After its initial popularity from the 1880s to the 1910s, the ideology of *Roma sparita* experienced a dramatic shift in the 1920s and 1930s. This change was a result of an intensive propagandistic campaign spearheaded by Antonio Muñoz. As the director of the Office of Antichità e Belle Arti, he was paradoxically in charge of both the major demolition projects in Rome, and the artistic and institutional remembrance of what was being demolished— and so, he had to power to control both the conceptualised and lived space of the city. This remarkable position allowed the Regime to take hold of *Roma sparita* in order to create an official representational space of the new Rome at a time in which it was facing increasing instability. Over a period of about ten years, through a combination of exhibitions, periodicals, and artistic patronage, Muñoz was able to completely appropriate and transform the intention, meaning, and message behind *Roma sparita*. As a result, by the

mid-1930s, the term had shifted from a nostalgic, mournful remembrance of traditional, picturesque Rome, into a triumphant rallying cry for the Governatorato and its *sventramento*.

The first step in Muñoz's transformation of *Roma sparita* was the creation of an exhibition entitled '*Mostra della Roma che sparisce',* which opened in 1927.[11] The exhibit featured 260 different artworks of areas that were slated to be demolished in the coming years with the ratification of the 1931 *piano regolatore.* In a brief preface that Muñoz wrote for the exhibition catalogue, he laid out his justifications and goals. He noted the dramatic changes that had already occurred in the city, and that,

> Più grandi trasformazioni si avranno certamente nel prossimo avvenire, per l'applicazione del nuovo Piano Regolatore, pubblicato in questi giorni dal Governatorato, che secondo le direttive tracciate dal Duce nel suo memorando discorso in Campidoglio, persegue il nobile intendimento di provvedere in modo degno alla formazione della futura Grande Roma.[12]

He continued, 'sono condannati a sparire molti edifici d'interesse storico ed artistico; molti ambienti caratteristici dovranno mutare aspetto', and thus, 'di tutte queste memorie mi parve fosse opportuno conservare il ricordo in forma artisticamente decorosa' through the creation of the exhibition.[13] He concluded by mentioning, 'le opere più interessanti e più degne andranno a far parte del nuovo Museo di Topografia Romana, a complemento della celebre raccolta di acquarelli della *Roma Sparita* del Roesler-Franz'.[14]

This testimony, although short, nevertheless provides clear insight into Muñoz's true intentions regarding the ideology of *Roma sparita*. He cited the incoming *piano regolatore* as the impetus for creating the exhibition, and his focus was on the loss of 'buildings' and 'environments' as Fascist urban planners enacted their visions of the new conceptualised space of the city. In doing so, he made demolition the centrepiece of Roma sparita; it was no longer focused on the picturesque and its traditions, ways of life, and local customs, but rather, a reaction to the changing urban fabric, and part of the process of demolition. Indeed, the subtle shift of the title, bringing the past Roma sparita into the present tense of Roma che sparisce, heralded in the development of this ideological difference. According

[11] Antonio Muñoz, *Mostra della Roma che sparisce (*Associazione artistica internazionale, 1927).
[12] Antonio Muñoz, *Roma che sparisce,* introduction.
[13] ibid.
[14] ibid.

to the Roma sparita of Muñoz, the act of remembrance was no longer about the past, and what had already been lost; instead, it was about the change that was actively in process all around the city. The transformation of Rome had not happen*ed*, it was happen*ing* at the moment of the exhibition.

Additionally, in choosing '*Roma che sparisce*' as the title, and centering Roesler Franz as the core of the exhibition, Muñoz was taking the first step in his appropriation of *Roma sparita*. Over the preceding decades, the term had become evocative of the emotional burden of loss and placelessness felt by those who watched as their city was drastically transformed. It was not a concept that originated from the Roman government itself, or from urban planners, but rather from artists and writers in reaction to the actions of the government and planners. And while the Roman government purchased and exhibited Roesler Franz's works during the Risorgimento, it is difficult to determine whether it did so because it endorsed the nostalgic sentiments behind it, or because it wanted to control the narrative of *Roma sparita*.

This ambiguity of motive vanished in the 1927 exhibit; from that point forward, the Regime was the patron and arbiter of the idea — and more importantly, the art — of *Roma sparita*. This position allowed the Regime to gain control over the creation of the new lived space of the city in the minds of residents while simultaneously dictating its conceptualised space. By appropriating the term and separating it from the artists who created their art as an emotional act, the Regime also removed any sense of nostalgia for the picturesque, or regret at its disappearance. For Muñoz, the documentation of these memories was not an organic cultural act, but rather, an academic pursuit of art historical and architectural preservation, separated from the emotions of Risorgimento-era *Roma sparita*. According to him, this process of remembrance was best achieved through the creation of artworks. This focus on artworks is made clear by the last paragraph of Muñoz's introduction, in which he states that the memory which he seeks to curate is specifically an 'artistic' one, and is meant to 'complement' the collection of Roesler Franz. Both of these changes to *Roma sparita* — the focus upon the demolition process, and the removal of nostalgia — would become central to the term's development over the next decade.

This process began in earnest after the closure of the exhibit, when Muñoz began implementing his plans to turn '*Roma che sparisce*', along with Roesler Franz's collection, into a permanent museum: an institution that would come to be known as Museo di Roma. This museum, which was inaugurated in 1930, contained a blend of two versions of *Roma sparita,* the nostalgic and the triumphant, in its first few years. Galleries tending

towards nostalgia displayed dioramas of Roman street life, cultural items donated by Romans or rescued from demolished buildings, and a multitude of paintings from the previous centuries that depicted the old ways of Rome, all of which joined the Roesler Franz images. Amidst these displays, however, Museo di Roma quickly became a useful tool to promote Muñoz's new vision of *Roma sparita* as well. This is largely due to the fact that a group of contemporary paintings joined these artifacts in the museum's permanent collection, many of which did not depict the lost neighbourhoods *before* their demolition, but rather, the demolition process itself. It is these demolition artworks, as a discrete genre, that enabled Muñoz to divert *Roma sparita* onto a new, Fascist course.

As the museum was being developed, Muñoz carried out an intensive acquisition campaign while also fielding offers from artists and collectors, and this process enabled him to exert almost complete control over the museum and its collection. The permanent collection was built through a combination of commissions sought out by Muñoz, and donations from artists who sought him out in order to offer their works.[15] As a result, a section of this collection focused on depictions of the demolition process itself began to develop in a permanent sequel to '*Roma che sparisce*', and included works executed over a number of years by more than a half-dozen artists. The encouragement of such artworks demonstrated how the term was used to invoke the physical transformation of Rome as an achievement to be celebrated, and not a loss to be mourned.

At the centre of this artistic initiative was Maria Barosso, a highly trained artist from Turin and the first woman hired by the Amministrazione delle Belle Arti.[16] Barosso painted dozens of scenes of the demolitions in the Centro Storico. In 1930, after being featured in '*Roma che sparisce*', she approached the Governatorato directly and offered to sell fifteen of her demolition paintings to the city, which were recognised for their value in preserving the memory of *Roma sparita*.[17] The city agreed, and hired her as an artist for the Office of the Forum Romanum and Palatine, for whom she continued to paint a multitude of watercolours depicting the demolitions for the next several years.

When looking at Barosso's body of work, as representative of demolition paintings as a whole, there are several aspects that stand out within the context of Muñoz's *Roma sparita*

[15] Rome, Archivio Storico Capitolino (ASC), Ripartizione (1921-1931) Appendice, t. 1931, cl.1 sottocl.9, b.363, f.4.

[16] 'Maria Barosso', in *I colori dell'Archeologia*, ed. by Luigia Attilia and Fedora Filippi (Edizioni Quasar, 2009), pp. 62-65.

[17] ASC, Ripartizione X A.B.A. b.358, f.1, sf. 3.

campaign (Fig. 5-8). First, and most noticeably, Barosso's paintings are extremely dynamic, and almost exclusively depict the act of demolition *in medias res*. Unlike Roesler Franz, or even the exhibition of 1927, there is no inclusion of the Rome before the loss; Barosso's paintings exclusively focus on the demolition that is already happening. They are zoomed-out, broad scale landscapes that encompass the half-demolished buildings, the workers, the equipment, and the surrounding landmarks and ruins, and are almost always a snapshot of the demolition in action, full of movement (Fig. 5). It is the process that must be noticed, documented, and remembered, not the disappearing urban fabric itself — *Roma che sparisce*, so to speak, and not *Roma sparita*.

Barosso's focus on the overall demolition process, as opposed to an interest in the people and places being lost, can be seen in one particularly curious stylistic choice: throughout her corpus of work, Barosso does not depict the faces of any of the people in the scenes. Although the paintings are often crowded with workers, she chooses to leave them anonymous. This choice makes the workers seem as if they are simply cogs in the demolition machine, and almost incidental to the scene being depicted. While their presence is important because they are carrying out the work of demolition, they are only one part of it; they blend into the bustle of the process, akin to the machinery and the scaffolding. This lack of focus on the people in the paintings, along with the broader scale of the compositions, creates a sense of overall industriousness and activity, but removes any details that might individualize the workers, and thus humanize the losses being depicted.

Similarly, when Barosso does choose to include residents in the composition, she includes them as taking part in the demolition action as spectators (Fig. 6). These residents usually have their back to the viewer and lean on barriers or fences; they are seemingly engrossed in the process unfolding in front of them, and some have the infamous *umarell* pose with their hands clasped behind their backs. Barosso's inclusion of these figures implies the residents' complacency regarding the demolition; while they seem curious about the process, they also seem to accept it, and their clasped hands signal submission. At the same time, their presence also seems to hint at the process of cultural memory formation taking place amongst the Romans themselves; these residents standing as witness to the demolition of their homes and neighborhoods suggests that they were also imprinting the memory of these locations, and the way in which they were lost, upon their minds for posterity.

While the spectators might have been creating a shared cultural memory, Barosso's paintings actively engage in the process of institutional memory by taking pains to

document the concrete details of the demolition process. One major way in which she includes this documentation is through the consistent inclusion of captions, which were written directly on the artworks themselves, within the frame. While some of these captions are quite straightforward with only her name and the date, more often, they include more detail, such as the exact location, the extent of time the painting was meant to represent, and a description of the work that is being carried out. Aside from these more clinical details, sometimes, her wording provides glimpses of her own thoughts and engagement with the Fascist program. For example, a caption written on a painting from February 1932 says, 'nuovi visioni di Roma Febbraio 1932 – dalle demolizioni delle casupole di via Cremona emerge il Campidoglio e si scopire il Foro di Cesare' (Fig. 7). The wording strikes the viewer as celebratory; the proclamation that *nuove visioni di Roma* are being created by the demolitions, while the grand ruins of the Campidoglio and Forum of Caesar are emerging from the *casupole*, aligns with Mussolini's call for ancient Rome to be freed from the 'costruzioni parassitarie e profane'.[18] Indeed, the caption seems to anticipate Mussolini's speech delivered to the senate a month later, in which he declared, 'demoliamo tutte le casupole infette'.[19]

Similarly, on another painting of the demolitions in the same area, made a few months later, Barosso wrote, 'come muoiono le vecchie case per la grandezza di Roma' (Fig. 8). However, it is especially interesting to note that Barosso, an illustrator of ancient architecture by trade, formats this phrase in the style of Roman monumental inscriptions: the words are written in all capital letters, with an interpunct between each word. Such stylistic choices situate this phrase as a triumphant title for the image, and not simply a caption — indeed, her more typical informational caption is written below this title. The language of the title is in keeping with its monumental formatting, and seems to harken back to Mussolini's infamous 1925 speech *La Nuova Roma*, in which he outlined his plans for Rome's urban transformation.[20] Barosso's use of *grandezza*, Mussolini's own word for his vision of Rome, is particularly telling, as is the sentiment that the old houses of Quartiere Alessandrino, the working-class district, were dying 'for the sake of' this grandeur.

Overall, Barosso's body of work epitomizes Muñoz's new vision not just for *Roma sparita,* but for Museo di Roma as a whole. Her celebratory images are designed to inspire

[18] Governatorato di Roma, *Piano Regolatore di Roma 1931* (Treves-Treccani-Tumminelli, 1931), p. 8.
[19] Benito Mussolini, *Scritti e discorsi di Benito Mussolini* vol. 8 (Ulrico Hoepli, 1934), p. 34.
[20] Governatorato di Roma, *Piano Regolatore 1931,* pp. 8-9.

excitement for the demolition process: the scenes are full of frenzied work, blue skies, and rosy buildings, and, most importantly, the grandeur of both ancient and Fascist Rome rising from the dust of the demolished buildings. It is precisely these types of artworks that were meant to consume the nostalgia of the old *Roma sparita*; this could be achieved by creating a museum that both entombed this pre-Fascist version, while presenting dynamic new artworks that overrode it. Such was the fate of the sorrowful *Roma sparita* of the past— the cohort of artists creating demolition paintings for the Museum represented the triumphant *Roma che sparisce* of the Fascist present.

In conclusion, the story of *Roma sparita* represents the power that one phrase could have in the collective memory of the city at the hands of authority; namely, the power to redirect the cultural reception of a drastically shifting urban fabric. Thus, *Roma sparita* underscores the ability of art to both preserve, and later construct, a preferred representational space while conceptualised space was being dismantled and destabilised. However, this paper provides only a small glimpse into the all-encompassing campaign led by Muñoz. Aside from artworks, the appropriation of *Roma sparita* extended across multiple fronts through the creation of new institutions, academic and popular publications, propaganda, and cultural works. As a result, the powerful emotions behind the idea were transfigured into a way to celebrate the very demolition process against which it had initially been protesting. Such a campaign continues to linger in today's cultural memory, where we can detect the original, nostalgic version of *Roma sparita* in book titles, restaurants, archives, and even songs. At the same time, we can also see Muñoz's version in the top floor of Museo di Roma, which is dedicated to Rome's Fascist-era demolitions, and the upcoming exhibition devoted to Maria Barosso. But in the end, the full picture of Rome's transformation involves all of these images: while we need to remember the sorrowful losses of *Roma sparita*, we cannot forget the processes by which it disappeared.

FIGURES

FIG 1. Ettore Roesler Franz, *Il Portico d'Ottavia guardando a destra* (1887), watercolor on paper, 53 × 75 cm (photograph by Alfredo Valeriani). Roma, Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico; Copyright Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

FIG 2. Ettore Roesler Franz, *Continuazione di Via Capocciuto nel Ghetto* (1886), watercolor on paper, 53 × 75 cm. Roma, Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico; Copyright Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

FIG 3. Ettore Roesler Franz, *La piazza delle Azimelle in Ghetto* (1881), watercolor on paper, 53 × 75 cm (photograph by Roberto Lucignani). Roma, Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico; Copyright Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

FIG 4. Ettore Roesler Franz, *Via Rua. In Fondo il Portico d'Ottavia* (1888), watercolor on paper, 53 × 75 cm (photograph by Roberto Lucignani). Roma, Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico; Copyright Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

FIG 5. Maria Barosso, *La via dei Colli con l'abside della Basilica di Massenzio nel 1932* (1932), pencil and watercolor on paper (photograph by Alfredo Valeriani). Roma, Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico; Copyright Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

FIG 6. Maria Barosso, *Demolizioni di case medioevali tra Via Cremona e Via delle Chiavi d'Oro, 1932* (1932), pencil and watercolor on paper (photograph by Alfredo Valeriani). Roma, Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico; Copyright Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

FIG 7. Maria Barosso, *Demolizione delle case in Via Cremona per gli scavi al Foro di Cesare, 1932* (1932), pencil and watercolor on paper (photograph by Alfredo Valeriani). Roma, Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico; Copyright Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

FIG 8. Maria Barosso, *Demolizione di un isolato tra Via della Croce Bianca e Via della Salara Vecchia* (1932). pencil and watercolor on paper (photograph by Alfredo Valeriani). Roma, Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico; Copyright Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

Memory and Narrative Positionality. Depicting the Italian Doctor/Colonial Other Relationship in the Post-war Period[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, a growing awareness has emerged regarding the issue of positionality. Within academic research, a scholar's preexisting epistemological assumptions may lead to potentially problematic outcomes and biased knowledge which reflect their own worldview. Although its implications are apparently subtle or purely discursive, this reflection can be applied also to cultural production to some extent. Within cultural and postcolonial studies, Said's *Orientalism* highlights that being European is not a neutral fact when representing non-Western Otherness.[2] In their contributions, Gayatri Spivak[3] and Linda Alcoff[4] also pinpoint the inherent risks in the act of speaking *for* or *about* the Other: the denial of the informant's agency, the reinforcement of discursive hierarchies, and the legitimization of specific narrative-interpretive constructions of the world.

My proposal for a literary application emerges from the question of how positionality influences the production and reception of knowledge. As a researcher's prior worldview can influence and bias their work, it is reasonable to assume that significant repercussions also occur in narratives about the Other and the Self, depending on the specific position of the narrator—technically distinct from that of the author. The narrator's specific position—and the extent to which they are embedded within the social system they

[1] The English translations from Italian of the primary and secondary resources are by the author.

[2] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1979), 11. See also: Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Knopf, 1993).

[3] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (editors), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 66-111.

[4] Linda Alcoff, 'The Problem of Speaking for Others', *Culture Critique*, 20 (1992), pp. 5-32.

describe—may thus contribute to legitimizing ideologically oriented readings of past events. These interpretations often reinforce already dominant narrative frames. This process is rarely merely intentional: even when ideological positions are articulated explicitly only in infrequent, overt 'non-narrative comments', this does not imply that the narrative itself is ideologically neutral or 'innocent'.[5] Rather, ideology tends to emerge almost inevitably when narrative production intersects with broader social and historical dynamics. A particularly relevant example concerns the construction and reshaping of national identity, where mechanisms of collective self-favoritism frequently come into play.[6]

For this reason, I aim to examine a specific dynamic: the relationship between the Italian doctor and the colonial Other, and the resulting construction of the self-image of Italians in the colonies as produced through literary representation. Specifically, my analysis focuses on how the position of the doctor-narrator and their inherent sense of mission intersect with memories of Italy's colonial past, considering three case studies published immediately after World War II—*Tam tam Mayumbe* (1950) by Gian Gaspare Napolitano,[7] *Il deserto della Libia* (1952) by Mario Tobino,[8] and *Un medico in Africa* (1952) by Alberto Denti di Pirajno.[9]

The case studies

The three case studies share common traits. Published in the aftermath of World War II and the loss of Italian colonies, they all feature doctors as both narrators and main characters, and are set in colonial Africa. The settings are not limited to territories formerly under Italian administration—Libya, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia—but also include countries where an Italian presence was nonetheless documented, such as the Congo.[10] At the same time, the authors differ significantly in terms of both their personal experience of Africa and their political allegiances.

[5] Mieke Bal, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto University Press, 2017), p. 23.

[6] Bruno M. Mazzara, *Appartenenza e pregiudizio. Psicologia sociale delle relazioni interetniche* (Carocci, 1998); Paolo Proietti, *Specchi del letterario. L'imagologia* (Sellerio, 2008).

[7] Gian Gaspare Napolitano, *Tam tam Mayumbe*, in Id., *La Mariposa* (Vallecchi, 1950), pp. 191-277.

[8] Mario Tobino, *Il deserto della Libia* [1952] *(con Il libro della Libia)* (Mondadori, 2011).

[9] Alberto Denti di Pirajno, *Un medico in Africa* [1952] (Longanesi, 1974).

[10] Carlo Carbone, *Italiani in Congo. Migranti, mercenari e imprenditori nel Novecento* (FrancoAngeli, 2019).

Gian Gaspare Napolitano (1907–1966) was a journalist, screenwriter, and writer. Initially aligned with fascism, he distanced himself from it in the early 1940s. As a reporter, he spent several months in the Belgian Congo during the 1930s—where decades earlier his father had worked on railway construction. Although his novel draws on knowledge from his time there, it remains a work of pure fiction.[11] Unlike Napolitano, Mario Tobino (1910–1991) was an ardent anti-fascist from a young age, a psychiatrist and writer. His African experience took place during World War II, when he served as a medical officer in the Italian army for a year and a half on the Libyan front. His largely autobiographical novel emerges directly from his desert war testimony and offers a sharp critique of the regime.[12] Lastly, Alberto Denti di Pirajno (1886–1968), despite holding numerous administrative roles alongside Duke Amedeo of Savoy, considered himself a doctor above all else. Always loyal to the monarchy and to the Duke, he combined his medical profession with colonial administrative duties in Libya and Italian East Africa from the 1920s until the British victory in North Africa (1943). His book emerges as a narrativized reworking of memories from his long medical and administrative experience.[13]

Their works are thus likely to mirror the diversity of settings and the authors' biographical backgrounds, resulting in a multifaceted—rather than uniform—representation of the Italian presence in Africa. Yet the specific features of the Italian postwar context also play a role in shaping—and to some extent orienting—the ways in which both the national past and the colonizer-colonized relationship are reworked.

THE CONTEXT OF PRODUCTION

[11] Plot of *Tam tam Mayumbe*: The narrator — an Italian doctor — listens to a younger colleague recount the tragic story of a sexual triangle. After discovering the secret affair, Martinez, a powerful Portuguese mestizo, killed his lover, the black servant Madalena, and his accountant, the Belgian Van Vaerten. Martinez is finally captured by the Belgians with the support of the natives, while the young doctor Alessandrini admits to the narrator that he too had slept with Madalena.

[12] Plot of *Il deserto della Libia*: The story, largely autobiographical, follows the events of an Italian army medical unit engaged on the North African front during the war. During their stay at the oasis of Sorman and in Tripoli, the medical officers interact with the local population. Despite their peaceful daily coexistence, underlying tensions are perceptible. Approaching the real war front in Tobruk, Italians face for the first time the reality of war and death.

[13] Plot of *Un medico in Africa*: The narrative retraces the autobiographical experience of the author-narrator in the Italian colonies in Africa. The most pages are devoted to anecdotes related to his medical work, as well as to individual local figures known during those years, sometimes highlighting their qualities, sometimes their exoticism or vices attributed to their ethnicity. The genuine interest he shows towards colonial Otherness seems, however, balanced by a veiled civilizing paternalism.

Though the authors' African experiences predate the loss of the colonies, their texts were elaborated and published afterward. Tangible interests in the former colonies had not entirely vanished, considering Italy's diplomatic attempts to secure trusteeship mandates in Libya—which failed—and Somalia—which succeeded, lasting until 1960—, whereas Ethiopian independence was immediately acknowledged.[14]

Moreover, after World War II, the myth of Italians as *brava gente* ('good people') gained increasing traction in public opinion, especially by framing Germans as the sole perpetrators of wartime atrocities, thereby omitting Italian responsibilities.[15] A specific ethical ideal of Italianness emerged as a shared premise through which to construct the identity of the new Republican Italian. In opposition to fascist virilism, Italians were portrayed as fundamentally humane, uncorrupted by fascism or racial policies.[16] Elements of the fascist and colonial past were thus excluded or reshaped within institutionalized collective memory, producing selective amnesia or dissemination.[17]

Given the role of memory in shaping a community's identity, it is reasonable to argue that this memorial reconfiguration answered a national need to redefine identity after the trauma of defeat and the dictatorship's collapse.[18] Furthermore, the witness role became indispensable, seen as the only historically legitimate informant in public opinion.[19]

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[14] Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani* (Laterza, 1992); Antonio Maria Morone, *L'ultima colonia. Come l'Italia è tornata in Africa 1950-1960* (Laterza, 2011).

[15] David Bidussa, *Il mito del bravo italiano* (Il Saggiatore, 1994); Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire* (Neri Pozza, 2005); Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano. La rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale* (Laterza, 2018).

[16] Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere della nazione* (Laterza, 2011).

[17] Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (eds.), *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory* (Peter Lang, 2005); Gianmarco Mancosu, 'Amnesia, Aphasia and Amnesty: The Articulations of Italian Colonial Memory in Postwar Films (1946–1960)', *Modern Italy*, 26, 4 (2021), pp. 387-408; Alessandro Pes, 'Discorso pubblico e stereotipo del «buon colonizzatore». Le istituzioni italiane e il passato coloniale', *Memoria e ricerca*, 2 (2023), pp. 255-274.

[18] See: Guido Bartolini, *The Italian Literature of the Axis War. Memory of Self-Absolution and the Quest for Responsibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); James V. Wertsch, *How Nations Remember. A Narrative Approach* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

[19] As Cristina Baldassini argues, at least until the early 1960s the autobiographical dimension of the witness's experience often reinforced biased narratives aimed at a sanitised rewriting of the recent fascist and colonial past. Within public opinion, such narratives were able to compete, in terms of public legitimacy, with the documentary approach of professional historians [Cristina Baldassini, *L'ombra di Mussolini. L'Italia moderata e la memoria del fascismo (1945-1960)* (Rubbettino, 2008), 143]. The figure of the witness continued to play a crucial role in shaping the memory of the colonial past well into the 1980s and 1990s, when a highly influential journalist such as Indro Montanelli persistently denied the use of mustard gas in Ethiopia solely on the grounds that he had not personally witnessed its

Personal and common memory—universally relatable and compatible—contributed to socialized, shared memory.[20]

The subject's positionality plays a fundamental role in the act of remembering and forgetting. When individual and public dimensions overlap within a literary-textual apparatus through which memory is filtered, the concept of narrative positionality proves particularly useful. Positionality does not merely reflect an individual worldview; it also encompasses relational, material, and symbolic interests embedded within power dynamics that may remain concealed.[21] This concept therefore goes beyond authorial positionality alone, integrating it with that of the narrator-focalizer of the narrative. The narrator's social role shapes the conceptualization and evaluation of events, while their narrative function grants their personal ideology interpretive authority for the reader[22]—even as the text may at the same time stage their unreliability in representing the past.[23]

By conveying memory through literary works, narrative performance and personal remembrance intersect. The narrator's position entails a preexisting, ideologically biased perception shaped by personal beliefs and socialized expectations, often unchallenged. In representing and interacting with other actors, a homodiegetic narrator with specific relational connotations—such as the European doctor in the colony—thus has repercussions on the narrative and, ultimately, on the construction of a transmissible image of the past. The notion of narrative positionality thus restores categories such as the "unreliable narrator" and the "ideological point of view" to their public dimension, foregrounding their relational, discursive, and social implications,[24] which stem from the narrator's personal value system and involvement in the events.[25]

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deployment, despite extensive documentary evidence to the contrary [Angelo Del Boca, *I gas di Mussolini. Il fascismo e la guerra d'Etiopia* (Editori Riuniti, 2007), 147-177; Sandro Gerbi and Raffaele Liucci, *Lo stregone. La prima vita di Indro Montanelli* (Einaudi, 2006), 35-37].

[20] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 15.

[21] See: Sun Yee Yip, 'Positionality and Reflexivity: Negotiating Insider-Outsider Positions Within and Across Cultures', *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 47, 3 (2024), pp. 222-232, https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2023.2266375; Jasmine K Gani & Rabea M Kahn, 'Positionality Statements as a Function of Coloniality: Interrogating Reflexive Methodologies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 68.2 (June 2024), pp. 1-13, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae038.

[22] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics* (Routledge, 1983), p. 81.

[23] Bal, *Narratology*, p. 145.

[24] Susan Snieder Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 1981).

[25] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 100.

When the narrator is an Italian doctor engaging with the colonized, such an underlying narrative situationality thus intervenes in postwar representations of the past precisely because of the narrator's positional specificity. His interaction with colonial Otherness is doubly marked: by the colonizer/colonized dialectic and by the sense of purpose attached to the medical mission. Yet, despite its apparently humanitarian and benevolent impetus, the figure of the European doctor can also function as a device of discipline and political control within the African, colonial context.[26]

Medical mission and the risk of contamination

For the colonial administration, the presence of European humanitarian doctors serves as a tool of indirect and informal surveillance over territories that are otherwise difficult for governmental authorities to control.[27] The medical status grants trust and respect among indigenous populations, as happens with the narrator of Napolitano's *Tam tam Mayumbe*. The locals mistake his medical knowledge for witchcraft and call him the '*Na' fumu mundele Munganga*', or 'Great White Sorcerer'.[28] This recognition not only compensates for a lifestyle perceived as inferior compared to his brilliant past in Europe; more importantly, it confirms the construction of his self-image as a savior. From this role derives the legitimacy of his presence in the Congo. Yet, within the Belgian colonial context, the Italian doctor occupies an interstitial position as a foreigner: although socially superior to the indigenous population, he remains subordinate within the colonial hierarchy, while still being functional to territorial control and therefore tolerated.

[26] Significantly, the authors display various degrees of complicity with the colonial system and different levels of positional overlap with their narrators. As an author, Napolitano diverges from his narrator; nevertheless, through this narrative mediation he is likely to articulate positions critical of the colonial practices of other national powers and to give voice to his own racial concerns. Tobino's experience as an antifascist, as well as his service as a military doctor during the Second World War, suggests a partial overlap between author and narrator, particularly with regard to judgments about Libyans and critiques of fascism. However, the mirroring effect established between the author and the character of Marcello complicates any straightforward positional coincidence with the narrator, who tends to remain in the background as a mere observer of events. By contrast, Pirajno's role as both physician and colonial administrator entails an explicit autobiographical coincidence with the position of his narrator, in whom the mirroring is complete and plausibly functional to a strategy of positive self-representation.

[27] Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills. Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford University Press, 1991).

[28] Napolitano, *Tam tam Mayumbe*, p. 215.

However, the narrator's personal worries undermine his sense of mission. He discredits the medical actions of the Egyptian humanitarian doctor Tefik-bey[29] and of local healers[30] since their incompetence risks damaging the credibility of the narrator's medical science.

The clash between local and Italian medicine—considered as the only true science—emerges when the doctor reproaches the tribal chief Gombà, suffering from elephantiasis, for following the village healer's advice instead of the Italian narrator's:

> ««Gombà», gli dissi, «hai preso la medicina del tuo stregone, eh?».
>
> Il re mi rispose con un gran silenzio.
>
> «Non credi più alla mia *majele*?»[31]

Exploiting local superstitions and the assumed overlap between science and magic within the indigenous epistemological framework, the narrator claims exclusive healing authority for Western medicine—especially when it proves unexpectedly effective. This strategy serves to re-establish trust in his 'magic' over local forms of knowledge,[32] while simultaneously reversing the power relations between doctor and tribal chief to his own exclusive advantage. Whereas the tribal chief addresses the Italian doctor using his honorific title, the narrator calls him simply by name, thus reinforcing colonial hierarchies. In the narrator's personal interpretation of his civilizing mission, white saviorism and racial superiority converge. Only the doctor's self-attributed salvific morality allows him to tolerate the Africans.[33]

These contradictions fully emerge after hearing the account of his young colleague Alessandrini regarding the events that led the Portuguese mixed-race man Martinez to murder his black servant-lover Madalena and his Belgian accountant Van Vaerten. Although as a humanitarian doctor he is ostensibly tasked with caring for indigenous populations, the narrator remains anchored to a racially structured colonial worldview:

[29] Ibid., p. 206.
[30] Ibid., pp. 224-225.
[31] Ibid., p. 224.
[32] Ibid., p. 226.
[33] See: 'Il mio primo istinto, quando ascolto parlare un negro, è di non credergli, non credergli mai', Ibid., p. 225.

> «[sono] personalmente contrario a mischiare i negri e le tribù negli affari dei bianchi, e quel che è peggio a farli strumenti della nostra giustizia, venendo così a riconoscere, in certo qual modo, che per amministrarla è necessario il loro aiuto [...]»[34]

Involving indigenous people in Martinez's capture would imply acknowledging their agency—an idea that is incompatible with the colonial order. However, political participation by the colonized is not the narrator's sole discomfort; interethnic contamination is perceived as even more troubling.

Alessandrini confesses not only to having letting Martinez escape out of empathy for his grief[35] but also to having been sexually overtaken by Madalena[36]—pathologically displacing violence and sexual impulsiveness onto the woman in order to evade direct responsibility.[37] The narrator scolds him, reminding him that Madalena was 'nient'altro che una negra, e che come tale andava trattata, e che in Africa una negra è una negra e un bianco è un bianco, e guai a far confusioni, crear compromessi'.[38] While he formally condemns interracial sexual unions, the narrator nonetheless reveals an inherent colonial 'ambivalence':[39] ultimately, he cannot truly judge his fellow Italian for exercising his positional privilege. Moreover, the very existence of Martinez—and the fascination he exerts over the two Italian doctors—stems precisely from that racial confusion and contamination the Italian doctor should refuse. The mixed-race man's inherent social danger[40] finds its culmination in his gravest crime: killing a white Belgian, while belonging fully neither to Africa nor to Europe. From the narrative perspective, only the murder of Van Vaerten is condemned, unlike Madalena's death.[41]

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[34] Ibid., p. 264.

[35] Ibid., pp. 267-270.

[36] Aligning with the stereotypical colonial representation, Madalena is a subaltern woman who does not speak, representing the embodied site of both sexual desire and of Africa itself. She speaks for the first and only time as she is dying, uttering '*Munganga*' ['Sorcerer'] in search of salvation through a magical and superstitious conception of medicine (260)

[37] See: 'Quella negra era una forza naturale, scatenata; la stessa natura dell'Africa, prepotente e insaziabile, distruggitrice di maschi. Tutti voleva avere, e ci ebbe tutti.' (p. 267).

[38] Ibid., p. 271.

[39] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).

[40] Francesco Casales, *Raccontare l'Oltremare. Storia del romanzo coloniale italiano (1913-1943)* (Le Monnier, 2023), pp. 189-198; Chiara Volpato, 'La violenza contro le donne nelle colonie italiane. Prospettive psicosociali di analisi', *DEP. Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista tematica di studi sulla memoria femminile*, 10 (2009), pp. 110-131.

[41] See: '[...] Martinez è uno straniero che ha ucciso un bianco, e per di più un belga, ma che lui stesso non è neppure un bianco vero e proprio, ma un meticcio (Napolitano, *Tam tam Mayumbe*, p. 264).

In Napolitano's *Tam tam Mayumbe*, the doctor's position intertwines the idea of civilizing and healing missions with the fear of contamination—racial, political, and moral. While his humanitarian engagement legitimizes the idea of a benevolent Italian presence in Africa, the doctor-narrator's claims and concerns remain uncritically rooted in a racialized, biologistic discursive system. Furthermore, precisely because he is not directly involved in colonial administration, he implicitly highlights the limits of the Belgian colonial model: the need to resort — even exceptionally — to indigenous support appears as a sign of weakness, thereby reinforcing the alleged superiority of the Italian segregationist model. The narrative therefore reveals deeply contradictory impulses operating beneath an apparently humanitarian discourse.

MEDICINE AND THE ROLE OF THE COLONIZER

Humanitarian acts initially serve to mask power asymmetries also in *Il deserto della Libia*, where the internal narrator is a doctor in the medical unit yet remains a spectator, never directly involved in
events. Autobiographical and fictional dimensions overlap in the novel. Tobino first collected thoughts and impressions from his experience on the Libyan warfront in an unpublished manuscript, Il libro della Libia, later reworked into the published version. Whereas the original draft contained sharper criticism of the fascist regime, Il deserto della Libia emphasizes the desert as a fictionalized environment—empty and immobile—mirroring the distressing situation of the Italian army in Libya. This element further complicates the position of the author and that of the narrator-spectator, which tend to merge in those passages derived from the original journal.

However, the role of the doctor in a colonial context apparently influences how medical officers are introduced as charitable saviors of colonial subjects, in line with a positive portrayal of the Italian presence in Africa:

> Moltissimi arabi hanno il tracoma, che è una malattia degli occhi, che porta alla cecità. Il giorno dopo che arrivammo, il maggiore, che era oculista, vedendo un bambino col tracoma, lo cominciò a curare. Il bambino migliorò. La notizia si sparse nell'oasi. Oltre il maggiore c'erano alla sezione altri medici. Cominciarono a presentarsi arabi per farsi curare.[42]

This seemingly selfless desire to provide care—particularly to children—helps gain trust and acceptance from Libyans, even though the doctors' presence is factually tied to the broader context of global conflict. Despite the war context, doctors remain privileged

[42] Tobino, *Il deserto della Libia*, p. 14.

figures when it comes to engaging with the local population, since they are portrayed solely as bearers of healing rather than of death, unlike soldiers.

The medical role in wartime Libya represents therefore not merely an autobiographical element. It also serves a narrative function, through which the novel exposes problematic relational dynamics within the colonial framework. The trust cultivated by the doctors in the oasis of Sorman enables the friendship between the Italian Marcello and the Arab patrician Mahmud—regarded as the only fully remarkable Arab because of his interest in European world. Despite their mutual curiosity about each other's cultures, the positional dynamics of the colonial relationship soon emerge. Upon discovering that a woman described as 'a beauty straight out of *One Thousand and One Nights*'—[43]a clear projection of the Italian orientalist imagination—[44]lives in Mahmud's house, Marcello views his friend as a means to fulfill his desire.

The doctor then exploits both his medical knowledge and Mahmud's trust to deceive the Libyan man. During a medical examination of some of Mahmud's female relatives—namely, his niece, wife and sister-in-law—, Marcello fantasizes about being erotically seduced by the three women while admiring and touching their naked bodies. His gaze on colonized femininity coincides with that of the colonizer. Although it remains merely voyeuristic, the erotic dimension of the literary representation becomes a metaphor of consensual domination, reinforcing pre-existing power hierarchies.[45] Yet, to suppress guilt and responsibility, he convinces himself that it was merely a 'sweet jest' between friends, and that, actually, Mahmud had deliberately shown the doctor his own 'harem'.[46]

Colonial factuality and inherent positional power dynamics overdetermine both men.[47] Assuming Mahmud's resignation to subordination is a necessary precondition for their friendship. This premise is eventually challenged when Marcello encounters Mahmud giving a speech at the market denouncing the Italian occupation:

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[43] Ibid., p. 65.

[44] Dagmar Reichardt, ' La presenza subalterna in Italia e la scrittura come terapia', *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani*, 28, 1 (2013), pp. 16-24 (p. 20), doi:10.18352/incontri.9140.; Silvia Lutzoni, 'Tra mito e realtà. La Libia di Tobino' in *I cantieri dell'italianistica. Ricerca, didattica e organizzazione agli inizi del XXI secolo*, ed. by B. Alfonzetti, G. Baldassari and F. Tomasi (Adi editore, 2014), pp. 1-7 (p. 6), http://www.italianisti.it/Atti-diCongresso?pg=cms&ext=p&cms_codsec=14&cms_codcms=581.

[45] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (University of California Press, 2010), p. 44.

[46] Tobino, *Il deserto della Libia*, p. 70.

[47] Antonio Schiavulli, 'Infiniti pensieri italiani', *Nuova rivista letteraria*, 5 (2012), pp. 26-29.

> Solo uno che è stato sotto la tirannia può con un lampo capire e soffrire certi aspetti e subito vergognarsene, accorgendosi di aver cambiato improvvisamente la sua parte. Infatti Marcello in quel momento era lo straniero, colui che domina, che ha l'uniforme del suo tiranno.
>
> [...] non era, come avrebbe amato, in quel luogo come un sereno spettatore, ma era e restava un italiano con il suo passato, la storia del suo paese e personale, era un attore, un vivo attore del suo tempo e la guerra, anche se non appariva ufficialmente, era proprio tra lui e Mahmùd [...].[48]

Their friendship proves impossible. Despite personal similarities and apparent mutual understanding, coloniality overrides the individuals. In Libya, Marcello is not merely an anti-fascist living under a dictatorship—he is a colonizer in a colony. Within these power dynamics, his position is reversed. He cannot experience the colony as a mere spectator or tourist, since from Libyans' perspective he remains nothing but a colonizer.[49] Orientalist imagery and unequal power relations shape his approach to Otherness. This awareness produces a rejection of his role, which is incompatible with both the myth of the 'good Italians' he wishes to represent and with his personal ethics—that shared by the character, the narrator and the author. Yet this refusal culminates in a retreat from the unsettling context. Following the episode, the narrative abandons the oasis setting and shifts focus to the topics of war and death, supplanting the colonial theme.[50]

Although autobiographical, the story told by a doctor who focuses on other Italian doctors carries public implications. Portraying the medics as altruistic saviors enables the partial omission of the military reasons behind Italian presence in Libya. Furthermore, it emphasizes the national postwar self-image of Italians as inherently humane people and colonizers. Yet the antifascist doctor's position, once applied to interpersonal relations, opens up a critical reflection. Despite their rejection of the colonial role, both Marcello and the narrator end up being unable to completely reject Italian colonial system, at least in its potentiality. The parallel drawn between the Italian medical lieutenant under fascism and Mahmud's under Italian colonial rule seems to suggest that only Mussolini's regime is to blame for the suffering of both Italians and Libyans.[51] Thus, in *Il deserto della Libia*, Italians are portrayed both as saviors of the Arabs and as victims on par with the colonized.

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[48] Tobino, *Il deserto della Libia*, pp. 74-75.

[49] Albert Memmi, *Ritratto del colonizzato e del colonizzatore* (Liguori, 1979).

[50] Tobino, *Il deserto della Libia*, pp. 77-167.

[51] Silvia Caserta, 'Memory and Representations of the Colonial Experience in Italian Literature', *Kult. Beyond the empires*, 12 (2015), pp. 52-66 (p. 60); Michele Baldaro, 'War and Colony. Empathy and

DOCTOR OR ADMINISTRATOR. THE CIVILIZING MISSION

Since author and narrator explicitly coincide, Pirajno's work is arguably the most contradictory in articulating the motivations animating the narrative. *Un medico in Africa* stems from a twenty-year experience not only as a doctor but also as a colonial administrator. This dual role results in diverging perspectives on the colonial world.

The narrator reveals a genuine desire to understand and engage with the Otherness, learning local languages and avoiding overtly exotic portrayals.[52] Numerous pages are devoted to his free medical clinic and to the many local figures he encounters and treats during his years in Libya and Italian East Africa. He does not dismiss traditional or tropical medicine as mere superstition, or judge those who naively place their faith in magic or divine intervention rather than in science.[53] He is even fascinated by the performance of a famous scorpion enchantress he hears about.[54] Yet, the narrator's medical mission remains the priority over his ethnological, touristic and administrative interests:

> È stato già osservato come tra la missione del medico e quella del prete esistano molte affinità e non a caso dell'arte sanitaria si dice che è un sacerdozio. Tanto al medico che al prete gli uomini si rivolgono in un'ora di crisi; entrambi promettono la salvezza: il primo in questo mondo, il secondo nell'altro. [...] sia il sacerdote che il medico restano sempre tali anche se il prete getta la tonaca alle ortiche o se eventi successive portano il medico in campi diversi da quello della medicina. *Semel abbas, semper abbas*.[55]

Though he eventually assumes administrative duties within the colonial apparatus, he primarily identifies as a doctor. His medical mission explicitly overlaps with the aims of Catholic missionary associations, resulting in a paternalistic stance toward the colonized. As well as the missionaries, Pirajno was a man of his time—likely animated by sincere

Ambivalence in the Setting of Mario Tobino's Libya', *Close Encounters In War Journal*, 7 (2024), pp. 12-41 (pp. 32-33).

[52] Marianna Scarfone, 'Alberto Denti di Pirajno: medico, funzionario, scrittore', in *Governare l'Oltremare. Istituzioni, funzionari e società nel colonialismo italiano,* ed. by G. Dore, C. Giorgi, A.M. Morone and M. Zaccaria (Carocci, 2013), pp. 103-115.

[53] Denti di Pirajno, *Un medico in Africa*, pp. 67-72.

[54] Ibid., pp. 31-36.

[55] Ibid., p. 273.

humanitarian spirit, yet equally convinced of his cultural superiority within a civilizing framework.[56]

In constructing his self-image as a doctor, the narrator thus emphasizes his qualities as a 'good Italian', revered by his loyal *ascaro* Gemberié[57] and capable of resisting female charms and the gifts of African chiefs.[58] However, when the doctor's role shifts to that of the colonial official, clichés and facile exoticism occur—such as when a manhunt for outlaws in Ethiopia morphs into an elephant hunt with adventurous and exoticist overtones.[59]

Yet, while he is writing, the world has dramatically changed. Nostalgia and regret filter the view on the colonial past. In the opening pages, the narrator-doctor laments the loss of the early 'pioneer' settlers in contrast to the 'bourgeois' administrator imposed during the Fascist period.[60] Upon the surrender and handover of Tripoli to the British, instead, the narrator-administrator claims the moral distinctiveness of Italian colonialism:

> Ma oltre che da un complesso di inferiorità la linea di condotta dell'amministrazione britannica era dettata da concezioni assolutamente estranee a quelle che avevano costantemente informato gli atti dell'amministrazione coloniale alla quale appartenevo: un'amministrazione che sempre aveva considerate le popolazioni coloniali come aggregate da guidare a forme superiori e più civili di esistenza, e mai come armenti umani da sfruttare.[61]

In defeat, the narrator-administrator overcomes the narrator-doctor, and becomes the spokesperson for a sanitized and overly idealized image of benevolent Italian colonialism. The Italian colonial enterprise is framed as fundamentally in opposition to the plutocratic and exploitive logics attributed British rule. Pirajno draws on the recurring theme of colonial resentment toward the other European powers—prominent in fascist propaganda and later reactivated in postwar Italian public opinion—thus fostering a self-absolving interpretation of Italy's African experience.[62] National colonialism is presented as driven by a sincere humanitarian and civilizing mission, purportedly for the benefit of the

[56] Silvia Forni, 'Racconti e immagini d'Africa. I missionari della Consolata in Kenya e in Etiopia (1902-1942)', in *Permanenze e metamorfosi dell'immaginario coloniale in Italia*, ed. by E. Castelli and D. Laurenzi (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2000), pp. 319-336.

[57] Denti di Pirajno, *Un medico in Africa*, pp. 54-67.

[58] Ibid., pp. 273-289.

[59] Ibid., pp. 182-204.

[60] Ibid., pp. 2-5.

[61] Ibid., pp. 300.

[62] Gianmarco Mancosu, 'Risentimento coloniale. I "nemici" dell'Italia e la retorica sul ritorno in Africa (1946-1960), *Diacronie. Studi di storia contemporanea*, 45 (2021), pp. 2-17.

colonized. The medical mission thus converts into an *ex post* justification for military conquest, lending humanitarian legitimacy to a system based on indigenous exploitation—that is, colonization.[63]

Despite the apparent prominence granted to local populations, in this memoir the central figure remains the one who remembers: the narrator—as a doctor and administrator. His personal beliefs and his administrative role in the colonial government shape both the narrative and the conveyed memory. As in the literary works previously discussed, *Un medico in Africa* presents the doctor as the best representative of the 'good Italian colonialism'—attentive to every aspect of local culture, life and population. His role is instinctively missionary. Nevertheless, his curiosity also functions as a tool of colonial control—an element persistently present in the text, even when elided. Although the colonial doctor's actions can be genuinely disinterested, they nevertheless remain 'an integral part of colonization, of domination, of exploitation',[64] fully embedded in an oppressive, segregationist social system of which he is also a representative.[65] His personal humanitarian aspirations collide with the underlying colonial framework, yet at the same time allow for the assertion of a positive remembrance of the colonial past.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

When recounting the past, memory assumes specific and individual forms which—once situated within a broader and shared framework—contribute to reinforcing the dominant memory narrative. Memory cannot be considered neutral; rather, it actively participates in the construction and restructuring of a collective national identity. In postwar Italy, the myth of the 'good Italian' emerges as a dominant paradigm for reinterpreting and recollecting a complex and contested past. By distancing Italians from fascism and presenting Italian colonialism as inherently benevolent, political and diplomatic contradictions toward the former colonies are ethically resolved through this reinterpreted collective, shared memory.

Within the literary works analyzed, the figure of the Italian colonial doctor is particularly revealing of the ambiguities inherent in the act of remembering national past

[63] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (Grove Press, 1965), p. 122.

[64] Ibid., p. 134

[65] Ibid., p. 121. See also: Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, 'From Warriors to Urban Dwellers. Ascari and the Military Factor in Urban Development of Colonial Eritrea', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 175 (2004), pp. 533-574.

and conveying its literary image. Depicted through selfless acts of care and personal initiative to support colonized populations, the doctor's figure encourages a salvific self-representation that facilitates the acceptance of both the colonizer and the colonial system—thus legitimizing the presence of domination, while leaving mechanisms of social control largely invisible in the narrative.

Moreover, the three literary works reproduce stereotyped representations. Napolitano channels colonial fears of racial contamination; Tobino articulates a voyeuristic, eroticizing gaze that objectifies the colonized; Pirajno proudly and paternalistically asserts the right to complete an unfinished civilizing mission. By foregrounding the Italian doctor, colonial and military discourse absorb humanitarian rhetoric, masking asymmetries of power and presenting colonization as a necessary intervention for the benefit of the colonized—an humanitarian re-framing of occupation.[66] These elements highlight how, even in the postwar period, Italian perceptions of Africa remain entrenched in colonial power structures and regimes of representation, deeply tied to positional relations between colonizer and colonized.

In the postwar context, personal and social dimensions are therefore deeply intertwined in the narrative position of the doctor in colonies: at a personal level, the narrator confronts his conscience and the contradictions of his role; at a social level, the narrative functions as a device to legitimize the colonial past, often sanitizing its deplorable traits. This inescapable coloniality[67] of memory illustrates the difficulty of disentangling from power structures that shaped Italian and European history.

Finally, viewing literary production as a symptomatic expression of socialized urges requires careful attention to the narrator's ideological and relational position, which does not necessarily coincide with that of the author. Narrative positionality is not here merely descriptive, but constitutive of how colonial memory is produced, circulated, and naturalized. Only through such a critical approach can the narrative, cultural and materialist apparatuses underpinning specific memorial transmissions be demystified, opening the way to a critical and aware reading of the colonial past—a past that continues to influence the present.

[66] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books, 2008), p. 65.

[67] Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Duke University Press, 2018).

Włodek Goldkorn '*acrobata del tempo*':[1] Imaginative Memory and the Ethics of Remembrance

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INTRODUCTION

In *Il bambino nella neve* (2016), Włodek Goldkorn reflects on the legacy of the Holocaust through a deeply personal and politically resonant lens.[2] Born in 1951 to Jewish parents who survived the Shoah, Goldkorn left Poland for Israel following the anti-Semitic purges of 1968, eventually settling in Italy in 1977, where he became a prominent journalist and public intellectual. His transnational trajectory—marked by Polish origins, Eastern European Jewish heritage, Israeli experience, and Italian cultural integration—positions him to approach Holocaust remembrance not as a fixed national narrative, but as a dynamic, ethically and politically charged process.

As will be shown, Goldkorn's account unfolds as both a journey to the physical sites of destruction and a meditation on how memory is inherited, imagined, and reshaped across generations. Rejecting sacralised or static conceptions of Holocaust memory, he frames remembrance as an ongoing act of interpretation—rooted in responsibility, critical reflection, and imaginative engagement. In an era of rising historical revisionism and the instrumentalization of collective memory, Goldkorn's work intervenes in urgent debates about the politics of remembrance, demonstrating that memory is never neutral or merely

[1] 'Acrobata del tempo' is an expression borrowed from Günther Anders who uses it to describe a figure capable of extending their temporal horizon beyond the present to encompass both past and future generations. The Italian is retained from its use in scholarship (e.g., Carla Benedetti 2021, 2023), and the phrase is cited here as a quotation. Cf. Günther Anders, *Brevi scritti sulla fine dell'uomo* (Trieste: Asterios Editore, 2016), p. 59.

[2] This essay uses both 'Shoah' and 'Holocaust' without intending a strict or systematic conceptual distinction.

retrospective, but a social practice.[3] Against the commodification and moral simplification of the Shoah,[4] Goldkorn proposes a model of remembrance that is self-aware, disruptive, and attentive to present ethical and political concerns.

This essay argues that *Il bambino nella neve* reconceptualises Holocaust memory as a living, transgenerational practice, sustained by critical distance and imaginative empathy. Through a close reading of the text, the essay explores five key dimensions: first, the interplay between personal testimony and historical narrative (section 1); second, Goldkorn's critique of second-generation discourse (section 2); third, his reflections on the limits of language and representation (section 3 and 4); fourth, the role of imagination as ethical engagement (section 5); and finally, the construction of memory as a form of moral labour in the present (section 6). I explore these five aspects in what follows.

The Double Journey

In *Il bambino nella neve*, Włodek Goldkorn undertakes a dual journey—temporal and spatial—that becomes a metaphor for the complex, layered work of Holocaust memory. 'Sono un viandante: nello spazio e nel tempo,'[5] he writes, framing this journey as both personal reckoning and historical exploration. This bifocal odyssey weaves together childhood recollections and visits to sites of genocide, constructing a multidimensional engagement with remembrance that resists static or monumentalised forms.

The temporal journey begins in postwar Poland, where Goldkorn grew up as the child of Jewish survivors. Memory, here, is not inherited through structured narrative but through the texture of domestic space—charged with the lingering presence of the Nazi occupation. His childhood home, once confiscated by the SS, still bore the traces of that violence: 'sul retro dei mobili erano attaccate targhette di metallo scuro. Su quelle targhette c'era una scritta in tedesco: *Proprietà del Terzo Reich*, e una svastica come icona. [...] Le

[3] Cf. Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[4] Cf. Robert S. C. Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944-2010* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[5] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2016), p. 13.

svastiche divennero una presenza quotidiana, familiare parte del mio immaginario infantile e delle mie fantasie'.[6] Everyday objects, inscribed with Third Reich insignia, formed the backdrop of his early life, embedding trauma in the very fabric of the ordinary.[7]

In this context, memory is transmitted less through testimony than through absence and silence. Goldkorn recalls how he and his sister grew up amid 'mezze parole e scampoli di narrazioni reticenti,'[8] gestures of speech that concealed as much as they revealed. 'La vergogna è la morte senza il lutto,'[9] he writes—shame silences grief, and with it, the possibility of forgetting. The refusal or inability to speak becomes itself a formative, haunting presence, a void that propels Goldkorn's inquiry into the limits of representation and the ethics of transmission.

This introspective labour is mirrored by a physical journey to extermination camps: Auschwitz, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka. These are not approached as commemorative destinations, but as charged landscapes where imagination, memory, and affect converge. 'Mi incammino su una lunga, lunghissima strada dove l'incubo e l'immaginazione [...] sono più forti di ogni percezione della realtà.'[10] Walking these grounds, Goldkorn confronts both familial history and the impossibility of total identification. The gesture of empathy—'cerco di immedesimarmi'[11]—is always shadowed by doubt and historical opacity: 'Penso che dove cammino ora camminarono i miei familiari. O forse non è vero. Forse nell'agosto del 1943 fecero un'altra strada per raggiungere le camere a gas.'[12]

Goldkorn's experience of Auschwitz encapsulates this ambivalence. Far from a site of solemn reverence, it appears to him as a 'luogo postmoderno,'[13] shaped by the demands of representation and tourism. His visceral reaction—'vorrei vederla distrutta,'[14]—signals a refusal to aestheticise horror or to allow the symbolic to eclipse the real: 'questo è un luogo

[6] Ibid., p. 17.

[7] On the inheritance of trauma through imaginative and affective channels, cf. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Himmedesimarmi'—isolocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[8] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*, p. 50.

[9] Ibid., pp. 50–51.

[10] Ibidi., pp. 147–148.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 141.

[14] Ibid.

maledetto che non dovrebbe e non sarebbe mai dovuto esistere e che non può essere, in alcun modo, riabilitato. Auschwitz è prima di tutto il mio cimitero di famiglia'.[15]

From this double journey emerges a conception of memory as embodied, affective, and unresolved. Memory is not merely a cognitive act or historical reconstruction, but a lived experience—shaped by physical space, emotional residue, and ethical tension. The interweaving of temporal reflection and spatial movement creates a palimpsestic structure in which past and present coexist in tension, continually rewriting one another.[16] This non-linear temporality resists historical narrative's closure, framing memory as a continual negotiation.

Integral to this structure is the book's visual dimension. Neige De Benedetti's stark photographs—depicting, for instance, Katowice, Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Warsaw—introduce an intermedial layer of testimony. Devoid of human presence, the images evoke and testify to the 'scomparsa di un mondo intero',[17] amplifying the sense of absence and historical void. Their silence invites an ethically engaged spectatorship, aligning with Huyssen's observation that photography in contemporary memory culture does not merely document but activates affect, linking disparate temporalities.[18] In this context, the photographs are not illustrative supplements but autonomous visual traces, resonating with and extending Goldkorn's reflections.

Together, text and image construct a multidirectional mode of remembrance (i.e. intermedial and temporally layered), in which the past is not simply recalled but re-inhabited. *Il bambino nella neve* proposes a vision of Holocaust memory as an active, transgenerational process—embodied in movement, shaped by gaps and ruins, and sustained by critical and imaginative engagement.

Postmemory and the Ethics of Inheritance

[15] Ibid.

[16] Cf. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

[17] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve,* p. 180.

[18] Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 2–3.

While *Il bambino nella neve* unfolds as a physical and temporal journey, it also engages with a less visible, but equally fraught, terrain: the transmission of memory across generations. As Goldkorn becomes a grandfather, he confronts a central question of his narrative—how to pass on the unspeakable:

> Poi capita che nascano i nipotini. E arriva il momento in cui si pone la domanda: come dire loro l'indicibile? Come trasmettere la memoria? Quando si diventa nonni, il futuro divisibile, e ci si chiede come inserire la memoria nella costruzione dell'avvenire.[19]

This reflection reframes memory not as a fixed inheritance but as a future-oriented practice, shaped by rupture rather than continuity. Goldkorn rejects the idea that trauma can be faithfully transmitted across generations, handed down like a sealed inheritance, viewing memory instead as a fragmentary and interpretive process— marked by uncertainty, imagination, and the persistent presence of absence.

His position places him at a critical distance from the discourse of the *second generation*, often used to describe the children of Holocaust survivors. Though he acknowledges the psychological weight of this category, Goldkorn remains sceptical of its premises. He resists conflating inherited memory with direct experience, suffering with its echoes, and warns against a form of identification that risks erasing the boundaries between survivor and descendant:

> Si parla molto della "seconda generazione", intendendo i figli dei superstiti [...] Ma diciamolo: in quella definizione c'è un piccolo abuso. Noi, la Shoah, per nostra immensa fortuna non l'abbiamo sperimentata. E allora, non ne risentiamo gli effetti ugualmente? Sì, li risentiamo: però non in quanto vittime, ma per la sensazione del vuoto. [...] E allora quel vuoto viene riempito con una sostanza, un misto di emozioni e di razionalità che chiamiamo memoria. Salvo il fatto che la memoria è un'invenzione: la sua forma e il contenuto ognuno se li costruisce come vuole.[20]

Here, memory emerges not as a collective possession, but as a singular act of construction—less a stable legacy than an ethical stance. What is inherited is not trauma,

[19] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*, p. 131.
[20] Ivi., pp. 41–42.

but a void: an inconceivable absence that demands active interpretation. Memory then becomes a form of imaginative labour, shaped as much by the limits of representation as by the need to make sense of inherited silence. This idea resonates strongly with Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory,' which describes the relationship of the 'generation after' to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before. Postmemory, as Hirsch argues, is not based on direct recollection but on imaginative reconstruction—a process of investing in and creating narratives from the fragments and silences of the past.[21] Goldkorn embodies this dynamic as he seeks to reconstruct a family history that he did not witness, acknowledging that the contours of his inheritance are defined as much by what is missing as by what remains.

Crucially, Goldkorn's approach is grounded not in victimhood but in responsibility. Raised in a family where hatred and resentment were consciously rejected, he cultivates a more critical, outward-looking relationship to the past:

> Sono stato fortunato a crescere in una famiglia in cui il rancore, l'odio, l'idea della vendetta erano inconcepibili. [...] Per questo il mio rapporto con la memoria, con l'indicibile, con l'inimmaginabile, è più sereno rispetto a quello di molti miei coetanei, [...] Io cerco di comprendere, non cedo alla vendetta. Soprattutto penso che la memoria non serva a rivendicare i torti patiti, a chiudersi in un recinto della propria comunità. Penso che della memoria vada fatto un uso politico.[22]

Goldkorn's stance aligns with Neumann's view of memory as an active, selective, and culturally formative process, produced in the present through narratives. His rejection of grievance-based remembrance in favour of a future-oriented ethical engagement exemplifies what Neumann identifies as the constructive, forward-looking dimension of cultural remembrance.[23]

This political use of memory does not entail instrumentalisation but ethical engagement. Goldkorn refuses to treat memory as a means of claiming historical grievance or reinforcing group identity; instead, he insists that it must be mobilised to address contemporary injustice and to expand the ethical imagination beyond the confines of one's own history. Such an approach resonates with Meretoja's argument that storytelling

[21] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*.

[22] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*., p. 41.

[23] Birgit Neumann, 'The Literary Representation of Memory', in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 333–43.)

actively shapes ethical understanding and the horizon of the possible.[24] In this light, memory becomes a practice of responsibility—reinvented and reactivated in the service of the future.

LANGUAGE BREAKS DOWN: CONSTRUCTIVE NIHILISM AND THE VOID

Goldkorn's scepticism toward inherited memory extends into a deeper interrogation of language itself. In his view, the Holocaust constitutes not only a historical trauma but also a profound rupture in the very conditions of meaning. 'La Shoah,' he writes, 'significa una rottura epistemologica e ontologica: significa l'assenza della parola, della spiegazione, del perché.'[25] The catastrophe defies narrative not simply because of its horror, but because it dismantles the symbolic frameworks through which human beings construct intelligibility. Words, in this context, become inadequate, even complicit.

Refusing the impulse to translate the trauma of the Shoah into moral instruction or redemptive closure, Goldkorn embraces a form of what might be called constructive nihilism. 'Chi è morto è morto,' he writes, 'e cercare di dare un senso a una morte così assurda come le camere a gas vuol dire accettare una razionalizzazione di qualcosa che non può essere ragionevole.'[26] In this refusal to impose coherence, he challenges the pedagogical clichés and commemorative rituals that seek to stabilise the Holocaust into a lesson:

> "Mai più Auschwitz". Per me sono parole prive di senso e contenuto [...]. dire "mai più" o "non permettete che si ripeta" significa costruire una specie di pedagogia della Shoah [...]. Ma non ci può essere una qualche pedagogia, laddove la parola ha perso ogni significato. O forse sto cercando di dare troppa importanza a qualcosa che ormai è solo un rito stanco, un cerimoniale obbligatorio per capi di Stato, preti, rabbini, politici in carriera o in pensione, moralisti in cerca di una causa ovvia e rassicurante (ci si sente bravi e giusti, quando si condanna l'olocausto, e si riscuote un applauso garantito), attivisti di organizzazioni ebraiche altrimenti ciechi e sordi di fronte alle ingiustizie, [...] La Shoah è solo un vuoto.[27]

[24] Hanna Meretoja, *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[25] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*., p. 119.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ivi., pp. 132–133.

Here, Goldkorn dismantles the rhetoric of moral reassurance often invoked around Holocaust memory. In his view, such slogans mask a refusal to confront the epistemological and ethical abyss that the Shoah represents. To speak of it as a source of 'lessons' is to flatten its absurdity into a palatable narrative, reclaiming its unassimilable violence in the name of civic virtue or symbolic consensus. As Valentina Pisanty notes, contemporary public discourse often turns the Shoah into a symbolic resource through banalisation or ritualisation, thereby neutralising its disruptive force.[28] Goldkorn's critique, however, targets not only the language of politicians and institutional ceremonies but also the complacency of those who rehearse memory without confronting its void.

At the same time, Goldkorn resists historical deterministic logics that see the Holocaust as the inevitable outcome of European modernity.[29] He rejects the notion that history proceeds toward catastrophes with structural necessity. For him, violence is not preordained but contingent—a rupture, not a culmination. The past does not instruct; it interrupts.

Yet this refusal of closure does not release us from the obligation to remember. On the contrary, it sharpens that obligation. For Goldkorn, remembrance does not mean transmitting a finished story. It means sustaining a relationship with what cannot be said, with what remains unresolved. In this sense, memory becomes not a retrieval of the past but an imaginative and ethical stance toward the silences it leaves behind. It is precisely within this tension—between language and its failure, between absence and its traces—that Goldkorn's renegotiation of Holocaust memory takes form.

From Sacred to Spectacle: Memory as Performance

If the Holocaust, for Goldkorn, marks a rupture in language and meaning, it also exposes the limits of how atrocity is remembered in public space. In extending his reflections

[28] Cf. Valentina Pisanty, 'Banalizzare e sacralizzare', in *Memorie, storiografie e narrazioni della deportazione razziale,* ed. by Marta Baiardi and Alberto Cavaglion (Rome: Viella, 2014), pp. 185–94; *I guardiani della memoria e il ritorno delle destre xenofobe* (Florence: Bompiani, 2019).

[29] Cf. Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*, p. 190.

beyond the private domain of transgenerational memory, he turns a critical eye to institutional rituals and sites of commemoration. His target is not remembrance itself, but the ways in which memory is increasingly codified, commodified, and sacralised—turned into spectacle and stripped of its political charge.[30]

Auschwitz, in particular, becomes for him an emblem of this transformation. Rather than provoking ethical reflection, it risks functioning as a theatre of ritual reassurance:

> Auschwitz sembra una fantasmagorica costruzione posticcia. Penso che chiunque arrivi qui abbia già un'idea di quello che sarà il suo sguardo. [...] assuefatti come siamo alle immagini e all'invocazione continua e rituale di questo luogo [...] Auschwitz si presta a ogni abuso, a ogni manipolazione politica, sentimentale, religiosa, perfino a ogni celebrazione [...] E in quanto simbolo e costruzione che sembra preservare tratti di autenticità, con le sue reliquie [...] si presta ai laici e meno laici pellegrinaggi.[31]

This is not a rejection of Auschwitz as a site of memory, but of the way it has been reinscribed as a symbolic and aestheticised experience—what he calls a 'Disneyland dell'orrore.' [32] The sentence encapsulates his discomfort with what he sees as the theatricalization of suffering, the touristification of atrocity—a process in which trauma is curated, sanitised, and the Holocaust reduced to a culturally consumed and emotionally pre-digested artefact palatable to visitors. Memory becomes a set of images and slogans, and is stripped of its unsettling force:

> Il museo degli orrori [...] mi dice poco o niente, nato com'è per la volontà di fissare gli oggetti nella memoria collettiva; di costruire un ricordo attraverso un presunto e falso realismo, falso come tutti i realismi, e quindi maggiormente falso qui, perché Auschwitz come la conosciamo, come la vedono gli spettatori, è il risultato di una costruzione culturale che molti vorrebbero scambiare per l'epifania dell'autenticità. Il ricordo, invece, il vero ricordo, non può vivere nella materia; pena la sua reificazione, pena la sua trasformazione in un totem.[33]

[30] Cf. Valentina Pisanty, 'Banalizzare e sacralizzare'.
[31] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*, pp. 141, 154.
[32] Cf. Ivi., p. 155.
[33] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*, p. 142.

Goldkorn's stance echoes broader critiques of what has been termed 'dark tourism'. Philip R. Stone's theorisation of a 'dark tourism spectrum' aims to classify memorial spaces based on their proximity to actual suffering, distinguishing between 'dark fun factories' and 'dark camps of genocide'. William Miles further refines this typology by differentiating between sites 'associated with death' and those 'of death,' emphasising the moral and locational gravity of the latter. Scholars have observed a *growing demand* for so-called *dark experiences*, often problematically framed in terms of *authenticity* and *emotional intensity*—paradigms to measure the darkness of particular sites, the recreational consumption of death, and the deployment of narratives designed to package atrocity into consumable narratives, sometimes veering toward spectacle or voyeurism.[34]

Above all, however, Goldkorn takes issue with the sacralisation of Holocaust memory—the framing of Auschwitz as a sacred space:

> Non c'è niente di sacro ad Auschwitz. Ho letto, ho sentito tante volte associare la parola 'profanazione' a qualche atto ritenuto disdicevole relativo a questo luogo. Profanazione? Ma quanta perversione, quanta volontà di non soffermarsi a riflettere, quanta paura di affrontare la fragilità di noi umani e la nostra propensione al Male, ci sono dietro a questo accostamento tra il sacro—perché la parola profanazione riporta al sacro—e l'immagine di Auschwitz: immagine, perché della realtà delle camere a gas non sappiamo niente.[35]

This is a provocative reversal. Where others see reverence, Goldkorn sees repression: a refusal to dwell in human fragility, to confront complicity, or to remain with the discomfort of historical violence. Sacralisation, in his view, domesticates memory. It transforms it into a relic, a fixed image, a moral certainty, a manageable past. Instead, he argues, memory must be unsettling. It must resist reification, refuse symbolic closure, and remain open to ethical disruption. In this sense, his critique is not iconoclastic but restorative. By refusing both commodification and sanctification, Goldkorn insists on a

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[34] Cf. Sharpley, Richard, and Philip R. Stone, eds., *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2009); Magano, José et al., 'Dark Tourism, the Holocaust, and Well-being: A Systematic Review', *Heliyon*, 9.1 (2023). Stone, Philip R., 'A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions and Exhibitions', *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 54.2 (2006), pp. 145–60. William F.S. Miles, 'Auschwitz: Museum Interpretation and Darker Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29.4 (2002), pp. 1175–78.

[35] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*, p. 142.

form of remembrance that remains politically alive—one that demands not pious repetition but radical reflection.

IMAGINATION AS RESISTANCE: MEMORY'S ETHICAL FORCE

Goldkorn's critique of the sacralisation and commodification of Holocaust memory, along with his scepticism toward language and representational realism, does not lead to a rejection of remembrance. Rather, it opens space for a different mode of engagement—one grounded in imaginative empathy, affective responsiveness, and ethical attentiveness. Where institutional memory becomes ritualised and realism fails to convey the affective magnitude of the Shoah, imagination becomes a necessary third path: not as embellishment, but as a vital, relational practice.

> 'La memoria [...] è fallace; le verità umane sono difficili da decifrare,'[36] Goldkorn writes, reminding us that the past is not a fixed repository of facts but a site of instability, ambiguity, and projection. While Auschwitz is an incontrovertible historical fact, 'il suo vissuto appartiene a una sfera che implica immaginazione, sogno, fantasia.'[37] Memory, in this view, does not reproduce experience; it reanimates it: 'dobbiamo trasfigurare la realtà',[38] Goldkorn reminds us. Memory is 'una costruzione psicologica, culturale, politica,'[39] shaped by the present as much as by the past.

Goldkorn explicitly rejects the adequacy of realist representation in capturing Auschwitz: 'le opere realistiche che cercano di riprodurlo sono perlopiù fallimentari, perché la loro simbolica e semantica non è adeguata alla dimensione dell'orrore.'[40] For him, imagination is not a betrayal of truth, but a way of approaching a past that is irretrievable, traumatic, and always mediated. In *Il bambino nella neve*, imagination functions as a method of ethical reconstruction—capable of holding the silences and contradictions that testimony alone cannot bridge.

This imaginative labour becomes even more urgent as witnesses disappear. Memory, Goldkorn suggests, is never a mere act of recall, but a future-oriented projection shaped by dreams, desires, and fears.

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[36] Ivi., p. 135.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ivi., p. 155.

> E del resto cosa è la memoria se non la rappresentazione di quello che eravamo o volevamo essere? [...] la trasfigurazione dei nostri sogni, dei desideri e delle nostre paure. E anche la proiezione della nostra immaginazione sui nostri nipoti. [...] La memoria è fatta di immagini: sognate, viste nelle foto e nelle opere d'arte, costruite da noi stessi e dagli altri. La memoria è solo il nulla su cui cerchiamo di strutturare la nostra identità.[41]

Far from escaping historical responsibility, such a view calls for renewed attentiveness to how memory is constructed—and for whom.[42]

Through this lens, memory becomes not only an ethical task but a political and imaginative one: resistant to closure, aware of its own artifice, and anchored in relationality. By foregrounding what we may call imaginative empathy, *Il bambino nella neve* reclaims memory as an active, affective, and open-ended process. It refuses the comfort of fixed narratives and instead insists on memory's capacity to provoke, unsettle, and sustain emotional and moral complexity. Imagination here is not a retreat from reality, but a means of re-entering it—through multiplicity, fragility, and the unresolvable tensions of remembrance. This logic finds a compelling echo in Olga Tokarczuk's idea of 'ognosia'—a form of knowledge that transcends rational analysis and embraces intuitive, narrative understanding. Tokarczuk describes 'ognosia' as a way of organising the world through empathy and synthesis, allowing disparate experiences to be woven into a larger, meaningful whole. In her Nobel lecture, she emphasises that literature is grounded in 'tenderness (*czułość*) toward any being other than ourselves'[43], a stance that captures the affective, relational, and ethically engaged dimension of Goldkorn's narrative project and illuminates the practice of imaginative empathy.[44]

Memory as Political Work: Responsibility Over Reverence

In *Il bambino nella neve*, memory is not a passive repository of the past but an active, dynamic practice—one that confronts the present with ethical urgency and political clarity.

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[41] Ivi., pp. 131, 153.

[42] On memory and responsibility cf. Bartolini, Guido, and Joseph Ford (eds). M*ediating Historical Responsibility: Memories of 'Difficult Pasts' in European Cultures* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024).

[43] Olga Tokarczuk, *The Tender Narrator: Nobel Lecture*, trans. by Jennifer Croft, (The Nobel Prize, 7 December 2019), p. 25.

[44] Cf. Olga Tokarczuk, 'Ognosia', trans. by Jennifer Croft, *Words Without Borders*, June 6, 2022. Olga Tokarczuk, *The Tender Narrator*.

For Goldkorn, remembering the Holocaust is not a ritual of reverence, nor a performance of sorrow. It is an act of resistance: a mode of speaking truth to power, defending the voiceless, and challenging the mechanisms of exclusion and dehumanisation that persist today.

'La memoria va usata, strumentalizzata, giocata politicamente: anche la memoria della Shoah,'[45] he writes. But this use must be grounded in ethical, aesthetic, and political discernment. The Shoah, for Goldkorn, cannot be reduced to solemn commemoration or rhetorical gestures: 'serve a difendere gli oppressi, i derelitti, coloro cui il potere toglie perfino la voce. [...] a niente se non a promuovere e difendere, ovunque e nel concreto, le istanze di emancipazione.'[46] To remember is to rebel—to contest dominant narratives, resist historical amnesia, and reject the hypocrisy of selective mourning. 'Altrimenti quella memoria non esiste,' he warns. 'Si riduce a un esercizio di vuota retorica [...] un ripetere 'mai più' che non dice nulla a nessuno.'[47]

Goldkorn's model of memory rejects both sacralisation and sentimentalism. Instead, it insists on the need for critical distance—not as detachment, but as the precondition for transforming empathy into action. 'La distanza è la madre della facoltà di discernimento, ma anche la chiave per poter trasformare l'empatia in azione politica.'[48] This balance between feeling and critique—between imaginative engagement and political responsibility—animates the ethical force of *Il bambino nella neve*.

As an 'acrobata del tempo',[49] Goldkorn moves between the irretrievable past and the unfinished present to expose the moral failures of contemporary Europe: its indifference to refugees, its abandonment of the vulnerable, its self-serving narratives of remembrance. His indictment is unsparing:

> E noi tutti, noi che non sopportiamo i rom (perché sporchi e sfruttatori di bambini), che non siamo stati capaci di difendere la popolazione musulmana di Srebrenica (massacrata con la complicità delle truppe olandesi che non avevano nessuna voglia di proteggere quegli straccioni di musulmani), noi che voltiamo lo sguardo altrove di fronte allo scandalo dei barconi di clandestini (categoria di subumani, in quanto privi di validi documenti di identità) che annegano nelle acque del Canale di Sicilia; noi tutti versiamo una lacrima pietosa quando pensiamo a quegli ebrei che, se oggi fossero tra di noi, in mezzo alle nostre piazze o all'assalto delle nostre frontiere, li tratteremo da rom e clandestini e

[45] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*, pp. 117, 128.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ivi., p. 117.
[49] Günther Anders, *Brevi scritti sulla fine dell'uomo*, p. 59.

musulmani; noi tutti ci commuoviamo per la loro sorte, perché la consapevolezza che sono morti provoca una specie di catarsi.[50]

In these words, memory becomes a mirror—one that reflects not only the trauma of the past, but the ethical failures of the present.

Il bambino nella neve shows that memory must not comfort, it must discomfort. It must unsettle, provoke, and compel. Goldkorn offers a vision of remembrance as imaginative and resistant: a constant negotiation between history and the now, between mourning and action. Against the backdrop of contemporary Europe, his work insists that only a memory anchored in empathy, imagination, and political struggle can remain alive—refusing to become ceremony and choosing instead to become responsibility.

[50] Włodek Goldkorn, *Il bambino nella neve*, pp. 159–160.

Archive as Memory: The Role of Repositories in Shaping the History of the Wages for Housework Movement

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On my first visit to the International Wages for Housework (WFH) Campaign archive at the Bishopsgate Institute in London, the archive's presentation concerned me. A highly curated selection of mostly photocopied documents, the archive is ordered chronologically between the years 1970-2022, with one folder roughly corresponding to each year of the Campaign. I was accustomed to archives overflowing with primarily original documents, like the Lotta Femminista archive I would subsequently visit. Located at the Biblioteca Civica in Padua, the Lotta Femminista archive holds 872 items, ordered thematically and spanning the years 1970-2012. As a researcher accessing primary sources for my PhD dissertation, my academic bias was evident: I distrusted the London archive and uncritically accepted the Padua archive. I continued to mull over why I had strong feelings about these archives, later rejecting the desire to judge them by quality standards I had learnt within the academy. After all, these were grassroots feminist movement histories; why should their archives be the exclusive domain of scholars and academics?

This question prompted a reflection on the role of archives in curating and transmitting social movement memory, a timely consideration in an era where political unrest and social change are at an all-time high. Activists and scholars alike are turning to the WFH movement and its archives for inspiration and guidance. The Campaign began in 1972 following the formation of the International Feminist Collective in Padua, and signatories included Maria Rosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, and Selma James. The group engaged in several struggles based on demystifying women's unpaid labour, abortion, welfare benefits, and reproductive health. Struggles were determined by the needs of the WFH Committees worldwide, convening under the umbrella of the International WFH Campaign. After five

years of struggle, Dalla Costa and Federici (amongst others) left the group due to political differences, whilst James continued the campaign into the present day under the umbrella group Global Women's Strike (GWS). These political differences spilled out into different approaches to remembering and historicising the WFH Campaign, bringing activists into conflict with one another.

In this note, I explore the divergent approaches taken to remembering the Campaign via the archives in Padua and London, analysing how their curation shapes and contests social movement memory. In this respect, I treat the archives as repositories of primary sources about the WFH Campaign and as participants in the construction and transmission of memory. Using insights from memory studies, archival sciences, and social movement studies, I compare the provenance, archival structures, and political functions of each repository to argue that archives are not neutral records, but active sites where power, history, and social identity are produced and contested.

MEMORY AND POWER FROM THE ARCHIVAL TO ACTIVIST TURN

The intersection between the fields of memory studies, archival studies, and social movement studies has been of interest to scholars since the 1990s, roughly corresponding to the cultural and archival turns within the humanities and social sciences. The work of Maurice Halbwachs had a major impact beyond memory studies. After being originally published in the 1920s, Halbwachs' work, specifically his concept of collective memory, was taken up again by memory studies scholars in the 1990s. Collective memory can be described as the culmination of individual memories about groups, which may include the family, an organisation, or a nation-state.[1] Halbwachs also draws attention to collective frameworks of memory, which include the archive, as public sites of memory (re)collection.[2] Memory is necessitated by a will to remember, and collective memory is the recalling of events that have a contemporaneous effect on the continual re-formation of a group identity. The question remains as to what makes collective memory collective. Jeffrey Olick distinguishes between 'collected' and 'collective' memory. For Olick, collected memory is determined by a subset of individuals who have access to the means of cultural

[1] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 39.

[2] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 40.

production, including the archive,[3] and recollections about a group do not represent collective memory. Instead, collective memory comprises the social actors and institutions that remember the past.[4] In the context of the archive, we should therefore centre the multiple processes that shape and produce the memories contained within collections.[5]

These concerns are shared in what is known as the archival turn of the 1990s and 2000s, most famously argued by Jacques Derrida's essay 'Archive Fever.' Derrida asserts that 'There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory.'[6] Furthermore, Derrida positions the archive as an act of forgetting and of remembering. Consigning materials or figures to the archive is a type of passive remembrance, permitting the archiving structure to reinscribe materials with other meanings.[7] Derrida's concerns are shared by archival sciences scholars working with colonial archives. Verne Harris argues that archives are incapable of presenting collective representations of events, as they are instead situated and partial truths.[8] Harris draws attention to the multiplicity of social actors who influence the archive, and whose interventions keep the archive in a persistent state of openness through remembrance. Problematising the creation, preservation, and use of archives leads Harris to contend: 'We need to embrace process rather than product. And we need to foster the contestation of social memory, seeing ourselves, conducting ourselves, not as referees but as contestants.'[9] Reframing the archive as actively shaping memory is summarised by Ann Stoler's article on the colonial order of things, warning that 'scholars need to move from archive-as source to archive-as-subject.'[10] With colonial archives, scholars shifted from uncritically accepting sources to questioning their production and circulation.[11] An introductory essay by Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook to a special issue of *Archivaria* on the topic of archives and power insists archives are 'active sites where social

[3] Jeffrey K. Olick, 'Collective Memory: The Two Cultures', *Sociological Theory* 17.3 (1999), pp. 333–48 (p. 339), doi:10.1111/0735-2751.00083.

[4] Olick, 'Collective Memory', p. 341.

[5] Olick, 'Collective Memory', pp. 342-3.

[6] Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression' trans. by Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), pp. 9–63 (p. 11), doi:10.2307/465144.

[7] Derrida, 'Archive Fever', p. 14.

[8] Verne Harris, 'Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa', *Archivaria*, 44.44 (1997), pp. 132–41 (p. 135).

[9] Harris, 'Claiming Less, Delivering More', p. 140.

[10] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, 2.1–2 (2002), pp. 87–109 (p. 87), doi:10.3998/mpub.93171.32.

[11] Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', p. 91.

power is negotiated, contested, confirmed.'[12] The intentionality of social agents working in the archive leads Brien Brothman to distinguish the 'memory-archivist' from the 'history-archivist':

> Memory's archivist is interested in the past's residue as material for promoting integrated knowledge, social identity, and the formation of group consciousness; history's archivist is interested in finding records and, in them, uncovering evidence to develop a linear narrative about a past that is ours, yet different from us.[13]

Brothman's statement raises interesting questions for the social movement archive, which requires both types of archivists, not only to organise and order movement memories, but also to promote material to reignite struggles in new contexts.

It is only recently that scholars have asked the same questions of social movement archives and memory as those of the colonial archive. Donatella della Porta emphasises this gap in scholarship, despite histories of social movements providing useful roadmaps for the staging of contemporary struggles.[14] Della Porta proposes that social movement memory is a process and an outcome, and that memory can be subjective and multidirectional.[15] Multiple modes of remembering and divergent memories may produce sites of contested knowledge, explored by Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally in the context of social movements. Choudry and Vally acknowledge that contradictory or conflicting memories of social movements shape the creation and transmission of memory when mediated through social movement archives.[16] In the past few years, social movement studies, memory studies, and archival studies saw an activist turn, with scholars proposing the use of memory practices and memory activism to promote social change.[17] Samuel Merrill and Ann Rigney also conceptualise memory practices as both a means and an end, shaping repertoires of action

[12] Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', *Archival Science*, 2.1–2 (2002), pp. 1–19 (p. 1), doi:10.1007/bf02435628.

[13] Brien Brothman, 'The Past That Archives Keep: Memory, History, and the Preservation of Archival Records', *Archivaria*, 51.51 (2001), pp. 48–80 (p. 62).

[14] Donatella della Porta and others, *Legacies and Memories in Movements: Justice and Democracy in Southern Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 9.

[15] della Porta, *Legacies and Memories in Movements*, p. 11.

[16] Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally, *Reflections on Knowledge, Learning and Social Movements: History's Schools* (Taylor and Francis, 2018), p. 7.

[17] Stefan Berger and Christian Koller, *Memory and Social Movements in Modern and Contemporary History: Remembering Past Struggles and Resourcing Protest* (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), p. 9.

and actively producing memory in struggle.[18] Red Chidgey and Joanne Garde-Hansen call attention to the fragility of activist memories, highlighting the critical mnemonic labour of cultural workers in archiving movements.[19] Similarly, Jen Hoyer and Nora Almeida advocate for centring the collective labour of archivists.[20] Hoyer and Almeida insist the social movement archive's guiding principle should be determined by what the materials will be used for, demonstrating the reflexivity of remembrance in shaping the archive's presentation.[21]

TWO ARCHIVES, ONE MOVEMENT: DIVERGENT PRACTICES AND COMPETING HISTORIES

In 2012, James published *Sex, Race, and Class: The Perspective of Winning* to commemorate the fortieth year of the Campaign. The anthology included a controversial claim of co-authorship of 'Women and the Subversion of the Community', typically attributed to Dalla Costa. To support her claim, James cited an article written by Dalla Costa for *Il Giorno*,[22] and critiqued the attribution of the perspective to Italian autonomist thought. Dalla Costa's rebuttal reframed the claim as more than an authorship dispute, arguing James's account threatened the WFH movement's collective origins by erasing its roots in *operaismo* and transnational feminist exchanges (alongside other autonomist currents).[23]

Dalla Costa's archive emerged directly from this dispute as a corrective action: 'In recognition of the importance of this history, we are now assembling our archives and making them public. Thus, I hope that a more balanced view of the early history of this movement will be available to new generations of activists.'[24] Following this statement, the

[18] Samuel Merrill and Ann Rigney, 'Remembering Activism: Means and Ends', *Memory Studies*, 17.5 (2024), pp. 997–1003 (p. 999-1001), doi:0.1177/17506980241262390.

[19] Red Chidgey and Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Museums, Archives and Protest Memory* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2024), p. 30.

[20] Jen Hoyer and Nora Almeida, *The Social Movement Archive* (Litwin Books, LLC, 2021), p. 3.

[21] Hoyer and Almeida, *The Social Movement Archive*, p. 7.

[22] London, Bishopsgate Institute, MS International Wages For Housework Campaign Archive, fol. WFH 1974, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, 'Non 'cosa scegliere' ma 'come combattere'', *Il Giorno*, 5 February 1974.

[23] Padua, Biblioteca Civica, MS Archive of Lotta Femminista per il Salario al lavoro domestico, fol. 10, Dalla Costa, Statement on "Women and the subversion of the community" and her cooperation with Selma James, 27 March 2012.

[24] Padua BC, *MS Lotta Femminista*, fol. 10.

Archivio di Lotta Femminista per il salario al lavoro domestico was donated by Dalla Costa in 2012 to the Biblioteca Civica in Padua, comprising 872 items.

The archive includes materials relating to the Italian chapters of the WFH Campaign, known as the Comitati per il Salario al lavoro domestico, alongside Anglophone WFH groups and others.[25] Most of the documents housed in the archive relate to Campaign activities of the 1970s, 'concepiti per un uso immediato nel lavoro di intervento pratico (volantini e opuscoli) ma anche materiale più analitico destinato alla formazione politica delle attiviste (piccoli libri).'[26] However, the archive also goes beyond Dalla Costa's involvement in the Campaign, charting how her perspective evolved following her departure from the movement in 1978.[27] Regarding the presentation of the archive, the documents are organised firstly by group, then by typology, and finally by chronology. The documents for militant use are prioritised, followed by thematic interventions and theoretical analyses, media coverage, and movement ephemera. Later integrations include a rich repository of correspondence, noted as a particular strength of the archive.[28] This organisational approach results in a nonlinear archive, prioritising the pluralism of group histories and dynamics over a unified history of the International Campaign.

The archive of Lotta Femminista is therefore a decentralised repository that privileges the regional networks that comprised the international movement, emphasising the political interventions performed at the local level. The archive includes materials from several countries but avoids attempts to converge WFH initiatives into a unified, hierarchical history of the movement. When viewed as a subject, the archive questions the value of imposing linearity on the remembrance of feminist social movements, highlighting its strength in the constellation of chapters that worked from the local to the global to struggle for the recognition of unpaid reproductive labour. The strategic ordering of original documents by group and theme emphasises the collective origins and shared labour of the movement as equally important in building and sustaining the Campaign. By

[25] Mariarosa Dalla Costa, 'Introduzione', *Inventory of MS Lotta Femminista per il Salario al lavoro domestico*, 2 February 2012, <https://www.bibliotechecivichepadova.it/sites/default/files/archivio/inventario_ultimo_aggiornato_al_2024_11_07.pdf> [accessed 27 May 2025], p. 11.

[26] Dalla Costa, 'Introduzione', pp. 11-12.

[27] Dalla Costa, 'Introduzione', p. 12.

[28] Dario De Bortoli, 'Premessa all'Integrazione', *Inventory of MS Lotta Femminista per il Salario al lavoro domestico*, 25 June 2018, <https://www.bibliotechecivichepadova.it/sites/default/files/archivio/inventario_ultimo_aggiornato_al_2024_11_07.pdf> [accessed 27 May 2025], p. 23.

focusing on demystifying the activist labour required to grow a movement like WFH, the Lotta Femminista archive is both a record of past struggle and an organisational resource for future mobilisations.

Two exceptions to this structure are documents detailing the authorship debate of 'Women' and Dalla Costa's departure from the Campaign, the very conflicts that necessitated the archive's creation. Although these materials are organised chronologically, unlike the rest of the archive, and include selected correspondence, they remain marginal compared to the archive's dominant focus on materials for militant use and activist training resources. The containment of these small histories of conflict within the movement reflects the dual function of the archive as a site of both remembering and forgetting, as referenced by Derrida. While the inclusion formally acknowledges and provides context to James' disputed claims, they do not demand focus within the breadth of documents available in the archive as a whole. Instead, these conflicts remain a minor chapter in the archive's primary mission of documenting activist labour within the transnational feminist network.

A decade after the establishment of the Lotta Femminista archive, James donated the International Wages for Housework Campaign materials to the Bishopsgate Institute, London. The archive was launched to coincide with the Campaign's fiftieth anniversary, with documents from 1970 to 2022.[29] An article from the Prostitutes Collective, one of the groups associated with the Campaign, references the archive's creation as one of many community events celebrating this milestone, positioning the archive as a technology of memory deployed by those still active in the WFH Campaign.[30] Beyond commemorative references, there is no further information explaining the provenance of the archive, its intended purpose, or target demographic.

The archive is ordered chronologically, with eleven boxes of materials containing fifty-four folders, roughly corresponding to one for each year of the Campaign. While the exact number of items is not provided, the collection appears modest relative to the timeframe covered. The materials include typescripts, movement publications, promotional

[29] 'Wages For Housework Campaign Archive: Administrative/Biographical History', Bishopsgate Institute, n.d. <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/wages-for-housework-campaign-archive> [accessed 15 May 2025].

[30] 'Event: Wages for Housework, 50 years of campaigning – The Global Women's Strike experience 28 May', English Collective of Prostitutes, 13 May 2022 <https://prostitutescollective.net/event-wages-for-housework-50-years-of-campaigning-the-global-womens-strike-experience-28-may/> [accessed 15 May 2025].

materials, and media coverage of the Campaign, primarily documenting actions of Anglophone groups associated with WFH. Dissenting voices and conflicts, like those featured in the Padua archive, are not present amongst the materials. The arrangement was determined solely by the donors, James and Anne Neale, with the collection's administrative history stating 'no further arrangement required' by the Institute archivists.[31] The reference to materials being added sporadically by the donors throughout 2022 suggests that the archive was created for the commemoration of the movement, rather than the result of an organic accumulation of materials.

Although James and Neale are the donors, the creator of the archive is listed as 'Wages for Housework', suggesting the archive is the product of a collective movement as opposed to individuals. The biographical information accompanying the archive's presentation states that WFH was born when James first articulated the demand at the Women's Liberation Conference in 1972, strategically omitting the meetings of the International Feminist Collective and the discussion of 'Women' that happened in Padua from 1971. This choice constructs a strictly Anglophone history, diverging from the transnational origins of the movement with the collaboration and publication of the *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (first published 1972).

The chronological structure produces an uninterrupted survey of the Campaign's various activities, now continued as GWS. Rather than a repository for historical inquiry, the archive functions as a curated highlights reel, an approach that is consistent with the commemorative purpose that occasioned the archive's creation. In this context, remembering serves to provide a counterpoint to academic engagements with the Campaign that often centre its early years and Dalla Costa and Federici's contributions. The archive, therefore, reclaims a grassroots legacy that those still active in the Campaign argue has been marginalised by a focus on the theoretical contributions of earlier works, at the expense of ongoing organising work.[32] While James and Neale's approach to archiving does flatten the complex history of the group, particularly in its exclusion of the productive collaboration with Dalla Costa in the early years of the movement, it foregrounds the survival of a campaign that has at times been seen as having concluded in the 1970s.

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[31] 'Wages For Housework Campaign Archive: Administrative/Biographical History', Bishopsgate Institute, n.d. <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/wages-for-housework-campaign-archive> [accessed 15 May 2025].

[32] Sara Callaway and Selma James, 'Novara Media: Correction request re Wages for Housework Campaign article', Global Women's Strike, 24 March 2022 <https://globalwomenstrike.net/novara-media-correction-request-re-yesterdays-wages-for-housework-campaign-article/> [accessed 29 May 2025].

ARCHIVAL PRACTICES AS MEMORY ACTIVISM

Having compared the provenance, process, and function of these two archives of the WFH Campaign, let us return to Schwartz and Cook's claim that within archival sciences, archives constitute active sites of power. As this case study has shown, far from being a passive repository, the social movement archive remains an active site where power is conferred and contested. In line with the argument of social movement studies scholars Choudry and Vally that contradictory memories shape how social movements are archived, the provenance of Dalla Costa's donation of the Lotta Femminista repository frames the archive as a technology of memory that was deployed to challenge established historical narratives. However, despite initially intending to correct James' provocative claims regarding the early history of the movement, the desire to remember the transnational origins and networks that sustained it shaped the ordering of the archive.

Scholars working at the intersection of memory studies, archival sciences, and social movement studies have emphasised that the production of history and memory is inseparable from the labour of those who curate and maintain the archive. In Padua, the collaboration of archivists and cultural workers exemplify this through their decision to present WFH's early history as decentralised, localised nuclei of organisers and activists, heeding Harris' call for archivists to validate their own role in the construction of social memory. The use of memory activism in the archive to rediscover repertoires of action for the present echoes the archiving approach suggested by Hoyer and Almeida, asking how the archive can best serve its users. The archive's presentation, prioritising documents for militant use, thematic analyses, and materials for activist training, demonstrates how remembering the Campaign can serve both history and memory by providing a multitude of access points. The social movement reality reflected by this choice of organisation emphasises the pluralism of the international network. Such a representation problematises linear histories of social movements, negating the desire to impose an official, singular narrative on a feminist movement whose difference and autonomy within its organisation was a core strength.

The approach taken to the London archive diverges in its conception of power in the archive and the transmission of social movement memory. Memory scholars have acknowledged the importance of collective memory, emphasising how the will to

remember shapes contemporaneous group identity-formation. In the London archive, the repository's commemorative function demonstrates GWS' 'will to remember' and legitimates the ongoing activism under the GWS umbrella. The presentation of the archive as a linear evolution of struggle from 1970 to the establishment of the archive in 2022 contests the traditional association of feminist movements originating within the 1970s as 'second wave' and confined to a specific era of political activity that needs to be recovered, as it was never forgotten. However, as Derrida warns us, power is operated through control of the archive and must not be mistaken as a neutral space, a claim to which the processing of the London archive attests. The decision of James and Neale to undertake all the archiving and processing labour, with no involvement from the Institute, underlines the construction of the archive as an active site of knowledge production. Derrida's claim that we remember and forget through the archive is pronounced in light of James and Neale's retrospective document selection, demonstrated through the erasure of the Italian activists' contributions. Therefore, despite the importance of archivists and users in contributing to the power and purpose of the social movement archive, there is a significant amount of control that lies with its creator, and potential users should acknowledge how the archive's construction influences the narrative being transmitted about the movement.

BEYOND THE ARCHIVE: MEMORY, MOVEMENTS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

To return to the disputes about the history of the WFH movement that prompted the creation of these archives, I believe reading either of the archives as definitive records of movement history would be to err in judgment. Instead, the value lies in adopting a comparative approach, juxtaposing multiple archives to interrogate how social movement memory is constructed and for what ends. The divergent approaches to archiving the WFH Campaign reflect the reality of remembering an international feminist movement, a reality that is conflicted, messy, and multivocal. While Dalla Costa's archive foregrounds multiplicity and debate, emphasising the interconnectedness of activist networks, James' archive underscores continuity and success, often prioritising a singular narrative. These contrasting approaches not only reflect divergent recollections of the movement's history but also highlight the broader tensions inherent in memory activism and social movement memory.

This comparative study of the Padua and London WFH archives underscores how archives play a critical role in the creation and transmission of movement memory and history. Unlike distant historical events, these archives invite engagement from users seeking a connection with the present whilst narrating the movement's past, whether through the ongoing WFH Campaign or the different thematic priorities of the movement. The dual purpose of the archive demands that users, archivists, and donors consider the archive as a collective framework of memory creation. How we think about the past has consequences for our present, and how we archive the past influences our approach to today's activist campaigns and mobilisations. In the context of social movements, it is impossible to distinguish cleanly between history and memory work: the evolution of struggle engages different social actors in the frameworks of collective memory as they develop and use the movement archive, continuously shaping and determining the archive's meaning and power.

Moving forward, we need more contributions and frameworks to conceptualise the relationship between social movement archives and collective memory. The goal in acknowledging the archive as an active site of knowledge production is not to reconcile contradictions but to embrace them, recognising that archives say as much about the future as they do about the past. By doing so, we honour the multitude of feminist struggles and ensure that these histories and memories remain vital tools for ongoing resistance.

An 'Improper Medium' for Memory: Exploring a Recent Case of Memory Remediation

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GENOA 2001 AS A GENERATIONAL METONYMY

According to the sociological literature on the subject,[1] the Global Justice Movements (GJM), of which the Genoese case of 2001 is a leading example, do not homogeneously represent a generation. The term 'social movement' refers to 'a network of individuals, groups and organizations that, based on a sense of collective identity, seek to bring about social change (or resist social change) primarily by means of collective public protest'.[2] The composite nature of GJM does not allow for the identification of a clear shared ideology. As recently restated by Alessandro Barile[3] we can more reliably identify a dominant interpretative framework that identifies the objective of the protest in a radical opposition to international market organisations (WTO, G8, IMF, etc.).

The protest in Genoa in 2001 (from 16 to 22 July) took the form of a counter-summit (the *World Social Forum*) concomitant to the G8 meeting, with the aim of formulating a counterproposal to the global economic policies discussed by the eight market powers gathered at the Ducal Palace in the city centre. The last three days of protest were marked by violent clashes between demonstrators and police, resulting in numerous injuries and the death, on Friday 20th, of the activist Carlo Giuliani in Piazza Alimonda, killed by a

[1]The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective, ed. by Stefan Berger, Holger Nehring, (Sirger, 2017); Donatella della Porta, The Global Justice Movement. Cross-National and Transnational Perspectives (Routledge, 2007); The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements, ed. by Donatella Della Porta and M. Diani (Oxford University Press, 2015); M. Andretta, D. della Porta, L. Mosca, H. Reiter, Global, noglobal, newglobal. La protesta contro il G8 a Genova (Laterza, 2002).

[2] Diechter Rucht, 'Social movements. Some conceptual challenges', The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective, ed. by Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring, pp. 39-62.

[3] Alessandro Barile, La protesta debole. I movimenti sociali in Italia dalla Pantera ai No Global (1990-2003) (Mimesis, 2024), pp. 138-9.

police officer's gunshot. The protest movements, which aimed to challenge globalisation and the decisions of the G8 summit, were met with intensified security measures and repression by the police, culminating in particular in the raid on the Diaz school which was being used to accommodate activists (on Saturday 21) and the torture in Bolzaneto prison of some detained demonstrators (on Sunday 22). Amnesty International described the Genoa events as the most serious violation of human rights in a democratic country since the Second World War.

Returning to the point we started from, the GJM cannot be defined as a generational movement in strictly sociological terms.[4] Unlike the labour movement, the global justice movement was marked by significant generational heterogeneity, bringing together participants from different age groups and social backgrounds while attempting to connect distant national and cultural contexts. At the same time, the major mobilisations of the GJM did record a noticeable increase in youth participation. While this demographic prominence does not in itself suffice to define the movement as generational, it contributed to the perception of a renewed political protagonism of younger activists. For this reason, the generational dimension of the GJM cannot be established on purely sociological grounds. This difficulty reflects the broader complexity of constructing a collective identity in movements that lack a homogeneous social base. Rather, it becomes recognisable through a narrative operation: the texts examined here engage in a dialectical process that sketches the outline of a generation, isolating shared traits and constructing a framework within which a generational memory can be articulated.

Our contribution focuses on the recent literary production of Massimo Palma,[5] an Italian contemporary writer, academic, and scholar of Walter Benjamin, Eric Weil, and Alexandre Kojève. Specifically, we will discuss *Happy Diaz. Sette giorni di gioia e divisione a Genova 2001* (Arcana 2015)[6] and *Olanda 1945, Anne Frank e i Neutral Milk Hotel*

[4] Cfr. M. Andretta, D. della Porta, L. Mosca, H. Reiter, Global, noglobal, newglobal, pp. 74-77

[5] Palma's literary production includes Desiderare Bowie (Nottetempo, 2025), La conta (Edizioni volatili, 2024); Olanda, 1945, (Nottetempo, 2023); Movimento e stasi (Industria & Letteratura, 2021); Nico e le maree (Castelvecchi, 2019); Happy Diaz. Sette giorni di gioia e divisione a Genova 2001 (Arcana, 2015); (Castelvecchi, 2021); Berlino Zoo Station (Cooper, 2012).

[6] Our contribution examines the second edition (Castelvecchi, 2021) published for the twentieth anniversary of the Genoa demonstration.

(Nottetempo, 2023). The first explores how the troubled memory of the G8 in Genoa can be approached and narrated through the musical culture of the generation involved in those tragic events in July 2001. On one hand, Palma's narrative operation is pertinent in light of its clear political endeavour to redeem the ideals belonging to that generation and transfer them into contemporary political discourse. On the other hand, it is justified by the author's observation of an absence of work on the memory of those years that has not been crystallised in the form of trauma. According to Palma what appears to be the particular object of removal is what the author calls the 'before Genoa'. The author refers to the dual formation ('la duplice formazione'), both political and musical, of those who took part in the World Social Forum. In the second book Palma shows how, in the same time period, precisely in 1997, the *Neutral Milk Hotel*'s indie rock masterpiece *In the Aeroplane over the Sea*, which offers a re-reading of Anne Frank's *Diary,* gradually achieved international success, becoming a generational voice. Palma perceives *In the Aeroplane over the Sea* as a 'generational essay' that describes a segment of alternative American youth through a reshaping of Anne Frank's legacy.

The essay will situate Palma's texts within the theoretical framework of cultural memory studies. We aim to show how Palma's work represents a literary example of the construction of a generational narrative that is still neglected, despite the strong media coverage of the events in which it was involved. In particular, our contribution develops an understanding of cultural memory and memory remediation based on the theoretical approach defined by Astrid Erll. We will start by clarifying the term 'collective memory' of Genoa. We will then explicate what we mean by 'remediation' and how it can be used to renew a narrative of the G8 protest. Here, we will refer to José Van Dick's concept of 'digitally mediated memory' particularly in relation to the musical medium. Finally, in the last section, we will analyse the texts, attempting to describe the concept of 'improper medium', introduced by Palma, in order to use it as an interpretative tool.

Before proceeding, a preliminary remark is necessary. The concept of generation is not easy to describe. Identifying a generation is possible through a multifactorial analysis including demographic, historical and cultural data. Moreover, consensus among researchers plays an essential role.[7] The two works examined focus on two different historical and geographical contexts (England-Italy; United States-Netherlands), but the

[7] For a summary, refer to the methodological articles published by the Pew Research Centre, such as, The Whys and Hows of Generations Research, Pew Research Center, September 3, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/ > [accessed 28 May 2025].

generation under discussion is the same: the so-called Generation Y or Millennials (1981-1996). Despite recent criticism of the indiscriminate use of these labels, Generation Y and the chronological boundaries that define it remain compelling.[8] From an Italian cultural perspective, authors whose literary works focus on this generation share identity-shaping episodes that occurred within the same general time frame. For example, Valerio Mattioli recently chose two events as temporal limits on his 'cultural counter-history of the 1990s':[9] the failed eviction of the Leoncavallo social centre in Milan (August 16, 1989) and the killing of Giuliani in Genoa (September 11, 2001). In contrast, the choice of chronological boundaries in Palma is subject to wider fluctuations between a national and an international horizon. The author recognizes two generational 'dates of birth', as he says, in Aldo Moro's death (May 9, 1978) and in Ian Curtis' death (May 18, 1980). The leader of the Italian party *Democrazia Cristiana,* who was kidnapped and killed by the *Brigate Rosse*, is described as a symbol of a generation's political background. What is more, the suicide of Joy Division's frontman Ian Curtis comes to represent that generation's musical education and cultural legacy. We will return to this issue later.

On the other hand, the Genoa events in July 2001 would constitute the opposite temporal limit, 'the date of death'. Both Mattioli and Palma depart from the more established historical milestones, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the attack on the Twin Towers. Mattioli justifies his choice as a matter of 'counter-history' that cannot subscribe to the dominant narrative. Instead Palma identifies September 11 as a competitive memory to the Genoa events on the media level. September 11 ('che ha inghiottito quasi tutto')[10] is the historical contingency that removed Genoa from the collective debate. Both, on the contrary, recognize Genoa as a generational metonymy, the symbol that geographically anchors their generation. It is Palma who explicitly uses the term 'Genoa Generation' and having clarified the chronological extremes to which he refers, we will adopt his definition for the sake of clarity in our argument.

[8] On debates over generational labels see How Pew Research Center will report on generations moving forward, Kim Parker, May 22, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/22/how-pew-research-center-will-report-on-g enerations-moving-forward/> [accessed 28 May 2025].

[9] Valerio Mattioli, Novanta, (Einaudi, 2025), p. 13.

[10] Palma, Happy Diaz, p.7.

Palma opens his reflection on Genoa's generational trauma with the cover of *Closer*, Joy Division's second and posthumously released album (July 1980), which inevitably reads as an elegy following Curtis' suicide. The album cover image reproduces a funerary monument from the Monumental Cemetery of Staglieno in Genoa, the very cemetery where Giuliani is buried. In Palma's interpretation, this visual coincidence becomes symbolically charged: both generations, Curtis' Manchester-based generation and the Genoese generation marked by the events of the G8, found themselves represented in mourning. From this starting point, Palma rewinds the week of the Genoa protests to 1981, the year of the release of *Movement*, the first album by New Order, founded by the former members of Joy Division after Curtis' death. He interprets that record as a collective act of mourning. In doing so, Palma internalizes as a metaphorical framework through which to rethink Genoa's generational wound.

THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF GENOA 2001

In the framework of memory studies, when we talk about memory as a collective phenomenon, we refer to the dual logic of collective remembering and collective forgetting within a given social context. As recently remarked by Erll, the term 'collective memory', although tautological, is part of a tradition dating back to 1925, to Maurice Halbwachs' pioneering text *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* that renewed a field of study clarifying that memory is always shaped within social frameworks. As Jan Assman summarises, recalling the achievement of Halbwachs' approach, 'our memory depends, like consciousness in general, on socialization and communication' and it 'can be analyzed as a function of our social life'.[11] In saying this, in the words of Erll, collective remembering 'means that certain versions of the past are actualised again and again within social groups (via discourses, media, practices), and that they are well-networked with other topics'.[12] On the other hand, collective forgetting 'means that within certain social frameworks, there are no acts of

[11] Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook ed. by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (De Gruyter, 2008), pp.109-118.

[12] Astrid Erll, 'The hidden power of implicit collective memory', Memory, Mind & Media 1, 14, (2022), pp. 1-17, (p. 3).

remembering traceable. For example, memories of particular past events can be avoided, kept secret, tabooed, or may seem difficult to articulate in public'.[13]

This terminological specification not only clarifies the interpretative key that guides our analysis, but also has another function. Most books about the G8 protests in Genoa are collections of testimonies or testimonial writings by people who were present at the events.[14] It is common to encounter the term 'collective memory' in these texts. However, behind the homonymy lie two different meanings that we believe should be pointed out before continuing. The term 'collective memory', as used in these texts and reported by testimonies, should be read in a political sense, referring to an explicitly politicized notion of memory work.[15] The expression 'Genoa collective memory' alludes to a broad political consensus from below, in contrast to the journalistic and institutionalised narrative of the protests. Gabriele Proglio, echoing Halbwachs, talks about 'uno sguardo sul passato dall'interno del gruppo di appartenenza',[16] which characterises the oral testimonies of the protesters, recounted most often from within a collective horizon. The institutional version and the media vulgate of the G8 counter-demonstrations are contrasted by a memory that claims to be collective, conveyed through the use of the subject 'we'.

Now, we build on the concept of collective memory by showing the relationship that the Genoa generation has with remembering and forgetting. Once again, we find Mattioli and Palma's considerations quite aligned. They seem to agree in identifying as common to a generation, a discontinuous relationship with recent national history and a contradictory engagement with memory. Both read as a generational trait, a deep connection with the historical events of the 1970s, the so-called *Anni di piombo*. This legacy is frequently discussed and according to Barile[17] the Italian social movement has a cautious attitude

[13] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[14] See: Gabriele Proglio, I fatti di Genova. Una storia orale del G8 (Donzelli, 2021); Gianluca Prestigiacomo, G8. Genova 2001. Storia di un disastro annunciato, (Chiarelettere, 2021); Raffaele Caruso, G8 c'ero anch'io: un avvocato tra le barricate di Genova, (FOG, 2021); Vittorio Agnoletto et al., 2001-2021. Genova per chi non c'era. L'eredità del G8: il seme sotto la neve, (Altreconomia, 2021).

[15] Cfr: Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media, ed. by Samuel Merril et al.,(Palgrave Mcmillan, 2020).

[16] Gabriele Proglio, Mitopoiesi del G8 di Genova, Laboratoire italien, 31, 2023, <https://journals.openedition.org/laboratoireitalien/10993> [accessed 12 novembre 2025].

[17] Barile, La protesta debole. I movimenti sociali in Italia dalla Pantera ai No Global (1990-2003), pp. 138-139.

towards that recent history, neither rejecting nor embracing it. The symbolic role of the protests of the 1970s is played between memory and oblivion. In this regard, Mattioli offers an interpretation that views the 1970s and 1990s as a continuum of his Italian counter-history, in which the former represent both a cumbersome legacy and a founding myth.

In Palma, in parallel with similar observations made by Mattioli, the reflection goes further by explicitly asserting an intentional component in the dynamics of forgetting of his generation. As stated in *Happy Diaz*:

> Il rapporto di questa generazione con la storia, con il passato, è stato contraddittorio: responsabili e sollecitati da più parti, si sono ricordati di tutto, grandi eventi e biografie personali, metanarrazioni e storia micrologica di travet misconosciuti. Ma di sera, spesso, si sono dimenticati di ricordare.[18]

Palma seeks to clarify the contradiction 'forget to remember' passing through a new formative date for the Genoa generation. On July 2000, a day of remembrance was established in Italy for the remembrance of Holocaust victims. Since that year, the 27th of January has been designated as *Il giorno della memoria*. According to Palma, the generation that arrived in Genoa in their twenties is also the first that questioned the warning 'ricordati di ricordare'.[19]

The thematisation of the Holocaust memory in terms of a generational identity-shaping feature is crucial in Palma's narrative. Similarly, choosing the death of Joy Division's leader as a symbolic generational limit is closely connected to the Shoah. Following the fourth chapter of *Happy Diaz*, Palma recalls how reading *House of Dolls* by Ka-Tzetnik (Yehiel Feiner) suggested to Ian Curtis the band's name *Joy Division*. He chose the English translation of *Freudenabteilung*, a term referring to a section of the Auschwitz concentration camp where young Jewish women were subjected to sexual slavery. In Rothberg's influential work on the interplay of disparate acts of remembrance involving the memory of the Holocaust, he asserts that 'public memory of the Holocaust emerged in relation to postwar events that seem at first to have little to do with it'.[20] His spatial

[18] Palma, Happy Diaz, p.14.

[19] Ivi, p. 42.

[20] Michel Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of. Decolonization (Stanford University Press, 2009), p.7.

metaphorical concept of multidirectional memory moves beyond a competitive view of memories in public discourse.

We believe that in Palma the reference to the Holocaust is directed at focusing on the memory-making process per se, referring to the institutionalised mnemonic act par excellence. This also means showing the trade-off and coming to terms with the moments when forgetting is sought. Palma interprets the absence of work on the memory of the G8 primarily as a traumatic reaction and secondarily as a symptom of a generational cultural problem with memory.

'DARE AZIONE AL RICORDO'" GENOA 2001 BETWEEN PREMEDIATION AND REMEDIATION

In order to construct a memory that adequately records the events of the Genoa counter-demonstration, Palma intends to rethink both political and personal trauma in terms other than identification or witnessing. He aims to move away from what he identifies as two automatisms of memory. If the first one is a moral automatism ('il senso di colpa per non esserci stati'),[21] the second one concerns the historization and iconization of past events ('nomi e scene del passato possono diventare icone').[22] The G8 of Genoa, as a strongly mediatised event, easily lends itself to this second dynamic. The first automatism does not allow emotional detachment from the recalled episode, the second one problematises the common compulsion to remember, creating fixed portraits of past events.

Visuality, as remarked by Erll, plays a crucial role in the making of collective memory: 'iconization is, along with narrativization, a key process of forming memory in culture'.[23] In our case, the memory of the G8 protests is crystallised in the figure of Giuliani, captured in the moments before and after his death during the clashes in Piazza Alimonda. There are two images that have been reproduced most often and have come to epitomise a week

[21] Palma, Happy Diaz, p. 8.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Astrid Erll, 'Media and the Dynamics of Memory: From Cultural Paradigms to Transcultural Premediation', Handbook of Culture and Memory ed. by Brady Wagoner (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 313.

of protests. This is how Palma introduced them in *Happy Diaz*'s chapter dedicated to Friday events:

> E infine, su migliaia di frame, di fermo immagine, scomposto tra fotografie di privati, di mediattivisti, infine su YouTube, è apparso un corpo minuto, bicolore, bianco e quasi-nero. Era disteso e circondato da gente in fuga, poi venne coperto da un telo.[24]

> C'è una foto famosa di Carlo Giuliani fermo su via Tolemaide, piccolo ma statuario, un rotolo di scotch da pacchi all'avambraccio, indossato come fanno i bimbi.[25]

In relation to the first image Palma speaks of 'generational framing' to emphasise how much an image can fix a memory. Instead, in the second one, a 'generational style' emerges: 'Dalla foto, nella perfetta staticità di Giuliani emerge lo stile generazionale. Una calma critica, una stasi riflessiva nel movimento assoluto, nel caos'.[26]

To these two automatisms Palma contrasts an alternative capable of giving action to memory. It consists of what he calls 'a musical perspective'.

> Happy Diaz voleva e vuole ancora essere [...] un invito a percorrere ragioni e radici di quel movimento [...]. Cerca di farlo da una prospettiva straniante. Una prospettiva musicale [...]. Parte proprio da venti anni prima: il 1981 in cui nascono ufficialmente i New Order [...]. E prende le mosse da un luogo altro: l'Inghilterra [...].[27]

The expression 'musical perspective' is not purely metaphorical. It means, first of all, considering the musical culture of the people involved in the Genoa protest. As clearly stated by van Dijck, who investigated the relationship between modern digital media and collective memory, 'popular songs create a context for reminiscence'28 and shape collective memories of the past. And also, thanks to van Dijck, the function of collective music repertoires (playlists) as vehicles for imagining collectivity has been highlighted. The case of Palma differs from the examples provided by van Dijck, who focuses on the national heritage of pop songs, providing an example on a transnational level.

In Palma, following a musical perspective means working comparatively, creating new mnemonic connections and finally, using a well-established term in the field of memory

[24] Palma, Happy Diaz, p.77.
[25] Ibid., p. 84.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., p.8.
[28] José van Dijck, Mediated memories in the digital age (Stanford university press, 2007), p. 90.

studies, remediating. *Premediation* and *Remediation* are defined by Erll as two complementary dynamics of cultural memory.[29] In her words:

> [...] while remediation describes the ongoing transcription of mnemonic content from medium to medium, premediation draws our attention to the result of such plurimediated memories: the emergence of certain media schemata, which preform the ways in which future events will be anticipated, experienced, represented, and then possibly remembered.[30]

To provide an example, we can look to the *Happy Diaz'* index. Palma states that he derived the week-long timeline narrative device from G. K. Chesterton's book, *The Man Who Was Thursday*. This is overlaid with references to the popular 1990s television series *Happy Days*, onto which the tragedy of the Diaz school is grafted. Palma also does not hide biblical symbolism linked to the weekdays from Genesis and the Gospels, which also derive in part from Chesterton. To these previous media formations, which already form a complex pattern of intermedial relationships, Palma adds a musical component. A large number of songs performed in Manchester are juxtaposed with the days of the week. We list only the title of the song that inspires each chapter, leaving the others aside: Monday = *Blue Monday* (New Orders); Tuesday = *Tuesday* (The Durutti Column); Wednesday = *Just Wednesday* (Inspiral Carpets); Thursday = *Thursday's Child* (The Chameleos); Friday = *Gramme Friday* (The Fall), *Friday Mourning* (Morrissey); Saturday = *Madchester Rave On* (Happy Mondays); Sunday = *Everyday is like Sunday* (Morrissey).

This juxtapositional practice, which achieves remediation at a macrostructural level, is a process that we also find at work on a microstructural level. Returning back to the figure of Giuliani, we can see the cultural resonance of previous representation reverberating across different media. The paragraph discussing his iconic significance is titled after the song by *The Associates, Tell Me Easter on Friday*. The song makes explicit reference to the religious and sacrificial dimension of Friday for Christianity. This symbolic context is consistent with the frame description of the two hands succouring Giuliani through the

[29] Regarding this point, see: Erll, 'Media and the Dynamics of Memory: From Cultural Paradigms to Transcultural Premediation', Handbook of Culture and Memory ed. by Brady Wagoner (Oxford University Press, 2017); Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory (De Gruyter, 2008); Memory in culture (Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, 2011), pp. 139-143.

[30] Erll, Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory, pp.13-14.

reference to the personification of piety: 'Immagini mute, in sosta sul fiotto di sangue che si spande, e finalmente due mani, la pietà, che tentano di fermare quel flusso'.[31]

In conclusion, it is difficult to identify a distinctive feature of remediation through musical elements (title-tracks, performers' biographies, etc.). What can, however, be emphasised is a similarity of process between the logic that guides associationism in *Happy Diaz* and that which van Dijck states underpins the logic of creating music playlists. In her words:

> The eminent value of creating collective musical repertoires, as American historian William Kenney points out, has proved vital to the "ongoing process of individual and group recognition in which images of the past and present could be mixed in an apparently timeless suspension that often seemed to defy the relentless corrosion of historical change".[32]

OF NAMES AND DATES WITHOUT A YEAR: A CONCLUSION

In *Olanda, 1945*, Palma dwells mostly on musical remediation, recognising in Neutral Milk Hotel's album a significant alternative to iconisation, even though the band interfaces with the icon par excellence: Anne Frank. Palma writes:

> In quel disco il compositore e paroliere del gruppo, Jeff Mangum, racconta che ci si può innamorare di un ritratto, di una foto di Cinquant'anni prima: il soggetto della foto è Anne Frank. E racconta cosa succede a farlo in musica. Le conseguenze e i cambiamenti che porta.[33]

A subsequent passage reads:

> dopo che le poche foto rimaste di Anne Frank sono state riprodotte a milioni, nella favola dell'*Aeroplano sopra il mare* Anne Frank non esiste come volto, sfuma come icona. Diventa suono e melodia senza immagini a supporto [...]. Non dà mai una descrizione del ritratto amato, e non pronuncia il nome di Anne Frank se non una volta.[34]

According to Palma, Neutral Milk Hotel (NMH) build a generational identity through the reuse of Anne Frank's memory and her diary. The approach adopted by NMH does not rely on philological methods to guide associations ('Non c'è filologia né uso di archivi').[35] The bridges between epochs are drawn by following emotional affinities in

[31] Palma, Happy Diaz, p.77.
[32] Van Dijck, Mediated memories in the digital age, p. 95
[33] Palma, Olanda, 1945, pp. 20-21.
[34] Ibid., p. 35.
[35] Ibid., p. 13.

particular on issues related to adolescence. Palma focuses more closely on what may be, namely, a kind of 'inappropriateness' of these associations. The figure of Anne Frank, appropriated by NMH, is defined by Palma as an 'improper medium'. The meaning of the expression lies in the ambivalence between 'medium' understood as 'media-related' and as a 'spiritual conduit'. In Palma's words:

> Anna Frank diventa il tramite attraverso cui fare musica nella periferia americana dei Novanta. Il medium per narrare la vita materiale di comunità ai margini. È un medium improprio.[36]

This paragraph most closely resembles a definition. The author clearly defines Anne Frank as a 'means' or 'vehicle' through which an identity narrative can be shaped. However, the semantic sphere that mostly revolves around the figure of Anne Frank is that relating to ghosts. See the following passage in this regard:

> Farsi possedere dagli spettri: questa è la chiave con cui i Neutral Milk Hotel, ragazzi degli anni Novanta, quando si proclama finita la storia e la storia stessa diventa fantasma, decidono di fare musica della vicenda di Anne Frank. [...]. L'Aereoplano ha il problema di dare una casa allo spettro di Anne Frank.[37]

Palma appears to define the 'improper medium' as a concept situated halfway between these two dimensions: at once a medial and a spiritual one. However, 'improper medium' seems to work following a multidirectional logic, exemplifying what Rothberg describes as 'new kind of comparative thinking' that 'produces new objects and new lines of sight'.[38] In this sense, memories that are used in a contrastive manner in relation to other elements of an identity-shaping narrative can be defined as 'improper medium'. This form of elaboration of mnemonic material in Palma has a stylistic counterpart. The author privileges juxtapositions through argumentative writing and thus highlights the destabilising potential of coincidences - deemed essential tools for an effective reimagination of generational memory. Let's conclude by looking at one last example from *Sebaldivision*, the last chapter of *Happy Diaz* included in the book's second edition:

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., pp. 90-92.

[38] Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, p. 18.

> Sebald morì in Inghilterra per un attacco di cuore che lo colse alla guida nel dicembre 2001, pochi mesi dopo aver pubblicato Austerlitz. Nell'ultima pagina di Austerlitz, ricorda l'uso che venne fatto di una fortezza. L'ultimo nome è "Max Stern, Paris, 18.5.44". Se Parigi è il luogo in cui si svolge tutto il finale di Austerlitz, se il 18 maggio 1944 è il giorno in cui è nato, Max è il nome con cui Sebald voleva essere chiamato. [...] Mentre la sua vita si conclude pochi mesi dopo, improvvisa, nel 2001, la sua vita d'autore finisce appena prima con una mossa punk. Nella data iscrive il nome, Sebald. Il suo dentro il loro. Vi innesta l'eco della distruzione causata dai suoi contro loro. E la speranza, solo per noi, decadi dopo, per quando ci vedremo come non ci era mai accaduto, come "ritratti del trauma". Per scrivere nomi e date senza anno: "Max Stern, Ian Curtis, Manchester, 18.5=".[39]

Here, the author creates a strong connection between Ian Curtis' death and some episodes from W. Sebald's life by working on the recurrence of a couple of dates, May 17 and 18. The author in this chapter builds a juxtapositional parable that solidifies in memory Manchester and the Shoah. As Palma points out in the note to the second edition, the chapter *Sebaldivision* is included in the book, not so much because it explicitly refers to Genoa, but rather because of a stylistic affinity that ties in with the issues raised by the memory of Genoa. In his words: '[*Sebaldivision* n]on ha un'attinenza diretta a quanto successo nel luglio 2001, ma ha molto a che vedere con l'uso di giustapposizioni e coincidenze che domina *Happy Diaz* e col problema che la memoria di Genova 2001 apre a chi c'era e chi non c'era'.[40] The problem with Genoa's memory, as we said, is the iconic significance of the traumatic event it represents, which cancels out what preceded it on a political and cultural level. At the same time, iconization ('ritratti del trauma') does not allow for the redeeming of those ideals; yet it leaves open the question of how they might be reclaimed in future political practice. Through juxtaposition of elements, Palma reveals how recreating memory means 'scrivere nomi e date senza anno', following a model such as 'Max Stern, Ian Curtis, Manchester, 18.5='. Rejecting names, dates, or spatial coordinates once again emphasizes how, with Erll, 'remembering and forgetting are closely intertwined'.[41] She continues : 'the phenomenon of forgetting is every bit as unobservable as is memory. As an object of research it only comes into view via the observation of remembering – by considering its peculiarities, mistakes and changes.'[42] Deliberately embracing forgetting, Palma constructs a new narrative, one that reinterprets and rearticulates generational trauma. In this regard, he states that his generation embodies repetition at concerts ('si incarnava la ripetizione')[43] in order to forget everyday life ('Le

[39] Palma, Happy Diaz, pp. 139-140.
[40] Ibid., p.10.
[41] Erll, Memory in culture, p.8.
[42] Ibid., p.9.
[43] Ibid., p.94.

allusioni ad una velocità che aiutava a dimenticare il quotidiano').[44] Questioning the injunction to remember which, as we have seen, was central to this generation and is here evoked through one of the authors who most prominently thematized it (W. G. Sebald), Palma reveals the possibility of an alternative warning ('forget to remember'). By engaging in contrastive mnemonic relationships within an identity-shaping narrative, Palma's work not only enables the reimagining of generational memory but also opens up a political horizon, understanding memory as a site of negotiation.

[44] Ibid., p.60.

Memory as Resistance: Contesting Climate Crisis and Identity in Antonio Scurati's *La seconda mezzanotte*

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A city is constituted by two interdependent elements: the *ville*, its physical environment, and the *cité*, its lived and experiential dimension[1]. While the former includes tangible spaces such as streets, buildings and infrastructures, the latter reflects the relational modes shaped by perceptions, memory and beliefs. In the context of climate crisis, both these elements are profoundly impacted by atmospheric transformations, with significant consequences for personal and communal identity. The climate crisis, understood in this article as a *hyperobject*[2], in Timothy Morton's terms, is a phenomenon so massively distributed in time and space that it defies total comprehension and whose effects, though planetary in scale, manifest locally, altering how cities are inhabited, experienced and remembered. Indeed, as a phenomenon that overwhelms traditional scales of perception and disrupts the boundaries between natural and cultural system, the climate crisis reshapes not only the material configuration of urban spaces but also the ways in which they are represented, interpreted, and imagined.

In order to emphasize the gravity and urgency of the challenges facing humanity, in this article I employ the term climate crisis rather than global warming or climate change.

[1] This conceptualization can be found in numerous studies from different fields of research. For an urban planning perspective see Sennett Richard, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* (Farrar, 2018) whereas for a sociological approach refer to Martinotti Guido, *Sei lezioni sulla città*, ed. Vicari Serena (Feltrinelli, 2017).

[2] Morton Timothy, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World. University of Minnesota Press (ProQuest Ebook Central, 2013).* https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ucc.idm.oclc.org/lib/uccie-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1477347.

Referring to the phenomenon as a crisis acknowledges that we are already experiencing a global emergency that necessitates immediate and transformative actions rather than merely speculating about potential outcomes. I argue that such language better captures the existential peril at hand and more effectively calls for strong measures, even though it may run the risk of provoking alarmism or polarized reactions.

This article outlines a process of urban and community metamorphosis as depicted in Antonio Scurati's *La seconda mezzanotte*[3], an eco-dystopian novel[4] that reimagines Venice in the aftermath of a devastating flood and that I situate within the broader context of climate fiction (*cli-fi*) – a term coined by journalist Dan Bloom in 2007 and further refined by Goodbody and Johns-Putra in 2019[5], who describe it not as a genre with fixed conventions but rather as a thematic focus on climate crisis and its social, ethical, and psychological dimensions.

Unlike Scurati's better-known historical narratives, of which the award-winning *M: Son of the Century* is a clear example, this novel interrogates the entanglement of climate crisis, corporate dominance, and urban identity in the form of a speculative fiction in which the city's physical and social fabric undergoes multiple transformations. Before proceeding, it is important to acknowledge that the novel's representation of the Chinese occupiers is deeply problematic: as Mark Chu has convincingly shown,[6] it relies on a racialized, homogenizing imaginary that casts them as a criminal, culturally inassimilable invading mass, while also reproducing, in ways that Malvestio link to eco-dystopian fears of "reverse colonization",[7] troubling colonial undertones that complicate my reading of memory as resistance to forgetting in the context of the climate crisis.[8]

In the text, the metamorphosis begins with the retrospective description of the 'Grande Onda', a catastrophic climatic event set in 2072 that obliterates Venice, followed by a

[3] Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte* (Bompiani, 2011).

[4] Malvestio Marco, 'Climate Migrations and Reverse Colonisation in Italian Eco-dystopias', *The Italianist*, 43.3 (2023), p.375. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614340.2023.2182069; Chiafele Anna, 'Climate Change: Eco-dystopia in Antonio Scurati's *La seconda mezzanotte*', *Quaderni d'italianistica*, 42.1 (2022), pp. 5–30. https://doi.org/10.33137/qi.v42i1.38478; Malvestio Marco, 'Sognando la catastrofe. L'eco-distopia italiana del ventunesimo secolo', *Narrativa*, 43 (2021), pp. 31–44. https://doi.org/10.4000/narrativa.421.

[5] Goodbody Axel & Johns-Putra Adeline, *Cli-Fi: A companion* (Peter Lang, 2019), pp.1-2.

[6] Chu Mark, '"Non voglio morire cinese": crisi e conflitto in *La seconda mezzanotte* di Antonio Scurati', *Narrativa*, 35–36 (2014), pp. 129–141. https://doi.org/10.4000/narrativa.1158.

[7] Malvestio, "Climate Migrations", p. 385.

[8] Although these dynamics inform my reading of memory as resistance against obliterating corporate control, a comprehensive examination is beyond the scope of this article, and I intend to dedicate a separate, more detailed article to this theme.

corporate-led reconstruction that distorts both its *ville* – through structures like a dividing wall that separates it from the 'Città Perduta', the submerged ruins of the original Venice, and a gladiator arena built in Piazza San Marco – and its *cité*, as the city is turned into a playground for a global elite whilst its residents are confined to a ghetto and relegated to roles of servitude or prostitution. These radical disruptions fracture urban and social identity, yet the novel demonstrates how reconnecting with the city's foundational elements – through rituals, narratives, and ecological critique – becomes a means of transformative resistance and reclamation.

I will investigate how *La seconda mezzanotte* uses the intricate temporality of memory to highlight the invisible effects of climate crisis[9] and I will outline a process of urban and communal metamorphosis, demonstrating how memory serves as a conduit for reclaiming both personal and collective identity through spatial reconnection. My investigation is framed by two primary questions: how does Scurati's depiction of memory function as a mechanism for resisting the erasure of cultural and urban identity? And how does speculative cli-fi, through its imaginative lens, engage with memory practices to critique ecological and societal destruction? I will answer these questions by concentrating on and analyzing three main ways, that intersect and reinforce one another, in which memory functions as a multifaceted catalyst for agency for both the novel's characters and its readers.

Prior to delving into these modalities, it is crucial to contextualize the societal framework in which the characters operate and look at how the company that runs Nova Venezia actively manipulates its memory and its connection to the past. Near the novel's conclusion, the Procuratore of Nova Venezia explicitly articulates this deliberate attempt to obliterate historical memory:

> No, Maestro, nessuna rievocazione. L'arena è una macchina sterminatrice. Qualunque pezzo di passato noi ci buttiamo dentro, lo riduce in polvere. Già oggi, sugli spalti e dall'altro lato dello schermo, moltissimi non sanno più che stiamo tornando indietro. Tempo una generazione, e non saranno

[9] Discussions around the apparent invisibility of the effects of the climate crisis and how to try to make them perceptible are central to contemporary criticism. I refer here in particular to the arguments made by Goodbody Axel & Johns-Putra Adeline, *Cli-Fi: A companion*, pp.10-13; Mehnert Antonia, *Climate change fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.4; Schneider-Mayerson Matthew, 'The Influence of Climate Fiction. An Empirical Survey of Readers', *Environmental Humanities*, 10.2 (2018), p.484. Doi: 10.1215/22011919-7156848; Andersen Gregers, 'Cli-Fi and the uncanny', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 23.4 (2016), pp. 857–858. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isw068.

> nemmeno sfiorati dal dubbio che tutto questo sia già esistito. No, Maestro, noi siamo contrari alla memoria. Noi organizziamo attivamente l'oblio[10].

The Company purposefully created a system of active oblivion to annihilate historical memory and guarantee that the past is not only forgotten but completely obliterated. It emphasizes how historical pieces are crushed and devoid of significance by using the arena as a literal and metaphorical 'macchina sterminatrice' ('exterminating machine'). Through this systematic erasure, the Company enacts what Paul Connerton calls repressive erasure[11]: a deliberate and structured elimination of memories deemed inconvenient to maintain existing power relations. In doing so, it engineers a shifting-baseline syndrome[12], whereby each generation accepts a further degraded present as normal because the original state has been obscured. Organized oblivion is thus weaponized as a tool of domination, directly opposing the restorative potential of memory that Svetlana Boym describes in her exploration of nostalgia and resistance[13]. Despite this, resistance emerges within the novel where pockets of opposition to the Company's agenda of erasure arise, are nurtured, and generate acts of defiance. These moments of resistance are firmly anchored in memory, which functions as a means of regaining agency, identity, and cultural continuity even under the threat of obliteration.

WHISPERS AGAINST SILENCE

The gladiators' actions on the Isola di San Giorgio, also known as the 'Isola dei Guerrieri' within the novel, provide a clear example of how memory may be used as resistance. The island hosts an alternative social structure, complete with its own rituals that explicitly oppose the imposed order of the corporate regime. Among these practices is the 'rito della memoria', also called 'la custodia dei morti', described as follows:

[10] Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte*, p. 325.

[11] Connerton Paul, 'Seven Types of Forgetting', *Memory Studies*, 1.1 (2008), pp. 60-61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698007083889.

[12] Pauly Daniel, 'Anecdotes and the shifting baseline syndrome of fisheries', *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 10.10 (1995), p. 430. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-5347(00)89171-5.

[13] Boym Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001).

> A volte sono storie dei vecchi tempi. Più spesso racconti dell'arena, di combattimenti vinti o combattenti morti, oppure ricordi di terre lontane. Uno racconta, gli altri ascoltano, poi il narratore tace. Sovente trascorrono parecchi minuti prima che a un altro torni la voglia di parlare dopo quanto è stato detto [...]. Per fortuna, alla fine, c'è sempre qualcuno che riprende la parola, che rompe il silenzio. Allora ci si rianima, si torna a mettere assieme quel poco che si sa del mondo, quel poco che ne resta[14]

The ritual of memory functions as an act of resilience against the city's systematic erasure of history. Storytelling, as a communal practice, becomes a means of preserving and reconstructing memory, fostering both individual and collective agency. Drawing on Griselda Pollocks' notion of memory as resistance[15], in which marginalized groups reclaim control over their narratives through acts of remembrance, and Paul Ricoeur's dialogical conception of memory[16] as an exchange of recollections that creates and sustains meaning, the passage illustrates how ritualized acts of remembering can work as a force resisting oppressive power structures, ensuring the survival of cultural identity. By sharing stories, the gladiators not only sustain individual agency but also foster collective resilience, countering the city's active effort to erase its history. Memory here transcends the role of a passive repository, becoming an active, living force of opposition and survival.

The spiritual practices that continue on the Isola di San Giorgio in spite of the corporate authorities' ban on religious worship serve as more evidence of this disobedience. Prayers are recited, lead tablets with curses and invocations to underworld deities are deposited[17], and the deceased are buried[18]. Each of the actions represents a unique yet interconnected method of memory preservation, whether it be material, ritualistic, or embodied, and together they constitute a spiritual protest against the city's systematic erasure of the past.

Among these practices, Fenice's prayer is particularly significant. His whispered fragment of the Paternoster – 'liberaci dal male' ('deliver us from evil') – can be interpreted as both a request for collective deliverance and an act of personal redemption. Building on

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[14] Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte*, p.77.

[15] Pollock Griselda, *After-affects | After-images. Trauma and Aesthetic Transformations in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester University Press, 2013).

[16] Ricoeur Paul, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, transl. by Blamey Kathleen & Pellauer David (The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.131.

[17] 'Non tutti dormono. In un angolo remoto del chiostro dei Cipressi, dove un tempo c'era un giardino, scorge un'ombra inginocchiata tra le ceppaie. È Dolone, il Lupo, che scava la terra. Vi depone le tavolette di piombo incise a punta di coltello. Contengono maledizioni per i nemici e invocazioni agli dei degli inferi, perché è a loro che il Lupo si vota e si consegna' Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte*, p.159.

[18] 'la sepoltura permane. Notturna. Obliata. Inconsolabile. Questo siamo. Siamo quelli che seppelliscono i propri morti' Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte*, p.104.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory[19], Fenice's capacity to recall and preserve the prayer creates a bridge between the past and present, fostering resilience against both external erasure and internal erosion of identity. In this sense, postmemory is employed not as a transmission of trauma but as a model of mediated memory that actively resists oblivion. His act of remembrance serves as a shelter, guaranteeing that remnants of the past persist in spite of systematic efforts to eradicate them. In these ways, the act of remembering is not merely reflective but deeply oppositional. Every act of reminiscence, whether tied to the communal rituals or spiritual practices, resists the erasure of the city's identity and asserts the enduring power of memory as a form of resistance against not only the destruction of a city but also the obliteration of its soul.

ORAL TRADITIONS AS RESISTANCE

Popular stories and oral traditions embody the second form of memory as resistance of the book. Throughout *La seconda mezzanotte*, the characters share stories that have passed down through the years, tales that maintain both personal experiences and collective memory. These stories are imbued with values, histories, and identities that resist both the ecological devastation and the commercialization of the city by the powerful elites who seek to control its future as well as its present and past. Popular tales in the novel are more than nostalgic recollections; they are radical acts of preservation. In a world where Venice is rapidly transforming under corporate control, these stories provide characters with a framework for resistance, reminding them, and the reader, of what Venice was, what it could still be, and what has already been lost.

The character of Spartaco, a gladiator who is adored by the few remaining Venetians, exemplifies this dynamic. Based on the elders' oral traditions, his resistance against the company that controls Nova Venezia is both symbolic and practical. Initially bound by an oath to fight until his death in the gladiator arena, Spartaco abandons his role following a traumatic event and embarks on a daring escape. His journey is literally guided by the 'storie

[19] Hirsch Marianne, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 2012), p.5.

dei vecchi' ('the stories of the elders') which provide him with knowledge essential to orient himself within the 'Città Perduta':

> Spartaco non sa niente della storia di quella città al di là di ciò che gli hanno raccontato, a memoria, i suoi vecchi [...]. Quando incontri la strada maestra vai sempre avanti, tira dritto fino alla fine. Ti condurrà a Santa Lucia, alla vecchia stazione ferroviaria. Segui i binari e sarai sul ponte. Gliel'hanno detto i vecchi. Lui non sa niente di quella città, niente del resto del mondo, ma così gli hanno detto i vecchi[20]

Spartaco therefore relies on external knowledge as an essential basis to express his dissent. Folk tales, most often referred to by the nomenclature 'le storie dei Vecchi' ('the stories of the Elders') or 'leggende' ('legends'), function as literal maps for resistance against institutional power and actively guide Spartaco as he moves through the utterly unfamiliar space of the 'Città perduta'. Jan Assmann's concept of communicative memory[21] is particularly relevant here, as Spartaco's reliance on these orally transmitted fragments highlights how small groups sustain resistant knowledge outside institutional frameworks. Not only, through the act of walking and exploring a section of the city that is prohibited by the company owning Nova Venezia, Spartaco is applying, in a personal and more radical way, Michel De Certeau's notion of walking in the city as a form of resistance to top-down structures[22]. Rather than engaging with visible, everyday structures, the character ventures into hidden, at times legendary, spaces beneath the city, guided by oral traditions only. Unlike de Certeau's walkers, who undermine structures by moving through them in unintended ways thus creating their own rhetoric of walking, Spartaco is uncovering and reclaiming a lost 'altra Venezia', metaphorically challenging the city's deep, structural power. This act is transformative, driven by a conscious, almost mythic rebellion against institutional control over space and memory. In this way memory is framed not as a nostalgic looking back, a longing for something that will not be anymore, but rather as a vehicle for agency, transformation and defiance.

[20] Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte*, p.255 and p.301.

[21] Assmann Jan, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Erll Astrid, Nünning Ansgar (De Gruyter, 2008), pp. 109-118.

[22] De Certeau Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* transl. by Rendall, Steven F. (University of California Press, 1984), pp.102-119.

Spartaco's transformation from a passive recipient of memory to an active participant in its transmission is further emphasized by his confrontation with returning seagulls, creatures steeped in the elders' oral tale:

> I vecchi, ancora i racconti dei vecchi. Spartaco ricorda che fin da bambino lo hanno ammonito a diffidare dei gabbiani. Non avrebbe mai dovuto addormentarsi su una barca o su un pontile in mezzo alla laguna, gli hanno detto e ridetto [...]. Ma da Nova Venezia, dopo la bonifica della TNC, sono quasi spariti. Sterminati quelli che c'erano e respinti dalla cortina di ultrasuoni quelli rimasti all'esterno del Muro di separazione. Ora, però, i gabbiani sono di nuovo lì – schierati in cima al muraglione, in attesa del momento propizio per attaccare – e Spartaco è di nuovo entrato nelle leggende dei vecchi[23]

The elders' warnings about the seagulls, rooted in oral tradition, serve as a reminder of how tenacious memory and nature are to systematic erasure. The seagulls' comeback in spite of attempts to eradicate them, represents the tenacity of the things that corporate domination seeks to obliterate. By confronting these creatures, Spartaco transcends his role as a mere recipient of memory, becoming a living embodiment of the legends he once absorbed, reflecting Assmann's view of communicative memory as a dynamic, interpersonal transmission that connects past and present[24]. Spartaco thus becomes a living symbol of the tradition's resistance, reclaiming space and continuity amidst the oblivion imposed by corporate control.

EMOTIONAL RESONANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

The emotional connection that *La seconda mezzanotte* may arouse in some of its readers is the third and most subtle form of memory as resistance. The novel challenges readers to confront their own recollections of locations in danger by portraying a flooded and destroyed Venice. Memory is positioned as a collective tool of resistance, and the reader is invited to actively participate in reimagining their own world. This emotional engagement transforms reading into a shared act of remembering.

[23] Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte*, p.140.
[24] Assmann Jan, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', p. 117.

I will show how this process takes place by looking at the urban landscape of Nova Venezia and, more specifically, at its significant transformation in its relationship with the vegetal realm, as highlighted through a representation *in absentia* and a lexicon that underscores this absence in a negative framework. This textual approach is underlined by the alternation of past and present verb tenses that establishes a dynamic interplay between the pre-Onda era, corresponding to the contemporary reality of the readers, and the current state of desolation and decay, the moment where the novel is settled. By doing so, Scurati draws readers' attention to existing lush areas in Venice today, urging them to recognize their potential impermanence. This evokes a dual form of memory: first, a nostalgic recollection of the present – a time when nature is still part of the urban fabric – and second, a reactive memory that encourages change and promotes awareness of ecological issues.

For instance, the desolate portrayal of the 'Chiostro dei Cipressi', once shaded by tall cypresses now reduced to stumps, juxtaposes a verdant past with a burnt present:

> Supera il Chiostro dei Cipressi, un tempo ombreggiato da quattro esemplari di quelle piante ad alto fusto, di cui ora rimangono soltanto i ceppi radenti il suolo [...]. Lo slargo che in passato ospitava il grande parco privato [...] è ridotto a una spianata riarsa.[25]

The sharp chronological contrast between a thriving past and a desolate present is introduced since the opening line.

The adjective 'ombreggiato' ('shaded') invokes the *locus amoenus* that is immediately disrupted by the 'spianata riarsa' ('parched esplanade'), a burnt area that conveys ecological collapse. Such a juxtaposition elicits a form of prosthetic memory[26], wherein readers, though temporally and spatially distanced from the event, are viscerally affected by the vivid imagery of loss and degradation. The use of 'ceppi' ('stumps'), a term that carries strong implications of devastation and severance, enhances this emotive approach even further. The remnants of once-majestic trees evoke both the drastic alteration of Venice's natural landscape and a more profound criticism of anthropogenic interventions that have changed the city over time, such as the clearing of forests for the construction of its

[25] Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte*, p.28.

[26] Landsberg Alison, *Prosthetic Memory. The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2004), p.28.

foundations. These interwoven allusions might inspire readers to use memory as a tool for resistance and cultivate a reflective stance toward humans' impact on the environment.

This concept is further supported by the description of the 'Teatro Verde', a former sanctuary of architectural and environmental harmony that is now reduced to lifeless stone under a burning sun:

> Arriva nell'anfiteatro [...]. I progettisti lo avevano battezzato Teatro Verde perché, imitando l'uso delle ville di terraferma di un'epoca successiva, avevano intercalato gradoni di pietra bianca a spalliere di bosso. Teatro Verde. Ora anche il nome era diventato obsoleto e le siepi sono bruciate da decenni. Non c'è più traccia di verde in quella conca infuocata. Rimane soltanto la pietra bianca sotto le fauci di un sole che pare voglia inghiottire l'intero pianeta.[27]

The poignant line 'non c'è più traccia di verde' ('no trace of green remains') denotes the disappearance of not only vegetation but also the cultural and symbolic meaning it formerly possessed with the text's emotional resonance prompting readers to consider the ecological effects of human activity and envision alternative futures.

In this sense, the memory of Venice is not just the memory of the characters but is shared with the reader. As the narrative unfolds, the reader is encouraged to oppose the same erasure of identity and history that the characters are battling. The text's emotional resonance becomes a form of collective memory-making, a resistance against the forces that aim to destroy not just the physical city but also the memories of what it once was. The reader's own sense of nostalgia and loss becomes intertwined with that of the characters, creating a powerful collective experience of memory as resistance.

TALES FROM THE SHADOWS: REMEMBERING AS REVOLT IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

In *La seconda mezzanotte*, memory operates as a dynamic and multifaceted form of resistance and transformation, asserting itself through rituals, narratives, and ecological critiques. The gladiators perform subversive actions of recollection on the Isola di San Giorgio, including praying, burying the dead, and writing curses on lead tablets. These actions oppose the institutional forces that want to obliterate the past by transforming

[27] Scurati Antonio, *La seconda mezzanotte*, p.28.

remembrance into a collective performance of dissent. Spartaco's journey, guided by oral traditions and popular tales, underscores the subversive potential of communicative memory. In addition to helping him find his way around Venice's abandoned areas, these generation-old tales serve as a counternarrative to the repressive rule of Nova Venezia's oppressive regime. Memory here becomes an act of reclamation, where unofficial histories empower individuals to resist spatial and cultural domination. Finally, the novel's vivid portrayals of ecological decay, as in the 'Chiostro dei Cipressi' and the 'Teatro Verde', invite readers to engage in a reactive memory, transforming nostalgia into collective ecological consciousness. By juxtaposing Venice's lush past with its desolate present, Scurati critiques anthropogenic destruction and compels readers to consider their role in preserving vulnerable urban and natural landscapes.

Through these interwoven dimensions—ritualized defiance, generational storytelling, and ecological awareness—*La seconda mezzanotte* positions memory as both a lens through which to navigate the transformed city of Venice and a catalyst for promoting transformation. The novel illustrates how reconnecting with Venice's intrinsic characteristics becomes a means of resistance, demonstrating that even in a fractured and corporatized landscape, the potential for metamorphosis remains. By unsettling dominant perceptions of space, history, and agency, the text reveals memory not as a static recollection of the past but as an active force, one that resists erasure, reclaims urban and social identity, and asserts community agency in the face of corporatization and climate devastation. In doing so, memory becomes more than a mechanism for understanding transformation in the Anthropocene; it fosters it, becoming an insurgent tool and offering a blueprint for reimagining and reshaping the city's future.

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