

# Prospero

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# Prospero

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**Memoria senza perdono. Dinamiche, retoriche e paradossi  
nelle rappresentazioni letterarie del trauma**

*Unforgiving Memory. Dynamics, Rhetorics, Paradoxa  
in Literary Representations of Trauma*

Ed. by *Marilena Parlati* (Università di Padova)

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Marilena Parlati

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And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed  
In dignity, and for the liberal Arts  
Without a parallel; those being all my study,  
The government I cast upon my brother,  
And to my state grew stranger, being transported  
And rapt in secret studies.

W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii. 72-77



# Adagio

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*Marilena Parlati*

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*Università di Padova*

“Che la memoria riguardi il passato sembra un’affermazione ovvia”, scrive Remo Bodei introducendo uno dei testi che Paul Ricoeur dedica a ‘l’enigma del passato’, appunto (*Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare*). Naturalmente, e senza sorpresa alcuna, questa affermazione si prova continuamente falsa: l’Angelo della Storia guarda certo in qua, ma sempre anche indietro, alla dolente massa di residui spesso intoccabili, certo difficilmente gestibili, lasciati, perduti, peso irreversibile che grava nostalgicamente sul presente, e ancora di più su ogni futuro possibile. Un altro sguardo, quello della Gorgone, di cui scrive e tiene traccia Tony Harrison in un enigmatico, intenso, film poetico che porta questo titolo, ‘marca’ l’abisso del passato, ne vede, ne sente la ‘gravità’ ineluttabile e sempre presente mentre osserva le cose di là, che si trascinano ponderose e trascinano con sé nel tempo inesorabile dell’adesso (1992).

Proporre la traccia di una memoria senza perdono sembrava un modo per osservare, ancora, aperture e abissi attraverso la lente e la misurata scansione suggerite da Ricoeur in *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (2000) o nel libro già citato, pubblicato originariamente in tedesco, a raccogliere alcune lezioni sparse sul tema, che in italiano esce come *Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare*, in una edizione che cancella per ragioni non comprensibili proprio la locuzione-architrave *L’enigma del passato* con cui si è iniziato (2004). Che Ricoeur, e in altri modi, Derrida, suggeriscano che il percorso, l’unico pensabile e necessario, conduca forzatamente l’umano attraverso il dramma del lucido riconoscimento delle ferite della storia

verso il dono gratuito e per molti versi insopportabile del perdono (Derrida *Perdonare; Pardonner. L'imperdonable et l'imprescriptible*)? E quale risposta, quale parola si renderebbero dunque improrogabili? Che fare del dolente, incalzante, impietoso discorrere di Vladimir Jankélévitch e Jean Améry, per i quali perdonare, quello, sarebbe impossibile, impraticabile, e i crimini contro l'umanità – per entrambi, in effetti, *il crimine singolare* resta la *shoah* – non solo imprescrittibili (come non smette di ribadire lo stesso Ricoeur), ma radicalmente imperdonabili (Jankélévitch 1971, 2004; Améry 1987)?

Ecco il senso del mio *adagio*. Da una posizione tanto programmaticamente complessa, indecidibile, procedere con passo marziale verso una direzione predeterminata, una presa di posizione rassicurante, ‘curata’, sembrava a dir poco un gesto incauto: come pensare, come scrivere di memoria, spesso declinata come traumatica e addolorata, senza vanificare le possibilità ‘vivaci’ del non perdono? Jankélévitch lo reclama a gran voce, questo diritto terribile di “raccolglierci”. E continua a spiegare in cosa consista il suo, il nostro forse, a essere ben onesti, “ressentiment”: “dove non si può ‘fare’ nulla, si può almeno *risentire*, inesauroibilmente” (49). Sentire, sentendosi e dichiarandosi implicati in quella “cosa inespiable” (49); sentire ancora, o di nuovo, ogni volta. E ogni volta dovere riconoscere che “raccontare un dramma, significa dimenticarne un altro” (Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* 584), quello dell’Altro che non sono, non voglio essere e che però, ancora, sono e non posso che essere. Questo, l’enigma, il paradosso insormontabile, l’aporia da cui non si può prescindere: pensare un possibile spazio dove la memoria *resti* e con lei il suo implicito, innegabile, opposto, l’oblio, che determina in contemporanea la distanza dall’evento già dato(sì) e la duplicazione immemoriale, l’assenza presentissima e sintomatica di cui scrivono molti degli studiosi che si occupano di trauma (Caruth 1996; Leys 2000, 2009; Luckhurst 2008).

Oblío come necessità e anche come patologia, rinvio all’assente che si dice nelle pause, nei silenzi, nelle parole incomprensibili: “Hurbinek era un nulla, un figlio della morte, un figlio di Auschwitz. Dimostrava tre anni circa, nessuno sapeva niente di lui, non sapeva parlare e non aveva nome.” (Levi 22) Quel nome blaterato di cui scrive Primo Levi in *La tregua* non si può dimenticare, quel lui dimenticato, cancellato e insieme tracciato sulla pagina nel suo inesauroibile desiderio di trovare una voce, una storia oltre lo spazio impossibile, ma troppo vero, del campo. Eppure, e Levi lo rimarca in più modi: “La parola che gli mancava, che nessuno si era



curato di insegnargli, il bisogno della parola, premeva nel suo sguardo con urgenza esplosiva” (22). Quale parola avrebbe mai potuto essere? Gesto di accusa o di perdono? Forse, Hurbinek si dà – viene dato – quale segno indelebile di una patologia della memoria da cui proprio non si può guarire, come cerchio soffocante da cui non si esce e che non *bisogna* abbandonare. Quella ‘fragilità’, mi pareva essenziale andare a sondare, quella inquietudine che non abbandona il nostro contemporaneo e che può e deve essere pensata anche per gli altri tempi, le altre memorie, gli altri passati. In una lunga poesia che snocciola storie, frasi lampanti, decisioni inesorabili e irreversibili, la poetessa americana Adrienne Rich, fattasi forte e insieme debole per una ascendenza parzialmente ebraica, lascia che la memoria, lei proprio, parli:

Memory speaks:

You cannot live on me alone  
you cannot live without me  
I'm nothing if I'm just a roll of film  
stills from a vanished world  
fixed lightstreaked mute  
left for another generation's  
restoration and framing I can't be restored or framed  
I can't be still I'm here  
in your mirror pressed leg to leg beside you  
intrusive inappropriate bitter flashing  
with what makes me unkillable though killed. (9)<sup>1</sup>

Sospesa tra il “living on” e il “living without”, questa memoria rifiuta la distanza, e l’arresto, e incombe sempre inappropriata, dove non dovrebbe e non la si vorrebbe, uccisa eppure mai morta, vampiro fragile e ferito che racconta storie, inaffidabili, o forse, in altra accezione del lemma, ‘incommensurabili’. *Unaccountable*.

Memory says: Want to do right? Don't count on me.  
I'm a canal in Europe where bodies are floating  
I'm a mass grave I'm the life that returns  
I'm a table set with room for the Stranger  
I'm a field with corners left for the landless  
I'm accused of child-death of drinking blood  
I'm a man-child praising God he's a man

I'm a woman bargaining for a chicken  
 I'm a woman who sells for a boat ticket  
 I'm a family dispersed between night and fog  
 [...]

I have dreamed my children could live at last like others  
 I have walked the children of others through ranks of hatred  
 I'm a corpse dredged from a canal in Berlin  
 a river in Mississippi I'm a woman standing  
 with other women dressed in black  
 on the streets of Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem  
 there is spit on my sleeve there are phonecalls in the night  
 I am a woman standing in line for gasmasks  
 I stand on a road in Ramallah with naked face listening  
 I am standing here in your poem unsatisfied  
 lifting my smoky mirror (Rich 10)<sup>2</sup>

In questo specchio che non è solo oscuro, ma segnatamente fumoso, brunito dalle ceneri di Auschwitz – e di ogni orrore – guardiamo la Gorgone che è la Storia, quando prende la forma umana e spesso pensa che sono *le* storie della guerra, del genocidio, della diaspora, della violenza, dell'abbandono. E questo volume si apre, metaforicamente, proprio a svelare uno specchio imperfetto, a mostrare le ferite di un “atlante del mondo difficile”. Curarle, è cosa d'altri.

A scar: meeting place between inside and outside, a locus of memory, of bodily change. Like skin, a scar mediates between the outside and the inside but it also materially produces, changes and overwrites its site. [...] nerves might not knit in 'appropriate' lines. (Kuppers 1)

Così scrive Petra Kuppers, in un testo su corpi complessi e sugli sguardi laceranti che li fissano e tagliano. Il suo discorso sull'evidenza e rilevanza semantica della ferita, o ancora più della cicatrice, funziona anche in questo contesto, ripensando, su suggerimento di uno dei nostri autori, al Giorgio Agamben che si concentra sul tema della lacerazione (1994). La cicatrice è segno visibile, tangibile, mediatore attivo e spesso dolente, “luogo di memoria”, ma, e perciò, insieme spazio della variazione molecolare, del sempre nuovo e diverso. Tutti i saggi di questo volume registrano e scansionano alcune cicatrici indelebili del nostro tempo e di molti ‘mondi’ diversi. In alcuni casi, si tratta di cicatrici poco visibili, tenute nascoste, scostate dalla coscienza politica e culturale: Federica La

Manna apre la raccolta con un'indagine su Hans Paasche, figura pressoché sconosciuta non solo fuori dallo spazio della germanofonia, ma anche entro i confini della Germania stessa. Nel conio “metánoia”, Paasche congiunge colpa e necessità di redenzione, in un percorso biografico e letterario che lo vede letteralmente ostracizzato, cancellato dal panorama del progetto coloniale tedesco di molto antecedente ai ben più noti e ancora più devastanti imperialismi novecenteschi. La sezione inaugurata da La Manna, “Coming to Terms with the Past(s)/Venire a patti”, include nelle intenzioni di chi scrive saggi che propongono una prospettiva su traumi e crimini passati, eppure in qualche modo elaborati, o ancora tutti da elaborare, comunque entro ambiti politicamente stabili e aperti al dialogo e, pur con estrema difficoltà, alla conciliazione.

Giuliana Iannaccaro propone la lettura di un tema, di una storia, di un corpo vero e letteralmente anatomizzato che grande peso politico hanno avuto nella storia recentissima, e non solo sudafricana: la “Venere Ottentotta”, Saartjie Baartman, resa orfana e schiava dalla presenza britannica nell’Africa meridionale e portata in Inghilterra come “esemplare” di bellezza esoticizzata, eroticizzata, messa in mostra e indubbiamente tacitata dai paradigmi culturali e politici del suo tempo. O di ogni altro tempo, suggerisce Iannaccaro leggendo le ‘vite postume’ di Saartjie, divenuta ‘luogo di memoria’ e spazio discorsivo perennemente conteso nel Sudafrica post-apartheid, dove sforzi enormi, pur se spesso discutibili e dagli esiti insicuri, sono stati fatti per giungere a una forma di ‘conciliazione’ pubblica, collettiva, anche attraverso la natura privata e tutta individuale, segnatamente corporea, di questa vicenda e del percorso di *questi* resti umani.

Proprio la complessa questione intorno a come gestire, in ambito politico, culturale, letterario, la variegata interazione tra collettivo e individuale muove Elena Agazzi lungo il filo del dibattito sull’amaro tema della colpa (*Schuld*), sugli interrogativi da essa imposti (*Schuld* è spesso lemma declinato come *Schuldfrage*, come nel testo di Jaspers citato da Agazzi) e sulle possibilità di immaginare, e perseguire, la memoria e il perdono nella Germania del secondo Novecento e contemporanea. Se è vero, come suggerisce in altro luogo Michael Rothberg, che “the categories of victim and perpetrator derive from either a legal or a moral discourse, but the concept of trauma emerges from a diagnostic realm that lies beyond guilt and innocence or good and evil [...]” (2009, 90), allora quelle categorie, che in linea teorica separano abissalmente vittime e carnefici,

vanno applicate anche per pensare non solo agli effetti della colpa, del crimine, del gesto disastroso su chi li subisce, ma anche su chi li compie. Molte voci, naturalmente, si sono levate contro questo tentativo, rendendo il panorama filosofico, ideologico, politico tedesco ancora profondamente inquieto su questo nucleo infuocato che per molti sta a fondamento letterale di ogni *idea* di identità del paese sin dall'immediato dopoguerra.

Antonella Catone sposta l'attenzione cronologicamente un po' più avanti, seguendo metaforicamente il caso di Vladimir Vertlib in quella che definisce "topografia" dell'esilio, della diaspora, in un testo, in particolare, che, pur non dimenticando mai la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, e la Shoah, porta da e verso quell'altro 'luogo impossibile', inventato e molte volte, e molto violentemente, riscritto: la Jugoslavia del secondo Novecento.

La sezione "Voices from Beyond/Voci d'oltretomba" tiene insieme tre saggi che, in ambiti culturali diversi e geograficamente lontanissimi, si concentrano sui fantasmi della memoria, su una memoria fantasmatica, fatta di dimenticanze, di vuoti, di voci inaudite. Una memoria davvero "trouée", così come l'ha definita il romanziere francese Henry Raczymow (in Hirsch 1996, 663) e, più recentemente Elisabeth Combres in un testo che porta questo titolo (2009). Bucherellata, sbrindellata, se non a volte praticamente e letteralmente annientata, come i corpi che Nicoletta Vallorani affronta nel suo saggio sulle ceneri – se va bene – di Hiroshima nella scrittura filmica e poetica insieme di Tony Harrison. Là dove il resto materico è spesso nullo, troppo sfuggente e infinitesimale per essere reso 'visibile', nella produzione di Harrison entra in gioco la traccia fantasmatica, spesso aurale-orale, a prendere forma di voci, di cori impossibili, eppure udibili, intenti a cantare le non troppo belle gesta dell'umanità moderna, 'scaldata' al punto della scarnificazione dal potere dell'atomo. Spesso, lì, a Hiroshima, solo la vaga e talora illeggibile traccia di corpi 'sublimati' dall'onda è rimasta, insieme fissa e vagante, e ogni discorso sul perdono quella traccia deve andare a osservarla, a lungo e senza fughe.

Anche Rosario Arias si occupa, come fa da tempo, di tracce e di presenze fantasmatiche. Sceglie, stavolta, di occuparsi della scrittrice britannica Kate Atkinson e del suo acclamato *Life after Life*. Molto appropriatamente, Arias prende avvio da un passo di *Le forme dell'oblio* di Marc Augé, in cui 'l'etnologo del quotidiano' inventa il lemma "ricominciamento" (83). Il romanzo funge effettivamente da palinsesto, perennemente ri-scrivibile, su cui ogni memoria, individuale e sempre anche collettiva, ogni *memento* si arresta fugace e procede oltre, perché l'oblio faccia il suo corso. Quell'oblio

che sta al cuore stesso di quanto scrive Ricoeur, più volte richiamato, evocato si dovrebbe forse dire, in questo saggio come nel volume *in toto*: un oblio che, piuttosto che ‘semplice’ cancellazione, assicura un variegato “oubli de réserve”, “oblio di riserva”, che la traduzione inglese trasforma – con altre implicazioni – in “reserve of forgetting” (1994).

Nell’ambito della francofonia nordamericana Eva Pich-Ponce investiga un’altra autrice ben nota, anch’ella affascinata dal tema del palinsesto, di una ‘life writing’ che si coniuga quale *ars (non) moriendi*: nella scrittura di Katherine Mavrikakis (nata negli Stati Uniti, ma canadese), si può ben intravedere la sensatezza di un’altra affermazione di Ricoeur, per cui il passato trova “un modo per perseverare nel presente” (*La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* 391 traduzione mia), incombendo come “hantise”, “haunting”, ossessione e possessione delle tracce di passati plurimi e sempre dolorosi.

Su questa falsariga si iscrive l’intera ultima sezione, “Restless Faultlines/Faglie in movimento”, che comprende saggi che, letteralmente, si occupano di “estremo contemporaneo” - espressione ovviamente tratta dagli studi sulla letteratura francofona dalla fine del Novecento in poi. Tuttavia, quel senso di ‘estremità’ mi serve a ripensare a questioni di portata ben più ampia, tutte attualissime, da cui è ben arduo provare a tirarsi lontano, per sostare in una qualche distanza ‘invulnerabile’ e non soggetta a rischio. Al contrario, la distanza in questi casi è impossibile, come insegna Aureliana Natale analizzando *Incendiary* di Chris Cleave, un testo fittizio, per molti versi ‘profetico’, pubblicato proprio in concomitanza con gli attentati di Londra del luglio 2005. Più vero del vero, indubbiamente. E vero *prima* del vero, in maniera ancora più inquietante. Tramite questo romanzo, Natale approfondisce le faticosamente costruite, troppo facili, dicotomie tra colpevoli e innocenti, aguzzini e vittime, lasciando emergere con il romanzo molte delle ansie del nostro vivere e sentire quotidiani.

Più ‘possibilista’ e speranzoso, il discorso di Ritika Singh intorno alla “Indian Partition”, formulato grazie allo studio di forme di comunicazione decisamente di massa, quali siti web e *graphic narrative* attraverso cui si registra il tentativo di dar voce, prima di ogni ulteriore passo, al dolore, al ricordo e alle possibilità di ri-conciliarsi con quella cesura così violenta e mai davvero risanata.

Ancora più instabile, ferita infetta del mondo globale, la questione, la memoria, l’esistenza stessa della Palestina cui Leila Aouadi guarda attraverso la lente della scrittura autobiografica al femminile, che funge

da testimonianza dell'impossibile (pare) sogno di avere due nazioni negli stessi territori. La "miopia dell'Occidente" rispetto a questo tremolante, sanguinante taglio è messa in luce da Aouadi, che rivendica, con altri studiosi, la necessità di annoverare la "Naqba" tra i grandi traumi collettivi e individuali, come sempre, dei secoli ventesimo e ventunesimo. Acquisire una distanza di qualsiasi misura dalla questione palestinese, che andrebbe guardata insieme e non *contro* la storia della *shoah* e della diaspora ebraiche, sembra coerentemente improponibile, proprio perché le strade di cui scrive Rich sono, restano, e purtroppo continueranno con tutta probabilità a essere bagnate nel sangue e soffocate dai detriti dell'oggi, che proprio non ne vuole sapere di allontanarsi e divenire, se possibile, 'Storia'.

La stessa toccante, vibrante inquietudine marca il saggio conclusivo, quello di Norbert Bugeja, che aiuta a osservare un altro evento vicinissimo, per gli italiani davvero in tutti i sensi, ovvero gli attacchi terroristici al Museo del Bardo che hanno sconvolto la Tunisia (e ogni altro paese europeo e mediterraneo, quanto meno). Il suo discorso sfiora il lirismo, ma mai perde letteralmente di vista gli oggetti museali doppiamente messi in mostra in seguito a quegli eventi, ma anche le nuove, inusitate 'cose' create dai proiettili, quei buchi, quei varchi, quelle lacune irresistibili che Bugeja non solo analizza e racconta, ma 'testimonia' nella sua scrittura anche fotografica. L'immemoriale di cui si era tentato di discutere nella conversazione che questo volume di *Prospero* si è offerto di inaugurare ha trovato qui piena espressione, in una congiuntura felice tra chiarezza lampante (ripensando ancora una volta a Rich) e approfondimento teorico e ideologico.

Ovvio, troppo ovvio, che questa selezione non possa che parzialmente sondare le ferite più o meno aperte del corpo globale della modernità. Un grazie è dovuto, sinceramente, a quanti hanno voluto misurarsi con i problemi e gli interrogativi che avevo tentato di sollevare: come una foglia, di certo, ci siamo mossi tutti, a fatica e rischiosamente, nell'intento di pensare, se possibile, alla complessità della memoria, del trauma, dell'oblio e del perdono. O della sfida di chi non vuole, non sa, non può (ancora, si spera?) perdonare. Restiamo in ascolto, non resta che questo. Ché di fantasmi, ce lo insegna Jacques Derrida, ce n'è in abbondanza, e spesso sono qui, in carne e ossa (*Spectres de Marx*).



- 1 “La memoria parla: Non puoi vivere di me soltanto/non puoi vivere senza di me/Non sono nulla se sono solo un rullino/Istantanee di un mondo svanito/ Fissate strisciate di luce mute/Lasciate a un’altra generazione/che le restauri e incornici/Non posso star ferma ancora sono qui/Nel tuo specchio gamba contro gamba accanto a te/Invadente inappropriata amara/Lampeggio di ciò che mi rende inassassinabile anche se assassinata.” Traduzione mia, anche se esiste una edizione italiana delle poesie di A. Rich, *Cartografie del silenzio* (2000) a cura di Maria Luisa Vezzali, introd. di Massimo Bacigalupo.
- 2 “La memoria dice: Vuoi fare la cosa giusta? Non contare su di me./sono un canale in Europa dove galleggiano corpi/sono una tomba di massa sono la vita che ritorna/sono una tavola imbandita con un posto per lo Straniero/sono un campo con gli angoli aperti ai senzatterra/sono accusata di infanticidio e di bere sangue/sono un uomo-bambino che ringrazia Dio per essere uomo/sono una donna che tratta per un pollo/sono una donna che si vende per un biglietto in nave/sono una famiglia dispersa tra notte e nebbia/[...]/ho sognato che infine i miei figli potessero vivere come gli altri/ho portato a spasso i figli degli altri tra file di odio/sono un cadavere dragato in un canale a Berlino/ in un fiume in Mississipi sono una donna che sta/con altre donne vestite di nero/sulle strade di Haifa Tel Aviv Gerusalemme/c’è sputo sulla mia manica telefonate di notte/sono una donna che sta in fila per le maschere antigas/sto su una strada di Ramallah il volto nudo ad ascoltare/sto qui nella tua poesia insoddisfatta/sollevo il mio specchio affumicato.” Traduzione mia.



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# **Coming to Terms with the Past(s)**

*Venire a patti*



# Unverzeihlicher Antikonformismus: Die Schriften Hans Paasches in der Ära des deutschen Kolonialismus

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Das Leben und die Schriften von Hans Paasche (1881-1920) zeigen die existenzielle Parabel eines von seinen Zeitgenossen und einigen Kritikern zum Großteil unverstandenen Mannes. Er hat seine militärische Laufbahn bei der Marine und seinen Auftrag im Kolonialismus zur Zeit des Maji-Maji-Aufstandes in Ostafrika aus verschiedenen, oft miteinander unvereinbaren Blickwinkeln erzählt: dem des kolonialen Jägers zu Beginn des Jahrhunderts, des exzellenten Scharfschützen im Afrikakrieg, des ironischen Humoristen in den Briefen von Lukanga Mukara, seinem bekanntesten Werk, des leidenschaftlichen Pazifisten in seinen letzten Veröffentlichungen. Die Tatsache, dass es keine wirkliche Trennung zwischen diesen verschiedenen Standpunkten gibt, und dass die verschiedenen Positionen meist problemlos miteinander einhergehen, hat viele seiner Zeitgenossen dazu gebracht, in der kritischen und unbequemen Haltung Paasches den Ausdruck von Wahnsinn zu sehen. Als seine abweichende und entfremdete Stimme eine immer größere Störung darstellte, haben die radikalsten unter ihnen sogar seine Ermordung geplant. Die Stimme Paasches machte aber einen tiefen und persönlichen Wandel publik, den eines Mannes, der seine Sichtweise von der Kultur und Zivilisation, in denen er aufgewachsen war, völlig verändert hat. Eine Seite seines Tagebuchs aus dem Jahr 1916 gibt eine lange Reflexion über die *Metánoia* wieder, ein Begriff, der einen tiefen Wandel des eigenen Denkens, eine radikale Veränderung anzeigt. Paasche entnimmt diesen griechischen Begriff aus dem Markusevangelium, in

dem Johannes der Täufer zur *Metánoia* aufruft. In der lateinischen und der deutschen Übersetzung werden die Wörter “paenitentia” und “Buße” verwendet. Hans Paasche gebraucht in seinen Werken jedoch den ursprünglichen griechischen Terminus, der nicht auf Buße und Strafe bezogen ist, sondern auf den Begriff des Gedankenwandels. Die *Metánoia* ist für Paasche das Mittel, mit dem durch die Veränderung der eigenen Sichtweise der Welt, der Wille, die Welt selbst zu verändern, entsteht. Er vertritt die Auffassung, dass es undenkbar ist, die Welt zu verändern, wenn man nicht zuvor das eigene Weltbild ändert. Im Unterschied zu dem christlichen Begriff macht die *Metánoia*, indem sie das Individuum auf radikale Weise verändert und damit auch seine Schuld aufhebt, die Strafe überflüssig. Der Mensch, der die *Metánoia* an sich selbst praktiziert hat, als Erleuchtung oder als rationaler Prozess, ist nicht mehr derjenige, der er vorher war und damit ist auch all seine Schuld, die er in einer verwerflichen Vergangenheit auf sich geladen hat, nicht mehr die seine. Damit wird aber nicht seine Verantwortung aufgehoben, diese wiegt sogar noch schwerer, da sie von außen und mit einer anderen Logik, als der, die sie zustande gebracht hat, betrachtet wird. Paasche ist der unbequeme Vertreter eines Bewusstseins, das kein kollektives sein kann, er ist die anklagende Stimme, weil er sein eigenes Wertesystem verändert hat. Die deutsche Gesellschaft des beginnenden zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts kann dem Kolonialsoldaten, dem Marineoffizier diesen reuevollen Meinungswandel aber nicht verzeihen oder ihn verstehen. Sie sieht in ihm einen verrückten oder gefährlichen Verräter, dessen Stimme die Kraft entzogen werden muss. Seine so außergewöhnliche und dramatische Lebensgeschichte hat auch in den späteren Jahren ein größeres Gewicht gehabt als sein Denken und ihn in die Rolle eines exzentrischen Protagonisten des Wilhelminischen Zeitalters verbannt.

Die deutsche koloniale Expansion in Afrika fand bekanntlich zwischen dem Ende des 19. Jh. und dem Ausbruch des ersten Weltkriegs statt. Im Vergleich zur kolonialen Ausbreitung anderer europäischer Mächte war dies ein sehr kurzer Zeitraum, der aber in der politischen Geschichte Deutschlands außerordentlich wichtig war und die afrikanischen Völker mit überaus heftigen aggressiven Trieben überzog. Erst seit relativ wenigen Jahren ist die deutsche Kolonialzeit zum Forschungsgegenstand in den Bereichen der Geschichts- Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften geworden, die ihre beträchtliche Verantwortung und Schuld aufgezeigt und gleichzeitig neue Perspektiven der Betrachtung des Phänomens

aus post-kolonialer Sicht gegeben haben. Die Gebiete in Afrika, die in den 80er Jahren des 19. Jh. Zur Beute kolonialer Expansionsinteressen wurden, befanden sich hauptsächlich in Südwest-Afrika, das dem heutigen Namibia entspricht, in Westafrika, Kamerun und Togo und in Ostafrika, dem weiten Land von dem Viktoriasee über den Tanganjikasee bis hin zu Mozambique, was heute die Staaten Tanzania, Ruanda und Burundi umfasst. Das Innere dieser Region wird von der Spitze des Kilimandscharo überragt, der höchste Berg Afrikas, dessen Name auf Swahili der Berg der bösen Geister bedeutet, wie die deutschen Reisenden ab 1848 berichteten. In diesem Jahr wurde der Berg von dem deutschen Missionar Johannes Rebmann entdeckt und beschrieben. Der Geograph Hans Meyer, der der Verlegerfamilie entstammte, die mit ihrem Meyers Konversation-Lexikon Berühmtheit erlangt hatte, erstieg im Oktober 1889 die Bergspitze und befestigte dort die deutsche Flagge, womit er den höchsten Bergwipfel Deutschlands eroberte.

Das Deutsch-Ostafrika bleibt mit dem Namen verbunden, dem es als Ersten gelang, ein weites Gebiet für das Deutsche Reich zu sichern, Carl Peters (1856-1918). In dem nach ihm benannten und 1941 nach völliger Nazi-Propaganda gedrehten Film verkörpert der Schauspieler Hans Albers den Kommandanten, der vor dem Reichstag eine leidenschaftliche Rede hält, während dieser ihn von all seinen Ämtern enthebt. Sein von Pfiffen des deutschen Parlaments unterbrochener Monolog wurde zu dem Zweck konzipiert, eine Tradition des deutschen Eroberungsdrangs zu schaffen und zu legitimieren. Carl Peters war einer der ersten, der mit Entschiedenheit einen Raum auf dem großen afrikanischen Kontinent suchte. Er war von dem englischen Vorbild beeinflusst, das er während eines langen Aufenthalts in London übernommen hatte, und wollte entschieden das politische Modell Englands imitieren und dabei einen deutschen Weg des Imperialismus vorschlagen (Gründer 33). Nachdem er die "Gesellschaft für deutsche Kolonisation" (GfdK) gegründet hatte, brachte er eine überaus aggressive Politik in Gang, um neues Land für das Deutsche Reich zu erobern. Im Jahr 1884 reiste er in die Gebiete Ostafrikas und in nur kurzer Zeit entriss er den Oberhäuptern der Tribus, oft unter falschen Versprechungen und Alkoholeinfluss, mit einem einfachen Kreuz als ihrer Unterschrift unter Verträge ein Territorium von etwa 140.000 km<sup>2</sup>, das er dem Reich und vor allem seinem grenzenlosen Ehrgeiz sicherte. 1885 musste Bismarck widerwillig Carl Peters einen kaiserlichen Schutzbrief übergeben, der der neuen Gesellschaft (Deutsch-Ostafrika Gesellschaft,

DOAG) die Kontrolle über diese Gebiete übergab. Peters tat sich aber nicht nur durch die Habgier hervor, mit der er die afrikanischen Gebiete erobert hatte, sondern auch durch die Brutalität und Gewalt, mit der er herrschte und durch die Zerstörung ganzer Dörfer. Die Leichtigkeit, mit der er hinrichten ließ, brachte ihm den Spitznamen “Hänge-Peters” ein. Der “Fall Peters” kam dann nach einem abermaligen Akt von Brutalität zum Eklat: Peters hatte seinen jungen Diener und ein Mädchen, das Peters Konkubine war, aufgrund einer Beziehung zwischen den beiden zuerst zu Tode peitschen und dann aufhängen lassen. Der Sozialdemokrat August Bebel informierte im Jahr 1896 das deutsche Parlament über diese Gewalttat aus persönlichen Gründen des Reichskommissars in Afrika und löste damit ein unweigerliches Disziplinarverfahren aus, das diesen von seinem Amt enthob.

Im Verlauf der deutschen Vorherrschaft in Afrika gab es zahlreiche Aufstände, die die Bevölkerung aufrührten und das Reich dazu zwangen, immer neuere Kontrollmaßnahmen einzuführen. Zwischen 1888 und 1889 brach der “Araber-Aufstand” aus, der von Deutschen durch die Schändung einer Moschee provoziert wurde; der deutsche Kanzler schickte Truppen unter dem Kommando von Hermann von Wissmann in das Gebiet, um es wieder unter Kontrolle zu bringen. Von diesem Moment bis zum Jahr 1905 gab es eine Periode von scheinbarer Ruhe, auch wenn für diesen Zeitraum einundsechzig Strafexpeditionen verzeichnet sind (Gründer 173). Der Höhepunkt der Aufruhre erfolgte 1905 mit den “Maji-Maji” Rebellionen, ein Aufstand, der noch blutiger niedergeschlagen wurde als der von den Herero in Südwestafrika. Auf dem Gebiet hatten sich beachtliche Plantagen entwickelt und die Handelsbeziehungen wurden immer intensiver. Deshalb wurden Eisenbahnstrecken gebaut, die die verschiedenen Teile des Territoriums miteinander verbanden und damit auch den Bedarf an Arbeitern erhöhten. Ab 1905 wurden überdies unter der Führung des Gouverneurs Graf Adolph von Götzen Steuern eingeführt (die so genannte Hüttensteuer), die jeder Mann im Arbeitsalter ausschließlich mit Geld bezahlen musste. In dem sehr häufigen Fall, dass er kein Geld hatte und die Abgabe nicht bezahlen konnte, war der Eingeborene dazu gezwungen, zu arbeiten, was zu einer Art legaler Sklaverei führte. Dies war aber nicht der einzige Grund für die Aufstände, die Erklärung dafür ist auch in einer Reihe anderer, damit verbundener Faktoren zu finden: Steuern, unwürdige Arbeitsbedingungen, die Brutalität der “Askari”, Soldaten im Sold der deutschen Offiziere, die Schulpflicht der Kinder. Dies alles führte

zu einer Art sozial-revolutionärem Protest (Gründer 180). Die Erhebungen begannen in den Baumwollplantagen im Süden, verbreiteten sich über große Teile des Territoriums und auch Tribus verschiedener anderer Ethnien beteiligten sich daran, alle mit demselben Kampfschrei "Maji-Maji". Der Aufruhr hatte einen ausdrücklich sozialen Charakter, dem sich aber auch religiöse Motive beimischten. Das Wasser (Maji auf Swahili) des Flusses Rufiji wurde bei den Banturitualen als Medizin benutzt und wurde deshalb zum Symbol der Stärke und zum Mittel des Zusammenhalts zwischen den verschiedenen Gruppen. Der Aufstand verwandelte sich schrittweise in einen Buschkrieg, der die Eingeborenen schließlich erschöpfte. Die deutschen Strafexpeditionen schlugen den Aufruhr nieder, die Verluste auf deutscher Seite waren geringfügig, während schätzungsweise 75.000 Eingeborene getötet wurden, andere Quellen gehen sogar von bis zu 300.000 Opfern aus, also etwa ein Drittel der gesamten Bevölkerung Ostafrikas (Gründer 186).

Während der Jahre des Maji-Maji-Aufstandes wurde Hans Paasche mit der deutschen Marine in diese Gebiete geschickt. Hans Paasche, geboren am 3. April 1881, war der junge Spross einer wohlhabenden Familie des gehobenen Bürgertums. Sein Vater Hermann Paasche, ein Professor für Statistik, war ein wichtiges Mitglied der Nationalliberalen Partei, Parlamentsabgeordneter und auch Vizepräsident des Reichstags. Hans Paasche ging auf das Berliner Gymnasium und entschied dann, die Marineakademie zu besuchen. Im Jahr 1899 wurde er Seekadett. 1904 war er schon Marineoffizier und wurde als Oberleutnant auf dem Dampfschiff "Main" in Richtung der Gebiete Ostafrikas gesandt und lief dann in Suez auf dem Kreuzer "Bussard" in die Zonen des östlichen Afrikas aus. In Afrika beobachtete, registrierte, notierte und fotografierte er, lernte die Sprache Swahili und wurde ein geschickter Elefantenjäger. Als 1905 der Aufstand ausbrach, war er in seiner Eigenschaft als Marineoffizier im Alter von 24 Jahren dazu gezwungen, an dem Krieg teilzunehmen, die Befehle des Gouverneurs Götzen getreu auszuführen und somit die Eingeborenen zu vertreiben, auf sie zu schießen, sie zu töten und ihre Dörfer in Schutt und Asche zu legen. In seinem Reisetagebuch, das 1907 gedruckt wurde, sind schon zwischen den Zeilen und andeutungsweise seine ersten Zweifel und Unsicherheiten gegenüber einem kriegerischem Gebaren herauszulesen, das ihm nicht zu eigen ist. Im Herbst 1906 wurde Paasche, nachdem er sich mit Malaria, Syphilis und auch starker Amöbenruhr infiziert hatte, in die Heimat zurückgeführt.

Nach seiner Rückkehr nach Berlin lernt er 1908 Ellen Witting, Nichte von Maximilian Harden<sup>1</sup> kennen und heiratet sie. Nach ihrer Hochzeit und einer langen gemeinsamen Reise auf dem Weißen Nil in Afrika lassen sich die beiden auf dem Gut der Familie Paasche in Waldfriede, im heutigen Polen, nieder. Schon bei seiner Rückkehr nach Deutschland zeigt sich ein starker Meinungswandel in Paasche: Er beginnt Aufsätze zu schreiben, hält Vorträge und in ihm wächst konstant das Bedürfnis, über den Krieg und die damit zusammenhängenden Verhaltensweisen zu reflektieren, zu denen er eine immer größere Distanz empfindet. Er befindet sich in ständig wachsendem Kontrast zur Mehrheit und seine Diskurse, die sich mit den Themen der Abstinenz und der Liebe zur Natur beschäftigen, nähern ihn immer mehr an die Anhänger von Reformbewegungen an, wie jene der "Wandervogel-Bewegung".<sup>2</sup> 1911 beschließt er, zusammen mit Reinhard Kraut, Ludwig Gurlitt und vor allem Hermann Popert, eine Zeitschrift zu gründen. Popert war ein Schriftsteller jüdischer Herkunft mit einer ausgesprochenen Ablehnung gegenüber jeglicher Form von Schwäche. In seinem Roman *Helmut Harringa. Eine Geschichte aus unserer Zeit für das deutsche Volk* beschreibt er eine Figur, die sich der Schwäche der modernen Gesellschaft widersetzt, dies oft mit rassistischen Akzenten. Die Zeitschrift mit dem Titel *Der Vortrupp. Halbmonatsschrift für das Deutschtum unserer Zeit* verwandelt sich nach und nach zu einer Vereinigung, die sich auf die neuen Tendenzen der Lebensreform richtet. In der ersten Ausgabe der Zeitschrift erscheint ein Artikel von Paasche (*Protest in elfter Stunde*), in dem er sich mit Afrika beschäftigt und nach einem allgemeinen nationalistischen Appell in Bezug auf die Kolonien ruft er zu einem Protest gegenüber dem unverständigen Jagdrecht auf, das eine unbeschränkte Anhäufung von "Souvenirs" erlaubt: "Und wir erwürgen sie (die Natur), bis nur totes Gebein und trockene Haut daran erinnert, daß sie uns einst das Bild der Erde verschönten" (*Protest in elfter Stunde* 84).

Paasches Beitrag attackiert entschieden und mit reformistischem und sarkastischem Tonfall eine schädliche Lebensführung. Seine polemischen Attacken haben die sogenannten "Nikarnalke" zum Gegenstand, Menschen, die die Folgen ihrer schlechten Gewohnheiten ignorieren und schädliche Laster weiterführen, wie Nikotin- und Fleischgenuss und Alkoholmissbrauch. Wie Paasche in seinen Memoiren (*Mein Lebenslauf* 56) ausführt, war es die Intention der Zeitschrift, sich von der Politik fernzuhalten, im Wesentlichen für die Bewegung der "Lebensreform" tätig zu sein und vor allem aus der studentischen Lebenswelt immer



neue Inspirationen aufzunehmen. Ab dem Jahr 1912 wird Paasche zum Aktivist der Vegetarier-Bewegung und im Jahr darauf auch des Pazifismus. Zwischen 1912 und 1913 erscheinen die ersten sechs Briefe, die zu den interessantesten Texten Paasches gehören, *Die Forschungsreise des Afrikaners Lukanga Mukara ins innerste Deutschlands* (in der Ausgabe von 1921 erscheinen drei weitere Briefe, die nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg verfasst worden waren).

Zu Kriegsausbruch ging er freiwillig zur Marine, in der Überzeugung für das Vaterland kämpfen zu müssen. Er hielt aber weiterhin Ansprachen, in denen er seine Theorien zur Lebensreform darlegte, zum Beispiel rief er die Matrosen zur Liebe für die Natur, zum Pazifismus, zum Vegetarismus und zur Abstinenz vom Alkohol auf. „Wegen gemeingefährlicher Reden“ wird er 1916 vom Dienst suspendiert. Von diesem Moment an wird sein Interesse für die Politik immer stärker und, wie er in seinen Memoiren ausführt, es wird ihm immer klarer, wie sehr der Konflikt von wirtschaftlichen Bedingungen hervorgerufen wurde (*Mein Lebenslauf* 64). Seine Ideen werden immer radikaler: Er entwirft Flugblätter, unterstützt Aktionen, die zum Generalstreik aufrufen, verteilt Bücher, die von der Zensur verboten wurden. Seine ganze Leidenschaft gilt nun dem Pazifismus: „Ich war als Pazifist, als Demokrat bekannt, und was ich gegen den Krieg unternehmen wollte, scheiterte an dem wohlorganisierten Widerstand der Militaristen und an der Teilnahmslosigkeit der Massen“, schreibt er wenige Jahre später (*Meine Mitschuld* 229). Mitten im Krieg erlaubt er französischen Gefangenen auf seinem Gut die Flagge ihres Landes zu hissen und die Marseillaise zu singen und wird dafür er im Oktober 1917 unter der Anklage des Landesverrats verhaftet. Wahrscheinlich wird er nach Fürsprache seines Vaters und nur dank seines Namens dann mit der Diagnose „Zustande krankhafter Geistestätigkeit“ in eine psychiatrische Anstalt überliefert.

Am 9. November 1918 und mit dem Beginn der deutschen Erhebungen nach der Niederlage Deutschlands befreien ihn die aufständischen Matrosen aus Kiel, mit denen er früher zusammen stationiert war, und brachten ihn nach Berlin, wo gerade die neue Regierung ihr Amt antrat. Paasches Hauptinteresse in diesen ersten Tagen war es, die Verantwortlichen für den Krieg zu ihrer Verantwortung zu ziehen: Dies tat er einerseits, indem er Mannschaften zusammenstellte, die vermutliche Kriegsverbrecher verhaften sollten und andererseits, indem er Dokumente über Kriegsverbrechen veröffentlichte, die im neutralen Belgien versteckt geblieben waren. Nach diesen ersten

stürmischen Tagen jedoch organisierte der alte Machtapparat mit seiner starken Heerestreue sich neu, holte zum Gegenschlag aus und machte auch Paasches Initiativen zunichte. Am Vorabend des parlamentarischen Kongresses im Dezember 1918, an dem Paasche als Delegierter zu Fragen über den Waffenstillstand hätte teilnehmen sollen, verstarb Ellen und er verließ Berlin.

Von diesem Moment an verbanden sich in ihm Ernüchterung und ein noch größeres politisches Engagement. 1919 näherte er sich nach der Ermordung von Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg der Kommunistischen Partei an. Im Frühjahr 1920 wurde er von einem anonymen Informator denunziert, Waffen auf seinem Gut versteckt zu halten. Paasche wusste, dass er für die rechten Kontrarevolutionäre eine Zielscheibe darstellte. Am 21. Mai wurde er von Angehörigen des Reichswehr-Schutzregimentes, der Brigade des Freikorps Eberhard, auf seinem Gut ermordet.

Die Fassungslosigkeit unter seinen Zeitgenossen war groß; Kurt Tucholski widmete dem Freund ein Gedicht<sup>3</sup> und antwortete mit einem heftigen Artikel<sup>4</sup> auf die Andeutungen seiner vermeintlichen Geisteskrankheit, die ein alter Freund bezüglich Paasche gemacht hatte. Es handelt sich um jenen Popert, mit dem er die Zeitschrift „Vortrupp“ gegründet hatte und der nun entschieden zum konservativen Lager übergetreten war. Auch wenn Paasche unter seinen Zeitgenossen als ein Beispiel für ein mögliches anderes, pazifistisches und revolutionäres, Deutschland in Erinnerung blieb, wurde sein Name völlig verdrängt und seine Schriften in der Nazizeit unter Zensur gestellt.

*Im Morgenlicht. Kriegs-, Jagd- und Reise-Erlebnisse in Ostafrika* war Paasches erster Text und wurde 1907 in Berlin veröffentlicht. Es handelt sich hierbei um eine Art Tagebuch über die in den Gebieten Ostafrikas verbrachte Zeit, die er detailliert beschreibt und mit einer reichen Sammlung von Photographien darstellt. Ab 1905 werden so auch die dramatischen Kriegsereignisse wiedergegeben. Paasche diktierte dem Sekretär seines Vaters das Manuskript und diese Tatsache führte der Ansicht einiger Kommentatoren zufolge dazu, dass der Text eine ausdrücklich koloniale Sichtweise hat (Laurien, *Hans Paasche Im Morgenlicht* 11). In seiner Schrift aus dem Jahr 1919 *Meine Mitschuld am Weltkriege* erzählt er zudem viele dieser Episoden mit einem völlig anderen Interpretationsschlüssel. In dem Text verfolgt er in chronologischer Weise seine Eindrücke und Erlebnisse während der Zeit in Afrika und stellt ihm das Goethesche Motto der Italienischen Reise voran - "Ich will, solange ich hier bin, die Augen

auftun, bescheiden sehen und erwarten, was sich mir in der Seele bilde“ - und zeigt damit seinen Willen, sich von den erlebten Anblicken und Empfindungen leiten zu lassen. Der Text enthält viele von dem Autoren selbst gemachte Fotografien und das ist ein völlig neues Element zu Beginn des Jahrhunderts. Einige zeigen wilde Tiere aus großer Nähe, die Paasche selbst aufgenommen hatte und worauf er auch in späteren Jahren noch sehr stolz war, wie aus seiner Schrift *Vegetarismus und Jagd* hervorgeht, die 1921 posthum veröffentlicht wurde. Ein Großteil des Textes beschäftigt sich mit der Jagd und das ist vielleicht eines der kontroversesten Elemente in Paasches Biografie, da er trotz seines überzeugten Vegetarismus auch weiterhin eine positive Einstellung gegenüber der Jagdkunst beibehält, die er als eine Ausübung für wahrhaft Naturliebende (*Vegetarismus und Jagd* 121-122) betrachtet. Sicherlich geht diese Leidenschaft für die Jagd auf die Prägung durch seine Erziehung zurück und an einigen Textstellen wird sie auch als notwendige Praxis zur Nahrungsmittelbeschaffung für seine Kameraden und Untergebenen gerechtfertigt.

Der Hauptteil des Textes ist den Maji-Maji-Aufständen gewidmet, die sehr detailliert und gleichzeitig mit einer fast distanzierten Haltung dargestellt werden. Bei der Lektüre dieses wichtigen Dokuments der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte entsteht der Eindruck, dass man es mit einer Art von kalter Berichterstattung der Erfahrungen in Afrika zu tun hat, die teilweise ein wahres Interesse für die Orte, die Personen und die Gegenstände zeigt. Bezüglich des Krieges schwankt der Text, wie Laurin gut herausgestellt hat, konstant zwischen der typischen pflichteifrigen Gehorsamkeit des deutschen Soldaten und der Unsicherheit desjenigen, der Rechtfertigungen für unmenschliche Taten sucht. Als geschickter Schütze beteiligte er sich direkt an den Schlachten und weigerte sich nicht, Dum-Dum-Geschosse zu verwenden, die international geächtet waren. Diese Ambiguität zeigt sich auch an anderen Stellen, wie zum Beispiel zu Beginn der Erzählung, als er an der Seite eines an der Kehle getroffenen Marinekameraden steht und die Verantwortlichen dafür finden muss:

Ich fühlte das Bedürfnis nach Ablenkung. Die Eindrücke des Morgens, das Gefecht, der Tod des Kameraden und die Entschlüsse, die mich zu dem Todesurteil über die Rebellen brachten, packten mich stark. Und immer wieder trat das Gefühl der Verantwortung hervor: würde man einsehen, daß ich Recht tat, dem Feinde in seine Schlupfwinkel zu folgen und immer weiter vorzugehen? Würde man das Opfer verstehen, das der Kampf an diesem Morgen forderte? (*Im Morgenlicht* 102)

Der Krieg verlangt von den Menschen Kälte, blindes Pflichtbewusstsein und erlaubt keinerlei Gesinnesänderung. In der außergewöhnlichen Schrift aus dem Jahr 1919 *Meine Mitschuld am Weltkrieg* reflektiert Paasche über den Krieg, den eben durchgemachten und jenen, den er als junger Mann in den Kolonialgebieten erlebt hatte; seine Sichtweise hat sich nun völlig gewandelt und er gibt dem Leser einen anderen Leseschlüssel für dieselben Ereignisse, die er viele Jahre zuvor erzählt hatte. Der Protagonist ist nun nicht mehr ein tapferer Soldat, der mit Präzision aus großer Distanz treffen kann, sondern ein einfacher Junge: "Der Krieg bringt uns Menschen in Schwierigkeiten, denen wir nicht gewachsen sind. Furcht und Vorurteile, besonders der lügnerisch erzeugte Haß gegen den Feind machen uns blind. Das ist unzweifelhaft, und als ich aus dem Kriege wieder unter Menschen kam, beherrschte mich das Gefühl, ich müßte büßen für jeden Toten, den ich gesehen hatte" (*Meine Mitschuld* 226). Die Menschen sind unfähig, über den Krieg zu reflektieren, bei ihrer Erziehung lässt man die Kinder mit Bleisoldaten spielen, sie haben Vergnügen daran und wenn sie erwachsen werden, haben sie den Krieg gegen die Indianer hinter sich, vor ihnen hingegen steht ein Gewehrschuss. (*Meine Mitschuld* 221). Paasche erzählt, dass man während des Krieges die Rolle eines Richter übernehmen müsse, die Menschen aber nicht dazu geschaffen seien, Richter über andere Menschen zu spielen. Ein Bild, das sich in dem Gedächtnis des Autors eingepägt hat und viele Jahre später in seinen autobiographischen Bericht übertragen wurde, beschreibt die Empfindung dessen, der, nachdem er über die Verbrecher gerichtet hatte, sah, wie sie "in der Abendsonne an dem Mangobaume hingen" (*Meine Mitschuld* 226). Paasche beschreibt hier eine Art Betäubung seines Seelenzustandes während des Krieges: "Nichts rührte mich. Ich blieb auch gleichgültig, wenn auf mich geschossen wurde, und wußte, wenn ich nicht ehrlich prüfte, daß ich im Grunde dennoch feige war" (*Meine Mitschuld* 228).

Nur an einer Stelle im Text scheint er zu einer Art von Normalität zurückzufinden. Auf seinem Rückweg in Richtung Küste verbringt er vier Wochen in dem Dorf Mtanza und hier gelingt es ihm endlich, für kurze Zeit in Frieden und in der Natur zu leben.

Die Mitverantwortung und das Schuldgefühl nicht nur für seine Kriegstaten, sondern auch für die Weise, mit der er die eigenen Erfahrungen wiedergegeben hatte, prägen den Großteil seiner Schriften nach jenem Tagebuch aus dem Jahr 1907. Der Biograph Werner Lange gibt Paasches Stellungnahme zu seinem Text und seinen Kriegserfahrungen wieder,

die er viele Jahre später 1917 vor dem Richter, der über seinen Fall von Landesverrat urteilen musste, abgab:

Ich werfe mir vor, daß ich mit meinem Buche "Im Morgenlicht", mit meinen Vorträgen und dadurch, daß ich alle bösen Erfahrungen des Krieges verschwiege, meine Mitmenschen belogen habe und dadurch mitschuldig wurde an dem Ausbruch des Weltkrieges. (...) Ich habe dies traurige Erlebnis und alles, was den Krieg verdächtigen könnte, verschwiegen, ebenso wie meine bitteren Erfahrungen, wie Krieg gemacht wird und verhütet werden kann. (Lange 189).

Zwischen 1912 und 1913 veröffentlicht Paasche in Fortsetzungen in der Zeitschrift „Der Vortrupp“ die ersten sechs von neun Briefen, die später in einer Ausgabe von Franziskus Hähnel im Jahr 1921 in Berlin erscheinen und das unterhaltsamste und innovativste Werk des Autors sind: *Die Forschungsreise des Afrikaners Lukanga Mukara ins innerste Deutschland*. Der Erstveröffentlichung von 1921 folgen viele weitere und der Text wird zu einem kleinen literarischen Ereignis. Er besteht aus einer Reihe von Briefen, die ein fiktiver Protagonist, Lukanga Mukara, an seinen König Ruoma von Kitara in Afrika schreibt, und in denen er ihm die Sitten und Bräuche der Deutschen beschreibt, die den ganzen Text hindurch die "Wasungu", die Weißen genannt werden. Lukanga Mukara befindet sich auf einer Art Bildungsreise in Deutschland und beschreibt, was er beobachtet und hört, um seinem Herrn mitzuteilen, was an einem so weit entfernten Ort geschieht. Die Wirkung ist ausgesprochen komisch und jede Seite ist von einer Ironie durchdrungen, die stellenweise auch sehr bissig ist. Der Autor folgt ausdrücklich der Lehre Montesquiues und seiner *Lettres persanes*, er beschreibt die Merkwürdigkeiten der Deutschen, ihre komische Art sich zu kleiden und dabei jedes Körperteil zu bedecken, ihren frenetischen Tatendrang, ihr konstantes Bedürfnis, Geld und Dinge anzuhäufen und bringt dabei mit diesem Werk eine scharfe Zivilisationskritik zum Ausdruck. Der Text richtet seine Aufmerksamkeit nicht auf die afrikanische Welt, sondern vielmehr auf einige Gewohnheiten und Haltungen der Deutschen, die aus einer außenstehenden Perspektive, wie eben jener des Afrikaners auf Besuch, groteske und surreale Konnotationen annehmen.

Den Briefen geht eine Einführung von Paasche voraus, in der er den Protagonisten vorstellt und ihn als einen Afrikaner der Insel Ukara auf dem Viktoriasee identifiziert, und sie werden von Berlin und Birkhain in Ostpommern aus geschrieben. Der Verfasser der Briefe schreibt aus einer

völlig externen und alternativen Perspektive, was den Texten Verwunderung und Scharfsinn verleiht. Er berichtet darüber, was sich in diesen Ländern seinem Anblick präsentiert und er aus einem anderen Licht beobachtet. Im zweiten Brief z.B. schreibt Lukanga aus Birkhain und beschreibt die ihn umgebende Natur, ihre Farben und Töne. Er beschreibt den Rauch, der anders ist als der heimische, wo er auf einen Ort hinweist, der dem Reisenden Unterkunft geben kann, und wo er Wasser und warmes Essen findet: "In Deutschland ist sehr viel Rauch. Aber das ist kein Rauch, der eines Wanderers Augen auf sich zieht, der die Schritte beschleunigt oder das Herz höher schlagen läßt. Es ist kein Rauch in frischer Luft; es ist Rauch im Dunst, ja Rauch im Rauch. In langen, steinernen Röhren wird er zum Himmel geleitet. Aber der Himmel will ihn nicht, und so liegt er wie ein Frühnebel über der Erde" (*Forschungsreise* 16). An diesen Orten bewegen Frauen und Männer fieberhaft ihre Hände an Maschinen und wird ein fürchterlicher Lärm ausgestoßen, der stärker als ein Frühlingsgewitter ist. Alles, was sie tun, zeigt sich den Augen von Mukara mit einer andauernden Hektik: "sie sind fortgesetzt in Bewegung, um sich gegenseitig in der Ruhe zu stören, um dafür zu sorgen, daß alle Menschen fortwährend durcheinander laufen müssen und nicht zum Nachdenken kommen" (*Forschungsreise* 39). Alle Tätigkeiten der Wasungo werden auf eine Weise erzählt und analysiert, die ihre grundlegende Sinnlosigkeit verstehen lässt. Beispielsweise beschreibt er die Starrköpfigkeit, mit der sie versuchen, Geld, Essen und Trinken anzuhäufen. In ihrer Sprache, sagt Mukara, gibt es nur zwei Verben, die die Handlung des sich Ernährens ausdrücken: "Essen" und "Fressen", das erste benutzen die Wasungo für die Menschen, das zweite für die Tiere. Dieser Unterschied verwischt sich jedoch, als der Protagonist sieht, wie sie ihr Essen verschlingen; wenn sie alle miteinander bei Tisch zusammentreffen und beginnen, Nahrung hinunterzuwürgen, auch wenn sie keinen Hunger haben, und dazu trinken, um noch mehr davon hinunterwürgen zu können. "Sie leben alle in beständiger Angst, daß sie nicht genug Gemischtes und Erhitztes in den Leib bekommen" (*Forschungsreise* 47).

Die Wasungo zeigen noch andere Merkwürdigkeiten wie die, sich den anderen gegenüber durch ihre Arbeit zu identifizieren und vorzustellen, was Unterschiede zwischen den Menschen verursacht und einigen erlaubt, den anderen gegenüber im Vorteil zu sein und mehr Geld anzuhäufen. Die Wasungo kennen weiter niemanden, der größer wäre als sie selbst und halten sich tatsächlich für die Menschen und denkenden Kreaturen, für die die Welt erschaffen wurde. Alles dreht sich um sie selbst und alle anderen

Lebewesen sind ihrer Ansicht nach “Wilde”, minderwertige Kreaturen, die nur dazu dienen, ihnen Nahrung zu geben. (*Forschungsreise* 26-27). Sie wollen die Natur nach ihrem Gefallen verändern, z.B. versuchen sie, den Lauf der Flüsse zu ändern, den Gott falsch angelegt hat.

Seite für Seite gibt der Bericht von Lukanga Mukara ein Bild von der zivilisierten Welt der Deutschen, das immer düsterer und irrsinniger wird. Nur am Ende des neunten Briefes erscheint ein Bild der Öffnung und Hoffnung. Die Hauptfigur befindet sich inmitten einer Gruppe junger Menschen, die nicht in prächtigen und unbequemen Kleidern stecken; sie singen und tanzen, und wenn einer von ihnen das Wort ergreift, hören die anderen schweigend zu. Sie wollen eine bessere Zukunft schaffen, jeder soll in Stück Land erhalten, denn, wer ein Zuhause hat, der hat auch eine Heimat und kann für sein Land kämpfen. “Ich sah die Gestalten von jungen Männern und Mädchen. Ich sah ihre Augen, und Feuerglanz darin. Ich sah, als Fremder, die Zukunft eines Menschevolkes” (*Forschungsreise* 84).

In den auf seine in Afrika verbrachte Zeit nachfolgenden Jahren und vor Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs widmet sich Paasche dem Schreiben und vor allem der intensiven Tätigkeit als Redner. In seinen Vorträgen vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg schenkt Paasche seinen Erfahrungen in Afrika und dem Krieg eine große Aufmerksamkeit. Er zeigt hierbei noch nicht seine charakteristische radikale Denkweise der späteren Jahre, was einige Kommentatoren zur Beschuldigung gebracht hat, er habe niemals ausdrücklich eine negative Stellung gegenüber dem Kolonialismus bezogen. Die Themen, über die Paasche unermüdlich referiert, sind der Naturschutz, überdeutlich auch im Text von Lukanga Mukara, und die Abstinenz vom Alkohol, dessen Missbrauch ein weitverbreitetes Phänomen in den Kolonien war, wie es Uwe Timm literarisch sehr deutlich in seinem vorzüglichen Roman *Morenga* darstellt hat.

Die letzten Schriften von Paasche erschienen in dem Mitteilungsblatt des Bundes Neues Vaterland, die wichtigste pazifistische Vereinigung, die 1914 ins Leben gerufen wurde und unter deren Mitglieder Figuren wie Stefan Zweig, Alfred Hermann Fried und Albert Einstein waren. *Das verlorene Afrika* ist ein wichtiges Zeugnis für die radikale Änderung der Perspektive, die das Denken des Autors ergriffen hatte. Dieser kurze Text behandelt die Beziehung der Deutschen zur Kolonialpolitik und spricht über Afrika, den Weltkrieg, das deutsche Schicksal und den Begriff der Kolonisation. Alle kolonisieren und alle sind kolonisiert worden, führt Paasche aus, aber es muss der Moment kommen, an dem freie Menschen es anderen Menschen

nicht mehr erlauben, sie zu Sklaven zu machen, zu berauben und eine Kolonialpolitik zuzulassen, die an wirtschaftliche, kapitalistische und imperialistische Ideen gebunden ist. Die Menschen migrieren und führen ihre Vorurteile mit sich, die wirkliche Reise ist aber die, die man unternimmt, um sich von ihnen zu entfernen. Die alte Kolonialpolitik hat sich von illusorischen Vorstellungen genährt, wie die Wunder der tropischen Länder und die Bilder von nackten afrikanischen Frauen und hat sich angemaßt, die überlegene Rasse zu sein und das Recht zu haben, den farbigen Menschen (Paasche gebraucht unerwartet den Begriff "Färbige"), die Zivilisation zu bringen, sie zu unterdrücken und zu geißeln. Nichts hat aber Wert, wenn es im Dienst der Gewalt steht und nicht in dem der Freiheit. Deutschland hat keine Kolonien mehr, aber es darf seine Kolonialzeit nicht vergessen, um erkennen und daraus lernen zu können.

Und daher schwebt mir ein ganz anderes Ziel vor: ich denke nicht daran, Menschen und Länder bessern zu wollen, sondern hoffe, selbst besser zu werden im Verkehr mit der Wildnis. ("Ändert eueren Sinn!" 165)

Sowohl der Kolonialkrieg als auch der die Welt völlig verändernde Erste Weltkrieg stehen im Mittelpunkt des schon erwähnten Textes *Meine Mitschuld am Weltkrieg*. Er ist eine gnadenlose Untersuchung der physischen und vor allem der psychischen Gewalt des Krieges und zugleich das Zeugnis für ein neues Vertrauen in die Menschen als Überbringer eines freien Denkens. Das am häufigsten im Text erscheinende Wort ist "Schuld", das Eingeständnis einer Schuld, die gerade darin bestand, nicht wissen zu wollen und, im Falle Paasches, sich nicht daran erinnern zu wollen, was Krieg, den er doch schon in Afrika erlebt hatte, bedeutet. Da man in einer Schlacht nie genau weiß, ob derjenige, den man gerade getötet hat, ein Freund oder ein Feind war, muss man die Vorstellung des "Feindes" im Krieg schnell lernen, um diesen auszumachen und zu töten. Die schmerzvollste Empfindung und der prägendste Eindruck, die Paasche neben vielen anderen aus dem Krieg in Afrika mit sich brachte, war die Leichtigkeit, mit der man sich an den Krieg gewöhnt und Rechtfertigungen findet, für Dinge, die nicht zu rechtfertigen sind (*Meine Mitschuld* 226). Nach seiner Rückkehr aus dem Krieg hätte er gerne allen sagen wollen, was der Krieg eigentlich bedeutet, welche Täuschung er ist, dass er nicht, wie zu lesen ist, aus Zahlen besteht und in ihm nichts Reines enthalten ist. Er tat dies aber nicht, oder zumindest nicht klar und nicht laut genug,



weil er sonst seinen Titel verloren und seiner Familie und seinen Freunden geschadet hätte. Zu diesem Zeitpunkt eines neuen Krieges besteht die einzig mögliche Rettung darin, zu bekunden, ein schuldiges Volk zu sein, das zur Sühne bereit ist und sich eingesteht, aufgrund einer unterdrückerischen Erziehung und Vorurteilen der Vergangenheit schuldhaft gehandelt zu haben, das niemals die Wahrheit gesucht und sich in die Hände von Schurken hat fallen lassen. "Aber nur aus dem Willen nach Gerechtigkeit kann neues Leben zwischen den Völkern kommen" (232).

In seinem Tagebuch aus dem Jahr 1916 fasst Hans Paasche sein Denken zusammen und vervollkommnt es. Die *Metánoia*, "die ungeheuerste Umkehrung des Denkens" (*Aus dem Tagebuch*, 170), das eigene Denken ins Gegenteil Kehren, verwandelt das Individuum in Bezug auf die Welt, die es umgibt. Im Besonderen hat die *Metánoia* es Paasche ermöglicht, die Werte und Vorurteile der Wilhelminischen Kultur ihrer Bedeutung zu entleeren. Das, was zuvor zweckdienlich war, ist nun unnützlich oder sogar schädlich. Das, was die Deutschen unter der Vaterlandsflagge vereint, die Grenzen und das Schicksal einer Nation, verliert plötzlich seine Bedeutung und übrig bleibt der einzelne Mensch, der sich mit dem Krieg und der Gewalt konfrontieren muss. Der Krieg ist nun in der Tat nicht mehr eine Frage von Statistiken und abstrakten Strategien, er ist nicht mehr die erwachsene Version eines kindlichen Spiels mit Bleisoldaten, sondern ein Problem von persönlichem Schmerz, von Angst, Ermattung und Tod. Wenn die *Metánoia* es dem Einzelnen ermöglicht, diesen neuen Denkansatz zu begreifen, wird es auch möglich sein, zu verstehen, dass die Verantwortung für all dieses Leid denen zugeteilt werden muss, die es verursacht und geschürt haben. Anderenfalls, und hier scheint Paasches Intuition das historische Schicksal der folgenden Friedenszeit vorauszuahnen, wird eine Nation, die sich nicht kritisch infrage stellt und dadurch ihren Geist und ihr Schicksal stärkt, immer einen Schuldigen außerhalb ihrer selbst suchen:

Das Unglück unseres Zustandes liegt in der Verteilung der Verantwortung, der Schuld. Weil alle in Elend und Schulden gestürzt werden, stellt niemand sich vor, daß er einen Teil der Schuld trägt, den Krieg durch seine Gedankenfaulheit verlängert und je nach Vermögen einen Soldaten, eine Kanone, eine Batterie oder ein Feldlazarett an der Front in der Weise hält, wie er hier einen Arbeiter für seinen Garten annimmt. Ist es nicht Zeit, die als Landesverräter zu bezeichnen, die vor dem Kriege Äußerungen getan haben, die zum Kriege geführt haben? (*Aus dem Tagebuch* 172)

Derjenige, der seine Sichtweise der Welt verändert hat, hat die Aufgabe, sich für die Veränderung der Welt einzusetzen und nur, wer frei denken kann, ist dazu in der Lage:

Es bleibt nur der unabhängige Denker, eine seltene Erscheinung in diesem Volke der Abzeichen, Auszeichnungen, Rangstufen und Fahnen. Er allein könnte Deutschland retten, wenn es heute noch zu retten ist. Aber es muß jemand den Mut haben, ihn zum Worte kommen zu lassen. (*Aus dem Tagebuch 173*)

Die Fähigkeit, die eigene Sichtweise der Welt zu verändern, ermöglicht es, den Teil der Verantwortung und Schuld, den ein jeder Einzelne hat, vollständig zu begreifen. Nur auf diese Weise und nur als Mensch, der nicht der alten Welt angehört, kann die Verwandlung ausgelöst werden.

Das Vorhandensein der Fähigkeit zur *Metanoia* kann als Zeichen eines Weltverbesserung fähigen Menschen angesehen werden. Wer die *Metanoia* auf irgendeinem Gebiet bewußt an sich vollzogen hat, der ist fähig, sie auch auf anderen Gebieten zu empfinden. Ohne die Fähigkeit zur *Metanoia* gäbe es keine Fortschritt. (*Aus dem Tagebuch 170*)



- 1 Die Brüder Witkowski, jüdischer Herkunft, hatten ihre Namen geändert, einer hatte den Nachnamen Witting gewählt, der andere Harden. Maximilian Harden hatte im Jahr 1892 die bekannte Zeitschrift "Die Zukunft" gegründet, die er bis 1922 leitete. Harden und Paasche standen sich für eine lange Zeit sehr nahe.
- 2 Die Wandervogel-Bewegung entstand zu Ende des 19. Jh. in Berlin und wurde 1901 dank Karl Fischer eine Vereinigung. Zu Beginn war sie eine Gruppe von Studenten, die gegen die wachsende Industrialisierung rebellierten und sich für eine Rückkehr zur Natur einsetzten. Im Verlaufe der Zeit wurde sie immer politischer.
- 3 Das Gedicht von Kurt Tucholski erschien am 3. Juni 1920 in *Die Weltbühne* Nr. 23: 659.
- 4 K. Tucholski, Am Grabe von Hans Paasche, in *Freie Welt* Nr. 21 (13.06.1920): 2.



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# Whose Trauma? Discursive Practices in Saartjie Baartman’s Literary Afterlives

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“Sarah Bartmann [...] has, at last, returned to her people”. These words were uttered on 9 August 2002 by Thabo Mbeki,<sup>1</sup> then President of South Africa, on the occasion of Saartjie Baartman’s ‘funeral’, which took place in the Eastern Cape Province. She was buried on the outskirts of the town of Hankey, possibly not far from the place where she was born in the 1770s or 1780s<sup>2</sup>. The remains of the body of the South African woman of Khoisan descent reached their land of origin after several years of negotiation between South Africa and France, begun by President Nelson Mandela in 1995 and concluded by his successor Mbeki in 2002. Until as late as 1974 a full cast of her body and skeleton were on exhibition at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, together with her bottled organs (brain and genitalia). Her body parts were then removed from display and held in storage, until they were repatriated to South Africa and solemnly buried.

Saartjie Baartman<sup>3</sup> was brought from Cape Town to London in 1810 to be exhibited at 225 Piccadilly as a freak and scientific curiosity for the price of two shillings. The shape of her body (short in stature with protruding buttocks) – unusual for European audiences but rather common among some populations of southern Africa – was exploited to titillate the morbid curiosity of the public<sup>4</sup>. After earning success in London and touring the provinces, the “Hottentot Venus” was put on display in the shows of Paris in 1814; in a few months she came to the attention of Georges Cuvier, the great anatomist and chief surgeon to Napoleon Bonaparte. Cuvier obtained

permission to examine her body and have it reproduced in painting; after Baartman's death (December 1815) he made a plaster cast of her corpse and then dissected it. Her skeleton, preserved organs, and body cast were kept on display for almost 200 years in Paris.<sup>5</sup>

Yvette Abrahams speaks of a "great long national insult" to refer to the systematic denigration and subsequent enslavement of South African indigenous peoples like the Khoisan and the Xhosa by white travel writers, scientists and colonialists towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Within a larger history of national colonialism, it is possible to write more specific narratives – usually considered *lesser* narratives – exposing not only the physical violence, but also the "mental abuse" exercised on those 'rebellious' populations through belittlement and disparagement (36). Both in the form of neutral scientific discourse and of political diktats, the emerging systematic classification of human races enabled the Europeans to think, safely, that the people "they were killing and enslaving were less than human" (36). Abrahams's "national insult" thus brings together the South African nation and the specific ethnic groups it is composed of, since the trauma (long lasting and still effective "mental abuse") brought on the Khoisan populations stains the whole nation.

Also Thabo Mbeki's speech at the belated funeral of Saartjie Baartman employs rhetorical strategies that highlight the national and social identity of the person buried: she was African, South African, and Khoisan; she was a representative of the female sex, and an individual with universal human rights. In this way Mbeki is able to claim the traumatic experience of a whole nation: "The story of Sarah Bartmann is the story of the African people of our country in all their echelons. It is a story of the loss of our ancient freedom. It is a story of our dispossession of the land and the means that gave us an independent livelihood". Mbeki's is a carefully prepared speech that introduces us to the complex discursive practices drawing on Baartman's story. In addition to the question of nation-building – the reclamation of Saartjie's remains in the name of the whole people of South Africa – he touches upon the issue of the historical truth that must be told in order to restore "the dignity of Sarah Bartmann, of the Khoi-San, of the millions of Africans who have known centuries of wretchedness". Not less important is the question of Saartjie's even harder form of subjugation due to her gender. Mbeki takes advantage of her being a woman to solemnly confirm the South African's government obligation "to ensure that we move with greater speed towards the accomplishment of the goal of the creation

of a non-sexist society”.<sup>6</sup> As can be seen from the weight of the issues raised in Mbeki’s speech, it is clear that the occasion of Saartjie Baartman’s burial is politically expedient to produce a ‘discourse of the nation’. The Khoisan woman becomes an icon of national unity, of political responsibility, and of the need of a firm ethical position on the question of human rights and dignity; her individual trauma, if remembered and reclaimed, can contribute to heal the collective trauma of an entire nation in the present.

Questions of remembrance, reclamation and restitution are embedded in the literary rewritings of Baartman’s story and in the attempts to recover her ‘voice’. Limiting our survey to works written in English, we can mention just a few examples belonging to different literary genres, like Elizabeth Alexander’s poem “The Venus Hottentot (1825)” (1990) and Diana Ferrus’ “A Poem for Sarah Baartman” (1998); Suzan-Lori Parks play *Venus* (1996); Barbara Chase-Riboud’s novel, *Hottentot Venus. A Novel* (2003), Rachel Holmes’s biographical narrative, *The Hottentot Venus. The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman, Born 1789 – Buried 2002* (2007), and another biographical narrative, Clifton Crais’s and Pamela Scully’s *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus. A Ghost Story and a Biography* (2009). Not entirely dedicated to Baartman, but nevertheless dealing with her icon, are Zoë Wicomb’s novel *David’s Story* (2000) and, to a lesser extent, Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000) and Njabulo Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003). There are also film productions, like Zola Maseko’s *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman: “The Hottentot Venus”* (1998) and *The Return of Sara Baartman* (2002), together with the French-Tunisian director Abdellatif Kechiche’s *Vénus Noire* (2010).

Far from being reclaimed only by her mother country, Baartman has become a transnational icon; Desiree Lewis remarks that “from the middle of the twentieth century [...] there has been a deluge of artwork, poetry, autobiography, documentaries, drama, and academic writing” dealing with her figure (101). Of the works mentioned above, Alexander’s poems, Park’s play, and Chase-Riboud’s novel are the expression of African American feminist aesthetics, whereas both Holmes’s and Crais’s and Scully’s biographical narratives are the fruit of (respectively) British and North American cultural historian’s archival research.<sup>7</sup> Zoë Wicomb and Zakes Mda are South African, although both writers mainly live and work in the UK and USA. Of the global surge of scholarly work on Baartman (greatly increased after 2002) a major part comes from the United States and Europe; for this reason, the introduction to the collection of essays edited by Natasha

Gordon-Chipembere in 2011 claims an Africanist outlook on the legacy of Sarah Baartman, even if the editor herself comes from the Caribbean. Along with transnational feminist movements of artists and cultural critics, Saartjie Baartman's icon is significant for anti-racist movements worldwide: being a woman and a black colonial subject, "[Baartman's] story was particularly compelling for anyone interested in deconstructing difference and analyzing the 'othering' process" (Magubane 47).

The present contribution deals with two very different novels – Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000) and Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus. A Novel* (2003) – not only because their dissimilarity can tell us much on the discursive practices concerning the figure of Saartjie Baartman, but also because they are bound by the same wish to shed light on the present by investigating the past. They also share an overall structural complexity. In the case of *David's Story*, the postmodern features of a fragmented and multi-layered narration are easily perceived: the novel carefully avoids granting authority to a single narrator and to a single version of history, including the life-history of the alleged protagonist, David, which is the very object of a painstaking and dubitative process of research and reconsideration on his part. Past and present judgments on events alternate continuously; a gendered gaze renders the interpretation of the same issues many-sided and by no means 'fixed'. Also Chase-Riboud chooses a complex structure for her novel: *Hottentot Venus* begins at the end of the protagonist's life, and the whole narrative could be defined, paradoxically, a 'fictional multi-voiced pseudo-historical (auto)biography'. Sarah Baartman's voice, allegedly the privileged source of knowledge on her own existence, alternates with other narrators who provide their own point of view on her life's story, thus crossing the border of fictional autobiography; the narrative, besides, swerves more than once from the (few) known facts of Baartman's life to propose different versions of events. I will argue that similar narrative techniques in both works – the manipulation of time and the intertwining of past and present, the challenge to received versions of history, the questioning of the very possibility of autobiography by negating the singular source of authority in a text – lead to unequal literary achievements. To be more specific, I find Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus* unsatisfactory for reasons that have first and foremost to do with the generally disregarded question of its literary value, although that aspect inevitably affects also the efficacy of its socio-political stances.

A further, relevant link between *David's Story* and *Hottentot Venus*



specifically relates to the main topic of this article: a trauma narrative is actually detectable in both novels, even if the lens of trauma are employed in radically different ways. As Thabo Mbeki's speech has already made clear, though, the trauma relating to the story of Saartjie Baartman is of complex definition. The bodily and mental trauma of an individual who lost mother and father at an early age, was dislocated from her rural birthplace and brought to live in an urban environment (Cape Town), was made a servant to strangers, and was eventually transported to a world totally unknown to her (Europe) in order to be exhibited as a freak, conflates into the collective trauma claimed by Khoisan populations like the Griqua,<sup>8</sup> by her recently constituted democratic nation (South Africa), by her African-American 'diasporic sisters', and by anti-racist movements denouncing the still widespread emarginated and subjugated condition of the blacks.

Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga discuss at length the possibility to apply a 'Western' conception of trauma to the South African situation in their introduction to the collection of essays *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel* (2012). They question Western trauma theories, which "focus on the individual who has been traumatized by a single identifiable event that causes what is defined PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)" (xi). For South Africa they claim instead a *historicized* conception of trauma, "an understanding of trauma that sees it not only as a result of an identifiable event but as the consequence of a condition that came about historically – in the case of South Africa, that of colonialism, and, more specifically, of apartheid" (xi). Wary of the fact that the 'postcolonial/trauma nexus' can be seen as an additional neo-colonial category imposed on former colonies, they strongly criticize the line of argument of trauma studies informed on deconstruction – like Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), "considered *the* canonical text of trauma theory in Western universities" (Mengel and Borzaga xiii). What they object to is the broad definition of trauma as "an unclaimed (and unclaimable) experience [...] in this way precluding any possibility of healing for individuals or entire nations" (xiii).

Interestingly enough, Caruth's work – in close dialogue with Freud's writings – does raise the question of historical trauma. In the first chapter, entitled "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History", Caruth affirms that the central insight in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* regards the connection between history, trauma, and the presence of the Other outside the self: "[...] history, like trauma, is never simply one's own

[...] history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24). Far from embarking in an investigation concerning the pertinence of Caruth's theory of trauma to the South African situation (which is beyond the limits of this article<sup>9</sup>), I just wish to point out a flaw in Mengel and Borzaga's argument. They regard the Western mode of thought inadequate to the interpretation of the postcolonial situation, because it is still structurally 'Cartesian': "The Cartesian subject's tendency to think in clear-cut dichotomies of black and white, body and mind, individual and society – which has become the Western mode of thought – proves untenable with regard to the historical and cultural situation of the postcolony." (xi). By so saying, nevertheless, they make use of precisely the same binary oppositions they want to stigmatize: they appear to consider Western thought as a monolithic block with no internal dialogue, nuances and inner contradictions – that is, totally deprived of the virtue of complexity, which instead has to be applied not only to the modalities of thought themselves, but also to the very category of "Western" thinking subjects, which is at least as debatable as that of postcolonial subjects. The same literary voices mentioned above in relation to Saartjie Baartman are just a few examples of the difficulty of labelling people who are 'Western' and 'non-Western' at the same time, beginning with Afro-American writers like Chase-Riboud and Suzan-Lori Parks, to the South African and deeply 'westernized' Zoë Wicomb and Zakes Mda.

Mengel and Borzaga's introduction to *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative*, nevertheless, does raise pivotal issues: they ask whether it is really possible to speak of a collective historical trauma, encompassing both black and white South African population, and wonder whether we shouldn't even "differentiate between the ethnicities that make up the South African nation as a whole" (vii-viii). Also Shane Graham, in an article entitled "'This Text Deletes Itself': Traumatic Memory and Space-Time in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*" (2008), holds that in coming to terms with a collective and transgenerational conception of trauma "we need to understand the trauma of various groups in South Africa" (128). He contends that a careful reading of Wicomb's novel clarifies three points which are pivotal for his project: "[...] to deepen and expand our understanding of historical trauma in southern Africa while suggesting in particular that we must pay at least as much attention to the ways in which traumatic events are 1) *collective* – they create psychic disruption in whole families, clans, and communities; 2) *spatial* – memorialization is

contained or inhibited by particular configurations of space and place and by particular uses of the land; and 3) *material* – they involve the loss of not just language but also land, houses, shops and stocks” (128).

Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* actually puts the reader in front of such issues by going deep into the question of historical identity and national belonging. Dealing (also) with the history of the Khoi peoples of southern Africa and especially of the Griqua, and with the difficult position of ‘coloureds’ in the apartheid state, the book avoids the traditional dichotomy black vs. white in order to explore more nuanced social and political conflicts. The novel also evokes the figure of Saartjie Baartman from the very beginning, but without appropriating the Khoi woman’s story, which is just hinted at and never told: the few mentions of her name are outnumbered by frequent indirect references based on allusions and gaps. Employing postmodern representational strategies, the novel renders the issue of authoriality extremely problematic, because it questions the possibility of telling even an autobiographical (let alone a biographical) truth. Throughout the text, it is never clear who is entitled to interpret past and present history, and in the name of whom.

The story is set both in 1991 – after Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the African National Congress was unbanned – and in the early twentieth century, during the struggle for independence and land restitution engaged by the Griqua community led by the historical figure of Andrew Abraham Stockenstrom le Fleur (1867-1941). The novel’s parallel narratives are in constant dialogue through references, allusions, similar names, recurrent motives and themes; the alleged main character, David Dirske, links the two timespans by being both a protagonist of the 1980s and early 1990s struggle for liberation from apartheid (he is a guerilla fighter for uMkhonto we Sizwe, MK, the armed wing of the African National Congress), and a member of a Cape coloured community descended from the Griqua peoples who struggled for independence at the beginning of the century. In search of his origins, and trying to make sense of a life as a revolutionary that is rapidly falling to pieces on the edge of a new era, David attempts to put order into his life-story by having it recorded in written form. He hires an amanuensis because he feels incapable of taking the necessary distance from events, and his scribe turns out to be a learned woman of liberal and pacifist convictions, whom David accuses more than once of belonging to a different world: “People who tend their gardens and polish their sensibilities in the morality of art have no idea about

the business of survival out there in the bush with no resources” (196). Nevertheless, the two of them engage in an enterprise which soon proves impossible: that of giving order to chaos, of making sense of David’s story through a coherent narration of events that instead turns out to be intricate, contradictory and terrifying, soaked as it is in violence and blood.

The plot revolves around individual and collective forms of trauma: the personal trauma of a single character, Dulcie – a guerrilla comrade of David’s who is subjected to concealed forms of extreme violence (torture, rape) and becomes the obsession of both the protagonist and his scribe – and the collective trauma of at least three overlapping social groups: the women characters past and present, whose life stories are reflections of Dulcie’s (and of Saartjie Baartman’s, as we shall see); the Cape coloured population involved in the struggle for liberation from apartheid; and the Khoi and San peoples (within them, the Griqua), who lost their land and independence in the course of the nineteenth century and who are still waiting for restitution and full citizenship in the new South Africa. The kind of trauma depicted in the novel, therefore, is not only both individual and collective, but also transgenerational – in a word, historical. From the personal to the general and vice-versa: in this respect, Wicomb’s novel would seem to employ the same discursive practices we saw exemplified in Thabo Mbeki’s speech, with the pivotal difference that in *David’s Story* the individual trauma is far from being decontextualized and dehistoricized in order to be exploited for political ends, and it is given, instead, “a historical context and a political force” (Driver 232).

It would be impossible here to give justice to a rich and complex novel like *David’s Story*; I will just try to shed light on the presence of Saartjie Baartman and her numerous ‘incarnations’, conscious of the fact that much has to be left out, but also that the narrative strand of women’s history past and present is one of the leading constituents of the story. Baartman’s name appears from the very beginning, in a preface in which the narrator (the anonymous amanuensis) reveals the uncertain, fragmented, and constantly negotiated nature of her narrative:

David’s story started at the Cape with Eva/Krotoa, the first Khoi woman in the Dutch castle, the only section I have left out. He eventually agreed to that but was adamant about including a piece on Saartje Baartman, the Hottentot Venus placed on display in Europe. One cannot write nowadays, he said, without a little monograph on Baartman; it would be like excluding history itself. (1)

The narrator objects to this mode of writing about the past, a practice that evokes historical icons<sup>10</sup> without contextualizing them and rather exploits their momentary public resonance for propagandistic and political ends – or even just to give prestige to a text perceived as not learned enough. David also shows elsewhere his superficiality in treating the figure of Baartman, as when he naively affirms that “Baartman belongs to all of us” (135): by “us” he means the same undifferentiated South African nation to which Mbeki’s speech was addressed, as if forgetful of the heterogeneity of his country and of the tremendous conflicts that century-long struggles for power have generated. Despite David’s wishes, therefore, the alleged scribe (who turns out to be at least the co-author of the novel) ultimately incorporates Saartjie Baartman’s story in the text just as a quick survey of the renowned bits and pieces of her biography, together with some of the “novelistic details” that must be included in an otherwise scanty, because very poorly documented, narration about her – thus also making a metanarrative ironical reference to the way in which many stories on Baartman are constructed:

[...] he brought along the meticulously researched monograph, complete with novelistic detail: Saartje’s foolish vanity, the treachery of white men, the Boer mistress who would not let her go, whose prophetic words rang in her ears, the seasickness on the ship, the cage in London decked with leopard skins, and, on the catwalk of her cage, the turning of the spectacular buttocks, this way and that, so that Europeans would crack their ribs with laughter. And the bitter cold of a northern winter that lasted all year long.” (134-135)

The narrator does not see the usefulness of yet another stereotypical representation of the story of the Khoi woman; since David insists, she appeals to his specific historical interest in the Griqua people: “But she may not even have been a Griqua. David gives me a withering look. Baartman belongs to all of us” (135). The woman seems to capitulate, and condescends to the fact that “the Baartman piece will have to stay” (135); instead, it will never appear in the finished book. Being the one who, for once, can take the final decision on the written record, this woman writer opts for leaving out yet another representation of Saartjie Baartman which, playing both on the icon of ‘savage Hottentot’ and on that of ‘mother of the nation’, perpetrates the exploitation of her name for discursive practices which have nothing to do with her story.

David wants his book to incorporate the historical figures of Eva/Krotoa and Saartjie Baartman, but at the same time he seems unable to deal with an icon much closer to himself, that of his already ‘mythical’ guerrilla comrade Dulcie Oliphant. The character of Dulcie is complex and elusive, not least because she never speaks for herself, but is always recounted, evoked or painfully remembered by someone else – mainly by David and the narrator, but at times also by David’s wife Sally. She is a leading figure in the struggle because of her courage and total dedication to the cause, but the situation in which she finds herself as a woman of military power is contradictory to the point of being paradoxical. The novel raises the issue of women fighters against the apartheid state, who were accepted as long as the liberation movement needed them, but could be reminded of their naturally subjected position vis-à-vis their male comrades through a sort of ‘regular’, established form of rape – and even, the novel suggests, outright torture. In addition, once it became clear that ANC cadres had to prepare themselves to become the leading figures of the upcoming democratic nation, it was similarly well-understood that there was no place for women of (real) power in the rainbow nation. Women fighters in the novel must be prepared to abandon military life in order to embrace the role of wives and mothers, confined to a domesticity they had previously learned to erase. Dulcie’s worst traumatic experience, her imprisonment in an ANC detention camp in Angola,<sup>11</sup> haunts the novel in the form of brief narrations of uncertain status and provenience: they could be actual events (more rapes, more torture) as well as fragmented memories or hallucinations, and even outright inventions on the part of the narrator. The reader never comes to know anything for certain, and yet the post-traumatic nature of those textual portions is clear: they deal with experiences which cannot be told and yet must be somehow brought to the surface. Dulcie’s trauma becomes David’s and even the narrator’s trauma, seen their inability either to keep silent about it or to make light on shameful practices that would bring discredit on the liberation movement.<sup>12</sup>

Since David cannot speak of Dulcie, the amanuensis-narrator suggests that “he chose to displace her by working on the historical figure of Saartje Baartman instead” (134). There are many elements linking the various female characters in the novel; in Graham’s words, “both women’s stories [Krotoa’s and Saartjie’s] become ur-texts of a sort for the situation of the women in David’s life – in other words, they are phantoms whose later incarnations include Dulcie, the narrator, and David’s wife Sally

(called 'Saartje' as a child)" (130). David's wife shares with Baartman both her name and 'steatopygia', those layers of natural fat on the buttocks that rendered Saartjie Baartman's body so peculiar in the eyes of European audiences. She is also coloured, possibly of Khoisan origin, possibly Griqua – like Saartjie, like David, like Dulcie. With Dulcie (who is also 'steatopygous') she shares the destiny of a female member of the movement driven, when no longer useful, to embrace domestic life; unlike Dulcie she complies and bravely faces the various phases of depression, feeling of displacement and inferiority complex that the new situation of confined wife and mother entails. Other steatopygous characters are the historical Lady Kok and Rachel Susanna Kok, both strong Griqua women who lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and who held and relinquished power for the benefit of their community, without social or historical recognition. Unexpectedly, we learn on page 201 that also the amanuensis-narrator is steatopygous, and that she has to face the "complexities of walking" among people who "stride purposefully, mark out their paths mentally and do not expect to deviate, so that anyone else, especially a clumsy, steatopygous woman like myself, simply has to get out of the way or risk being knocked down". The metaphor of a way of walking which is not straight and purposeful but tentative and clumsy clearly alludes to a similarly non-linear narrative, "not seamless and entire to itself [...] but fractured and fissured, and self-critical, even self-mocking" (Driver 217).

Thus Wicomb draws a lively picture of a transgenerational community of women which is at times tragic and often ironic – the multiplication of steatopygous buttocks being the most obvious ironical strategy to deconstruct the way in which the 'savage' African female body was perceived and scientifically exploited by Europeans. The women characters of the novel turn out to be incarnations of Saartjie Baartman in more than one way: for their origins and the colour of their skin, for the shape of their body, in many cases for their name, and above all for their common destiny. These strong and resourceful women are linked by similar experiences when it comes to struggling against prejudices, assumptions, and stereotypes so firmly rooted in the collective unconscious as to prove almost invincible. "How many exceptions does an intelligent person have to come across before he sees that it is the definition of the category itself that is wanting?" (*David's Story* 80). *David's Story* is made of 'exceptions', of textual portions that specify and contextualize the stories they tell; one may like or dislike the self-reflexive, metanarrative quality of the book, but

it would be impossible to accuse it of ‘postmodern futility’ and of lack of political commitment.<sup>13</sup> If readers are willing to work through the novel, it does reward them for their effort.

Less rewarding is Chase-Riboud’s book, *Hottentot Venus* (subtitled *A Novel*), which is a fictional reconstruction of Saartjie Baartman’s life. Published in 2003, in the wake of the repatriation of Baartman’s remains, it goes in search of the ‘true Sarah’ by intertwining imaginary characters and events with historical figures and data. The acknowledgments at the end of the book list a number of libraries and archives where the author did research; she thanks various academics who helped throughout and mentions eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers whose works she quotes. Sheila Lloyd considers *Hottentot Venus* a “historical novel” (221); she maintains that its structure is devised in such a way as to give readers a multiple perspective on events, which should help them to comprehend “what perspective on history is most fitting when telling the story of Sara Baartman” (222). Actually, Baartman’s story is told by several narrators, the most important being the Venus herself, who alternates with her British master Alexander Dunlop, the anti-slavery campaigner Robert Wedderburn, the novelist Jane Austen, her French master Réaux, her fictional friend Alice Unicorn, the French painter Nicolas Tiedeman, and even with the scientist who finally disposed of her body, Baron Georges Cuvier. The “heterogeneity needed to account historically for Baartman” (Lloyd 222), is also assured by the various typologies of texts included in the narration (advertisements, letters, journal articles, scientific reports, court transcripts); being explicitly a novel, the text can avoid distinguishing between historical, fictional, and semi-fictional sources.

Sheila Lloyd’s analysis of the book, though, deals only tangentially with narratological issues, and does not really consider the literary aspects of the novel. What Lloyd remarks is that Chase-Riboud’s narrative constitutes a challenge to present-day hegemonic forms of neoliberalism and transnational market relations, whose ideological and economic roots can be traced back to the period in which Baartman lived. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy praises *Hottentot Venus* because, being the fifth of a series of novels by Chase-Riboud focused on the subject of slavery, it is part of a “large-scale philosophical project [...] in which her primary subject is precisely the complex, fragile and contradictory dynamic of the master-slave dialectic” (758). He points out that *Hottentot Venus* exposes the fallacy of scientific racism and identifies “Western science as a prominent



source of the cultural dynamic in the master-slave dialectic” (769). From economic to pseudo-philosophical issues, it is clear that for both Lloyd and Rushdy the interest of the novel lies in its ideological significance, and that the aesthetic question – *Hottentot Venus* as literature – does not emerge from their investigations. Miranda and Spencer do engage in a discussion of the language of Chase-Riboud’s novel (in the light of Judith Butler’s critical work), and contend that Baartman’s narrating mode, together with her “abject articulation of self [...] cut several ways – figuring and acting as both subjection and meta-historical critique” (920). Nevertheless, although they go deep into the analysis of “The Heroine’s Note” and of the first chapter, they never consider the functioning of the novel as a whole, and thus do not really provide a discussion of *Hottentot Venus* as a literary product.

What I suggest here is that the novel, *as a novel*, is weak, and that its literary weakness diminishes the strength of its socio-political stances. The plot is loosely based on the few known events in Baartman’s life, to which are added the “novelistic details” mentioned by Wicomb’s narrator in *David’s Story* (see above). In a number of cases Chase-Riboud’s narrative swerves from Baartman’s ascertained biography and gives different versions of her life story; clearly interested in granting voice to the colonized subject and to the other exploited and emarginated characters who can be found at the very heart of ‘civilized’ Europe, the novel employs both traditional and more experimental narrative modes, but the final result has more to do with confusion and inconsistency than with complexity.<sup>14</sup>

Before hinting at some of the reasons why this literary Sarah Baartman is unsatisfactory, I wish to highlight the way in which *Hottentot Venus* is built as a ‘trauma narrative’. The novel is conceived as the multi-voiced (auto)biography of a woman who cannot free herself from her personal trauma until it is recognized as collective and, accordingly, granted atonement and restitution. The underlying structure, although fairly traditional, is well-conceived: a childhood trauma, the psychological wound it inflicts upon the mind, and its periodic re-emergence in symbolic form until it is fully recognized by the adult individual and overcome. The *fil rouge* of trauma appears very soon, when Sarah (her Khoikhoi name in the novel is Ssehura) begins to tell her story, set in the Eastern Cape towards the end of the eighteenth century. As a child of almost four, she witnesses the murder of her mother Aya Ma on the very beach where she used to play with other children:

Even after they had taken everything of value – the land, the cattle, the gold – the English still raided our settlements for sport, hunting trophies to hang on their walls or send back to England. [...] Severed heads were very much prized [...]. When I was almost four, my mother was killed in one of these raids. With the eyes of a child, I remember her severed head rolling along the beach and stopping at the water's edge, then being scooped up by a yellow-haired horseman riding hard as if it were a plaything that he had to retrieve. As Aya Ma tried to outrun him she had taken wing like a heron, her elbows flapping in a futile effort to fly away, her lips jutting out like a beak, her neck outstretched in a bird's landing position. (14-15)<sup>15</sup>

Ssehura's father suffers the same fate five years later, in an extremely violent raid. The Khoikhoi herders minding their cattle are beheaded while running for their life, and the people of the nearby village are massacred. The orphaned Ssehura is sold by her aunt to a Wesleyan missionary, who takes her to Cape Town and changes her name to Saartjie.<sup>16</sup> On his death, she tries to reconstruct her life with a young man from her own clan; they have a child, who dies shortly after his father. Saartjie is once more alone in the world and decides to leave her clan and return to the Cape Town orphanage; it is during that journey – the last free period of her life – that the first manifestation of her trauma appears. Pausing along the edge of a river, Saartjie sees a great purple heron standing in the water, and she is “suddenly seized by the sense that this was someone I knew, not merely a bird” (30). The heron is lonely, an “exiled bird” like herself who seems to have a message to deliver. She is sure that it is a spirit, and when it glides towards her, its neck “bent forward in a double curve as if someone had broken it”, she knows that it must have something to do with her mother: “Was this my mother's spirit? Had that bird been a real heron or a ghost in the form of a heron?” (31).

The heron-mother reappears in the course of the narrative. After living for some time in the surroundings of Cape Town as a nurse and domestic servant, Sarah is smuggled to England in 1810 by her master Hendrick Caesar and a British surgeon named Alexander Dunlop (both historical figures) to be exhibited as the first Hottentot woman in London. Exploited and betrayed by the man she loves, “Master Dunlop”, the Hottentot Venus becomes the main attraction of London high and low society, until her humiliating show draws the attention of anti-slavery campaigners, who manage to open a court case against her keepers. Sarah refuses to witness against Dunlop and Caesar, and the case is dismissed.<sup>17</sup> In June 1811 the

tour of the English provinces begins, and it is in Manchester that Sarah gets to know the destitute conditions of the English working class. On entering Manchester, a filthy woman in rags starts running after their carriage, grasping the door handle and crying for help, before dropping back. “As I looked back, I had the sense that I had already lived this scene long, long ago” (171), thinks Sarah. The full recollection comes a little later: “Suddenly I knew what the forlorn, ragged girl reminded me of. Running alongside the carriage with her elbows flapping, her neck outstretched and despair in her eyes, she made me think of my mother trying to escape the guns of the Boer patrols” (172).<sup>18</sup> Since the girl in rags proves to be Alice Unicorn, the only real friend Sarah finds in her life, the scene suggests to the reader what the protagonist has not yet understood: that the image of the mother-heron, albeit tragic and deeply unsettling, is also the sign that her dead mother is somehow protecting her daughter, in this case by sending her a fellow creature who can understand, and help alleviate, her condition of subjection and economic exploitation. Alice’s presence in the story puts together feminist and anti-capitalist stances; the narrator tells us that she “had a life more wretched than a Hottentot’s” (177). In 1814 Sarah is taken to Paris by the animal trainer Réaux. In the freak shows of Paris, the Venus is a tremendous success, until Baron Georges Cuvier obtains permission to examine her body at the Botanical Gardens; his desire for her transcends scientific curiosity, and he becomes sexually obsessed by her. Sarah refuses him, and here the novel takes its revenge not only on the white scientist, but also on the man Georges Cuvier, who is reduced to the role of a desperate stalker. In the Botanical Gardens, Sarah meets a great purple heron staring at her; “Suddenly she opened her wings as if in an embrace, hopping pitifully” (223). The heron hops because her legs are fettered with brass weights to hinder her flight, and Sarah waits for the first opportunity to free all the birds of the aviary at the Botanical Gardens – a foreboding of her own liberating flight at the end of the novel. Overwhelmed by a life of shame and exploitation, Sarah, who had long before started to drink heavily, becomes a drug addict and a whore, and finally dies on New Year’s Day 1816. The story is not finished with her death: since Sarah is the main narrator and tells her autobiography in the first person, she couldn’t have witnessed the moment of her own death unless in the form of a spirit. Actually, towards the end of the novel the reader understands that it is her ‘ghost’ who has told her story all along, and who, detached from her body after death, describes its dissection by the triumphant Cuvier. The spirit goes on to tell the reader

about the two centuries in which she was displayed in a museum before being repatriated; in the last scene of the book, a finally 'emancipated' Sarah (315) is lifted on a plane in a coffin and taken 'home'. The last flight of the heron is in the form of a South African jet:

The plane lifted, the great black-tipped wings of the purple heron bore me up and out, her long feathers hissing in the wind, her black-tipped beak pointed outwards, her long neck stretching endlessly in a horizontal line above the coast: like the final underline of a signature (315-16).

The novel is weak not because it mixes history and fiction, which is a legitimate and widely employed literary practice. It certainly has a redundancy which is not pleasant, above all towards the end, when it always seems on the brink of concluding and instead carries on beyond the protagonist's death until present times. It abandons too often the narrative mode to give room to tirades, either against the chauvinist practices of predatory males (be they interested in sex, in gaining money or in gaining power through scientific fame), or against the racist outlook of European eighteenth- and nineteenth-century intelligentsia. Instead of reinforcing the political stances of the novel, the reiterated invectives against the 'villains of history' simplify things excessively, and reduce the efficacy of the arguments. But what is perhaps the greatest weakness of the novel is that the character of Sarah Baartman is inconsistent. In search of the 'true voice' of the Khoikhoi woman, this novel in the final reckoning finds none. Chase-Riboud's Sarah wavers between the submissive and excessively trusting colonized subject and the fully conscious spokeswoman for Western feminism and anti-racism. She is (and remains until the end) both a helpless girl thrown into the grips of white people whose ways and language are alien to her, and a post-1968 young feminist who develops a subtle political understanding of her oppressed situation; sometimes she discusses things on the same level as her (white, male, learned) interlocutor, employing a fully articulate English language.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, she is psychologically subjected to all her white male exploiters to the point of addressing them as 'Master', not only when talking to them, but also in her thoughts, and until the very end of the novel. Nevertheless, her deeply interiorized inferiority complex does not hinder her from lucidly denouncing the ravenous practices of the whites, and from exploding in a liberating "fuck you sirs!" directed to all the 'masters' who profit from the "slaughterhouse of science" (285).

In spite of the sophisticated architecture of the novel, *Hottentot Venus*'s discursive practices on Saartjie Baartman are too simplistic to treat complex historical and political issues in a satisfactory way – issues that draw on the colonial past to throw light on the way in which “Africa and Diasporic women are represented in the twenty-first century” (Gordon-Chipembere, *Representation and Black Womanhood* 10). Overtly against all forms of exploitation, be they sexual, political, or economic, the novel seems to go against its own assumptions already from the title, which exploits a colonial icon – that of the ‘Hottentot Venus’ – obviously seductive for the reading public and therefore more appealing to the publishing industry. One wonders whether Chase-Riboud couldn't have been more daring and ideologically more consistent by choosing a different, albeit less easily attractive, title for her story.

Both Zoë Wicomb and Barbara Chase-Riboud use Saartjie Baartman's icon to raise issues that transcend the life-story of a single person and open a dialogue between past and present, individual and collective. Not only interested in the re-emergence of one of the ‘lesser narratives’ of history, they explore the way in which it sheds light on contemporary political and economic practices. Both novelists look at past and recent events through the lens of trauma – trauma being, according to the South African writer Sindiwe Magona, “*in the blood* for the people of South Africa; they can neither escape nor ignore it” (93). Yet, the different ways in which their narratives are built prove meaningful, not only as far as the aesthetic aspect of reading is concerned, but also in the light of their (implicit or explicit) political aim: that of enhancing the reader's awareness of why we live in the present world. Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus* actually tries to shed light on some of the interlaced ideological stances that ‘produced’ Saartjie Baartman as a “relic and a symbol. A relic of the past, but a symbol of centuries of suffering under the yoke of apartheid and colonization” (Chase-Riboud 313). Only, she does so at the expense of the novel itself, to the point of using it more than once just as a platform from which to denounce colonialism, neo-colonialism, and ruthless capitalism. In *David's Story*, instead, Zoë Wicomb's engagement is both aesthetic and political. The novel functions as literature not because of its postmodern features, by no means unavoidable in a literary work, but rather because its design, characters and language are consistent and effective. The multi-layered structure of *David's Story* does not hinder comprehension but rather enhances it, and its underlying irony suggests that investigating the

purposes of past and present discursive practices certainly helps to avoid a simplistic approach to history – but it never protects us once and for all from further mystifications, including our own.



- 1 See Mbeki's "Speech at the Funeral of Sarah Bartmann" on the official website of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation.
- 2 The conventional year of Baartman's birth is 1789; the date was inferred from her own declarations when her case was examined by the London court of the King's Bench in November 1810. The legal proceedings were started by some anti-slavery campaigners, members of the African Institution, who wanted to ascertain whether the woman was a free subject in London or her keepers' slave. The transcripts of the various affidavits, including Baartman's own, constitute the major source of information on her life ("Examination of the Hottentot Venus", 27 Nov. 1810, King's Bench, Court Records, The National Archives, London. See Holmes and Crais & Scully). Crais and Scully, nevertheless, challenge some of the conjectures of other researchers; they argue, for instance, that she was born a decade earlier (see p. 7 and note 1 p. 184).
- 3 There is no record of an original Khoisan name for this woman. Holmes discusses Saartjie's name in "A Note on Naming" placed at the beginning of her biography, and justifies her choice of the Afrikaans version rather than the anglicized Sarah, or Sara – preferred by those who want to take a distance from the legacy of the 'Boer' name. Actually Saartjie – a diminutive of Sarah with the Dutch suffix '-tjie' – can express endearment but also subordination, since it was often used by whites to belittle black servants, and it can therefore be considered a "racist speech act" (Holmes xiv). Nevertheless, Holmes prefers the historical Saartjie to the 'ideological' Sarah. I basically agree with Holmes and use Saartjie Baartman in my contribution; yet, I reproduce faithfully the different versions of her name and surname as I find them in quotations: Saartjie and Saartje, Sarah and Sara; Baartman, Bartmann, Bartman, and Baartmann.
- 4 The recent bibliography on Baartman's body and its cultural significance is copious. A few exemplary titles will suffice here: Gilman "Black Bodies, White Bodies"; Abrahams "The Great Long National Insult"; Strother "Display of the Body Hottentot"; Magubane "Which Bodies Matter?"; Qureshi "Displaying Sara Baartman"; Hobson *Venus in the Dark*; Gordon-Chipembere "Even with the Best Intentions" and *Representation and Black Womanhood*; Willis *Black Venus 2010*.

- 5 See Crais and Scully (142) for the various locations in which Baartman's remains were placed in the course of the twentieth century in Paris.
- 6 Significantly, the 9th of August, when the funeral took place, is also *National Women's Day* in South Africa, and *International Day of the World's Indigenous People*; the dates were made to coincide (see Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade* 282).
- 7 Crais and Scully are aware of the limits of the biographical genre when applied to humble people whose life is poorly recorded (see 5).
- 8 The Griqua National Conference asked the French Government to return Baartman's remains in 1995. Dorothy Driver wrote in 2000 that "Members of the newly established Khoisan Movement in the Cape claim her as an icon" ("Afterword" 230). Zoë Wicomb raised the question of Baartman's "contested ethnicity (Black, Khoi or 'coloured?')" already in 1998, and remarked that her "very name indicates her cultural hybridity" ("Shame and Identity" 93).
- 9 Before Mengel and Borzaga, other theorists of culture and literary critics have questioned the assumptions derived from Freudian conceptions of trauma when applied to the postcolonial situation. Particularly pertinent to this contribution is Shane Graham's article on traumatic memory in Wicomb's *David's Story*, where he considers the work of theorists of trauma like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Dominick LaCapra inadequate "to account for the complex dynamics that emerged from and shaped South Africa's revolutionary transition due to that paradigm's tendency toward a depoliticized individualist psychology" (127-28).
- 10 Krotoa was a Khoi woman who lived at the time of the Dutch settlement in the Cape (mid-seventeenth century). Employed as domestic worker for the whites, she soon became fluent in Dutch and proved extremely useful as an interpreter and cultural mediator. She was baptized and renamed Eva; when her Dutch husband died, her living conditions deteriorated, and she eventually died banished to Robben Island.
- 11 Dulcie, like David before her, is suspected of having betrayed the movement and is accordingly imprisoned and tortured before being acquitted and released. Meg Samuelson sheds light on the historical circumstances: "Following the unveiling of an apartheid spy within the ANC inner circle in 1981, an atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion pervaded the movement in exile, while a group of MK combatants rebelled against the high command. Mutineers and suspected spies were imprisoned in a detention center established in Angola, which came to be known as Quatro and where conditions matched those of the notorious prison in Johannesburg known as Number Four" (843-844).
- 12 For an analysis of the novel in the light of women's role in the liberation struggle see Samuelson "The Disfigured Body", which deals with the figure



- of the female militant and her violated body – a site of contending feminist discourses and of still too many silences.
- 13 Shane Graham believes that *David's Story* represents the “the spatial-material dimensions of trauma” (135) in dealing both with the shameful treatment of ANC women fighters, and with the loss of the land and the destitute material conditions of a great part of the South African population. He maintains that Wicomb’s novel “calls into question the adequacy of narrative alone to enable healing and the restoration of agency; it implies that such recovery of language must be joined by material compensation and a fundamental refiguring of socio-spatial relationships in the post-apartheid dispensation” (129).
  - 14 In her introduction to a collection of essays on Baartman’s legacy, Gordon-Chipembere makes the following consideration: “[...] after Baartman’s burial in 2002, there were a number of celebrated African American women writers, such as Barbara Chase-Riboud and Suzan-Lori Parks, who took on Baartman’s story as a way of claiming diasporic sisterhood. Ultimately, their literary productions have been critiqued as producing a Baartman who is a self-destructive, sexually excessive, drunken stereotype, echoing Cuvier” (8). See also, by the same author, “Even with the Best Intentions”.
  - 15 The struggle for land and cattle possession between Europeans and the African populations of the Eastern Cape became particularly violent towards the end of the eighteenth century, when Saartjie was born. ‘Commandos’ formed by settlers began hunting people for sport and for punishment, killing hundreds of adults and capturing children (see Crais and Scully 17-20).
  - 16 Saartjie will become Sarah when she gets her passport for England, see Chase-Riboud 70-71.
  - 17 The court case is historical, as well as the figures of Lord Ellenborough (the judge) and of Zachary Macauley [*sic*] and Peter Van Wageninge (members of the African Institution).
  - 18 As can be seen from the quotation above, those who raided the beach and killed her mother were English, not Boer patrols. This is just one of the inconsistencies that can be found in the book, but it wouldn’t be possible to discuss them all here.
  - 19 See for instance the dialogue between Sarah and Dunlop on the ship that takes them to England (74-75); her long talk with the members of the African Institution (131-137); her answers to the questions of the judge Lord Ellenborough during her examination at the King’s Court (147-150). Actually, the level of the protagonist’s knowledge of English is never clear, and the way in which the story is told is confusing. For instance, she appears at the King’s Court with two Dutch interpreters (138), but when she is questioned by the judge a few pages ahead there is no hint of the fact that her answers are being translated. She answers in a fully articulate English, and the reader is

the more confused by the fact that, after the interrogation, the judge himself should raise the language question, as if he had never spoken to her: “*Lord Ellenborough*: Does anyone understand her language? *Solicitor general*: Not the Hottentot language; but it is stated in my affidavit that her keeper and the representatives of the Court state that she understands and speaks Low Dutch, imperfectly” (151).



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# Die Täter-Opfer-Debatte und die Schuldfrage: Eine (nicht nur) literarische Bilanz nach der Wende

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## *Vorbemerkung*

Der Betrachtungswinkel dieses Beitrags zu den Reflexionen über die *Täter-Opfer Debatte* bezüglich der im Zweiten Weltkrieg begangenen Verbrechen richtet sich nicht nur auf einige kulturelle, literarische und künstlerische Momente, die sich mit dem ethisch-moralischen Problem der Schuld befassen, sondern auch auf die heikle Aufgabe, die die Interpreten der *Postwar Politics of Memory* zum Jahrhundertwechsel des 20. zum 21. Jh. übernommen haben. Die Diskussion über die deutsche Schuld hat sich besonders nach der Wiedervereinigung der beiden deutschen Staaten enorm ausgeweitet, sowohl in Deutschland als auch auf internationaler Ebene und die betreffende Bibliographie dazu ist immens.

Die hier ausgeführten Überlegungen nehmen ihren Anfang mit der unnachgiebigen Kritik, die die Komparatistin Dagmar Barnouw (1936-2008) an die Historiographie der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jh. gerichtet hat, in der sie ihr die fast fehlende Darstellung von den Leiden der deutschen Zivilbevölkerung während der Bombardierungen durch die Alliierten zwischen 1939 und 1945 zum Vorwurf macht. Aus heutiger Sicht erscheint diese Unnachgiebigkeit Barnouws als unangemessen gegenüber den Positionen, die Historiker und kritische Beobachter in den letzten fünfzehn Jahren gegenüber der *Schuldfrage* angenommen haben, aber vielleicht lohnt es sich dennoch, die Begriffe der Debatte noch einmal zu untersuchen und einige Schlussfolgerungen daraus zu ziehen. Sicherlich schließt diese

Perspektive das Thema der Vergebung ein, weil sie in den Erinnerungsraum auch das andere Gesicht Deutschlands einfordert, d.h. das derjenigen, die gelitten und gleichzeitig das Stigma der deutschen Kollektivschuld, die die Seiten der zeitgenössischen Geschichtsschreibung füllt, in sich getragen haben. Der Preis für die Vergebung war der kontinuierliche Aufruf zur Notwendigkeit, an die verbrecherische Vergangenheit zu erinnern und diese Aufgabe wurde in Deutschland immer dringlicher, je weiter man sich von dem noch nahen Trauma der Nachkriegszeit, die zunächst von Ressentiment über die Niederlage im Zweiten Weltkrieg durchdrungen war, entfernte. Im weiteren Verlauf erfolgte zunehmend eine Wahrheitssuche, zu der auch literarische und dramaturgische Werke wie das Drama *Die Ermittlung* von Peter Weiss beigetragen haben. Es wurde 1965 verfasst und basierte auf Notizen, die der Autor während des Prozesses gegen Mitglieder der SS und Aufseher in Auschwitz gemacht hatte, der zwischen Dezember 1963 und August 1965 in Frankfurt stattfand.

Die Schriftsteller, gemeinsam mit den Kultur- bzw. Literaturwissenschaftlern, haben in der Tat damals wie heute einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Debatte über die Kriegsverbrechen geliefert. Dabei sprachen sie sich überwiegend für die Verteidigung eines kollektiven Gedächtnisses aus, in anderen Fällen bestanden sie auf unterschiedliche Auslegungen der Gedächtnisfrage und auf die Unterscheidung zwischen persönlichem und öffentlichem Diskurs. Hierbei ging es – wie im Falle Martin Walsers, auf den später noch eingegangen wird – um den Anspruch, die eigene Beziehung zur Vergangenheit durch die Mikrogeschichte (bestehend aus den historischen Perspektiven und Dynamiken, die in Romanen, Erzählungen, Theaterstücken und filmischen Verarbeitungen der Fiktion erscheinen) zu lesen, um so die Abweichungen zwischen dem kollektiven Gedächtnis und der individuellen Erinnerung aufzuzeigen und dadurch eine persönliche Interpretation der Geschichte in der Gegenwart zu legitimieren.

Dies führt uns dazu, die wesentlichen Unterschiede zu vergegenwärtigen, die die Aufgaben des Historikers im Vergleich zu denen des Schriftstellers kennzeichnen. Ersterer beruft sich auf eine "Vergangenheit" deren historische Tatsachen praktisch für alle gültig sind (Gründe, Auswirkungen, Daten, Ereignisse), und formt dabei die eigene Interpretation nach einer ideologischen Perspektive, die den Vorfall, in Übereinstimmung mit den bestehenden Theorien, oder auch nicht, rechtfertigt. Der Schriftsteller hingegen konstruiert eine "Gewesenheit", die aus erzählten Ereignissen und Personen besteht und fühlt sich dadurch von einer direkten



Pflicht ethisch-moralischer Art gegenüber dem Leser entbunden, dass er sich auf die "freie Erfindung" beruft. Er kann theoretisch die eigene Erzählweise in der ersten, zweiten, dritten Person, oder in der Pluralform wählen und damit seine Präsenz im Text verbergen. Der entscheidende Punkt aber ist, wie Silvio Vietta bei seinen Anführungen zur Besonderheit der "Textualität der Erinnerung" herausstellt (an die die Gattungen der Generationen- bzw. Familienromane sehr gut anknüpfen), dass der Schriftsteller sich seines eigenen Gewissens bzw. seiner Auffassungsform und seiner Sprache bewusst ist und sich somit nicht einer naiven Weise der Vergangenheitserinnerung überlassen kann, ohne dabei die Wahrheitssuche zu berücksichtigen.

Ab der Zeit von Weiss' Engagement gegen das Vergessen der Nazi-Verbrechen bis hin zur gegenwärtigen Phase der Arbeiten über die Erinnerung ist die Aufmerksamkeit für die Opfer der während des Zweiten Weltkriegs begangenen Verbrechen sogar noch größer geworden. Einige Autoren haben aber mehr als andere die Wichtigkeit des Rechts auf eine Zugehörigkeit für alle Opfer des Krieges in der gemeinsamen Erinnerung anerkannt, und nicht nur für die Opfer der Shoah. Aus diesem Grund haben sie die Aufmerksamkeit auf historische Ereignisse gelenkt (wie z.B. die Vertreibung und die Flucht vor den Russen aus den Ostgebieten, die zu Kriegsende viele Opfer mit sich brachten), über die man von den 50er Jahren bis zum Fall der Berliner Mauer aus entgegengesetzten politischen Gründen weder in der DDR noch in der BRD sprechen konnte.

Zu den Beschwörern des Rechts auf eine Zugehörigkeit für alle "Untergegangenen" der Geschichte gehören zwei der wichtigsten Gegenwartsliteraten Deutschlands. Der erste ist Walter Kempowski, der *Die deutsche Chronik* zwischen 1971 und 1984 in Form von 6 Romanen und 3 Befragungsbüchern verfasste und 1999 veröffentlichte sowie *Das Echolot*, das aus zehn kollektiven Tagebüchern besteht, welche die Schlacht von Stalingrad, die Flucht, die Vertreibung und den Luftkrieg behandeln, und das er zwischen 1993 und 2005 publizierte. Der zweite ist W.G. Sebald, der sich ab Beginn der Veröffentlichung seiner Lektionen aus dem Jahr 1997 über *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999) gleich im Mittelpunkt der Diskussion über die doppelte Rolle der Deutschen als Täter und Opfer befand.

Die im letzten Jahrzehnt im Alter von 72 Jahren verstorbene Dagmar Barnouw war eine der mutigsten Forscherinnen über die heikle Frage der Beziehung zwischen Opfern und deutschen Tätern. Ihr intellektueller Mut hing auch mit der wissenschaftlichen Qualifikation zusammen, mit der

sie sich anschickte, das Deutschland der Nachkriegszeit zu interpretieren, d.h. in ihrer Eigenschaft als Forscherin in der "Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft" und nicht als "Historikerin", die sich aber dennoch mit Fragen beschäftigte, die einen Hauptteil der des Erbes der zeitgenössischen Historiographie bilden. Das Forschungsinteresse von Barnouw galt der Überprüfung der Maßstäbe, nach denen die gesamte deutsche Bevölkerung in den fünfzig Jahren nach Kriegsende in der öffentlichen Meinung auf die Anklagebank gesetzt worden war, in der Auffassung, dass trotz der Unterscheidung zwischen Befehlsgebern des Massenmordes, Ausführem und indirekt am nazifaschistischen Terror Beteiligten weiterhin von einer Kollektivschuld gesprochen werden sollte. Die letzte Veröffentlichung der Autorin vor ihrem Tod *The War in the Empty Air: Victims, Perpetrators, and Postwar Germans* (2005) hat allerdings heftige Polemiken, unter anderen von dem Historiker Frank Biess, ausgelöst, aufgrund der Ungenauigkeit von Angaben zu den Opfern und der Vagheit einiger Behauptungen, die teilweise als unglaubwürdig oder sogar als falsch betrachtet wurden. Die Hauptthese des Buchs besteht in der Behauptung, dass sowohl die antideutsche Propaganda der Alliierten, als auch die Erhebung der Verbrechen von Auschwitz in den "supra-historical status" eine Neuverhandlung des Schuldthemas zugunsten anderer Opfer der Kriegskatastrophe verhindert hätten (Barnouw, *The War* xiii). Die Einbeziehung von den Leiden der hilflosen deutschen Bevölkerung - zu denen als unvergleichlich anerkannten, die die Verbrechen der Nazis verursacht haben - in die Geschichtsbücher ist Barnouw zufolge notwendig, um der Erinnerung der Opfer (vor allem Frauen, Kinder und alte Menschen) der von den Alliierten Luftkräften als Strafaktionen durchgeführten Städtebombardierungen eine Form von Respekt zu zollen. Der Hauptgrund für Barnouws leidenschaftlichen Kampf für das Hervorholen einer von der Historiographie schuldhaft vernachlässigten Realität besteht darin, dass sie sich noch sehr deutlich an die Lufteinflüge über Dresden erinnerte, deren Bombenhagel sie als zehnjähriges Mädchen zusammen mit ihrer Mutter wie durch ein Wunder entkommen war. Ihre Stimme ist somit auch die einer "Geschädigten" und Zeugin und nicht nur die einer Forscherin der deutschen Vergangenheit.

In diesem Zusammenhang ist aber ein Interview in Betracht zu ziehen, das der Historiker Hans-Ulrich Wehler gegenüber S. Burgdorff und C. Habbe in der Ausgabe 1/2003 des *Spiegel* gegeben hat, in dem er seine große Sorge bezüglich einer Gleichstellung der Shoah mit anderen Leiden während des "totalen Kriegs" zum Ausdruck bringt. Wehler kritisiert bei

dieser Gelegenheit die sprachlichen Ausdrücke, mit denen Jörg Friedrich in *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945* (2002) die Auswirkungen der Luftbombardierungen über Deutschland beschrieben hat:

Wenn man die Flächenbombardements von rund 30 Städten anschaulich schildert, ohne das Ganze aber einzubetten in einen totalen Krieg, der sich hochgeschaukelt hat, dann droht Emotionalisierung. Wenn Friedrich schreibt, die Bombenflotten seien "Einsatztruppen", brennende Luftschutzkeller "Krematorien" und die Toten "Ausgerottete", dann hat man sprachlich die völlige Gleichsetzung mit dem Holocaust. Und damit bedient man schon Vorstellungen von einem Opferkult, nach dem Motto "Wir sind doch im 20. Jahrhundert immer die Opfer gewesen" (Wehler 21).

Zehn Jahre nach Erscheinen von Barnouws Buch kann ihr Kampf nun nicht mehr als einer für eine "verlorene Sache" betrachtet werden, dank einer weiten Mobilmachung durch die Presse und einer umfangreichen Arbeit im akademischen Bereich zu diesem Thema. Die Dynamiken dieser Diskussion wieder aufzugreifen bedeutet aber, die Vermittlung von historischen Tatsachen und erreichten Ergebnissen bei der Untersuchung des kulturellen Gedächtnis am Leben zu erhalten, und in diesem Bereich ragen die Namen von Jan und Aleida Assmann heraus, zusammen mit vielen anderen Beobachtern der Beziehung von Gedächtnis und Zeugenschaft, wie beispielsweise die von Martin Broszat, Dominick La Capra oder Saul Friedländer.

Bei dem Übergang von der Erinnerung der Zeitzeugen der Katastrophe zu dem von der Kollektivität geteilten kulturellen Gedächtnis war die Anerkennung der Funktion des "In-Sich-Gehens" einer der wichtigsten Aspekte im Prozess der Aufarbeitung von den traumatischen Erfahrungen des Einzelnen in ein kollektives Gedächtnis:

Adorno insistierte in den unmittelbaren Nachkriegsjahren des Zweiten Weltkriegs auf die Grundbedeutung des Begriffs Erinnerung als "In-Sich-Gehen" und somit als ein Eindringen des Subjekts in das Bewusstsein bis hin zu den tiefsten, verdrängten und unerträglichen Teilen der menschlichen Erfahrung. Das Ziel der Erinnerung in dem in Trümmern liegenden Deutschland sollte Adorno zufolge nicht nur das statische Gedenken der Vergangenheit sein, sondern die Integration des Gewesenen in die Gegenwart (Calzoni 20).

Mittlerweile ist sichergestellt, dass die Ermittlung einer Kollektivschuld nicht den amerikanischen Besatzungstruppen zugeschrieben

werden kann, die ihre Maßnahmen zur Entnazifizierung teilweise mit völlig unzulänglichen Mitteln durchführten. Ein Beispiel ist die flächenweite Verbreitung eines Fragebogens im Jahr 1946, auf dem die Deutschen unter 131 Fragen zu ihrem Privatleben wahlweise auch die persönliche Teilnahme an dem Hitler-Regime angeben konnten. Das Zugeständnis einer Kollektivschuld ist übrigens von den Deutschen zu Kriegsende größtenteils abgelehnt worden, wie Carsten Dutt passend herausstellt. Er zitiert hierbei C.G Jung, der in einem Interview für die *Münchener Zeitung* am 3. Juni 1945 Folgendes ausführte:

Alle sind, bewußt oder unbewußt, aktiv oder passiv, an den Greueln beteiligt; man wußte nichts von den Dingen und wußte sie doch, gleichsam in einem geheimen Contrat génial. Die Frage der Kollektivschuld, die die Politiker so sehr beschäftigt und beschäftigen wird, ist für den Psychologen eine Tatsache, und es wird eine der wichtigsten Aufgaben der Therapie sein, die Deutschen zur Anerkennung dieser Schuld zu bringen (zit. nach Dutt 8).

*Die Stimme außerhalb des Chores: ein stattgefundener Skandal wirft alte Probleme wieder auf*

Dagmar Barnouw hat 2001 in ihrem Aufsatz *Zeitlichkeit und Erinnerung: Überlegungen zur Problematik der Schuldfrage*, der die ausführlichere Analyse des Problems in ihrer Monographie *The War in the Empty Air* vorwegnimmt, diesen Gedanken geäußert:

Nun ist die über ein halbes Jahrhundert lang geforderte "ehrliche Konfrontation" mit der "unbewältigten" deutschen Vergangenheit schon darum problematisch, weil sie ein ganz bestimmtes unveränderbares Ergebnis voraussetzt, nämlich die Sühne an "den jüdischen Opfern" in der adäquaten kollektiven Erinnerung "der Deutschen" als "Täter" (663).

Die intellektuelle Haltung mit der diese Wissenschaftlerin die Thematik der *Kollektivschuld* der Deutschen wieder vergegenwärtigte, diente dem Zweck, die Deutschen auch in ihrer Rolle als leidende Subjekte ins polarisierte System der Beziehungen zwischen Opfer und Täter mit einzubringen. Dadurch bezieht diese Thematik weite Teile der Zivilbevölkerung (vor allem Frauen und Kinder) mit ein, die in der Nachkriegszeit einem harten Regime der moralischen Umerziehung seitens

der Alliierten unterlagen. Diese bekamen auch – wie von Schriftstellern wie Sebald und Kempowski sowie vom Regisseur Alexander Kluge, aber auch früher von Ledig, Nossack und Böll u.a. zur Genüge betont wurde – während der Bombardements von 1943 bis 1945 als Wehrlose die Vergeltung der Alliierten zu spüren.

Laut Barnouw wurden später die unterschiedlichsten politischen Aktionen des deutschen Volkes in ihrer Verantwortlichkeit mit den Gräueln des Holocausts in Verbindung gebracht (von kontroversen Entscheidungen wie die für öffentliche Gedenken der Kriegsoffer im Verhältnis zu den Opfern der Shoah bis zur Teilnahme am Kosovokonflikt), was oftmals erst gar keinen konstruktiven Dialog mit dem, was Barnouw als “the supra-historical status of the Holocaust” (*The War* xiii) bezeichnete, aufkommen ließ.

Wenn auch für Barnouw die Aufforderung zur Anzeige einer jeglichen Art besorgniserregender ideologischer Abweichung von der Verpflichtung zu einem demokratischen Aufbau des deutschen Gesellschaftssystems in der Nachkriegszeit eine Priorität bildet und sie dabei betont, dass der Antisemitismus immer ein zentrales Problem der gegenwärtigen Gesellschaft bleibt, beklagt sie doch, dass unter den Historikern andere Formen der Gewalt, unter denen die deutsche Zivilbevölkerung gelitten hat, keine Berücksichtigung gefunden haben:

Die Intellektuellen, auch die Historiker, die am Ende dieses Jahrhunderts die Bedeutung der Vergangenheit für die Zukunft eines neuen Deutschland debattieren, zeigen relativ wenig konkretes Interesse an den Zeitgenossen dieser Vergangenheit. Deren Versuche, aus ihrer uns heute unvorstellbar schwierigen Gegenwart einen möglichen Weg in die Zukunft zu finden, werden aus der Distanz dieser Zukunft, unserer Gegenwart, meist zu einfach als Beginn der “unbewältigten Vergangenheit” abgetan: als die dauernde Unfähigkeit, mit den Fragen kollektiver Verantwortlichkeit, Schuld und Sühne auf eine Weise umzugehen, die die Opfer krimineller Handlungen in der Vergangenheit auf Dauer befriedigen, *befrieden*, könnte (Barnouw, “Zeitlichkeit” 663).

Die Anführung von Barnouws Position hat dazu gedient, zwischen der Gegenwart und der Nachkriegszeit, die im nachfolgenden Abschnitt behandelt wird, eine Brücke zu schlagen. Es zeigt sich hierbei die Kluft zwischen den verschiedenen ideologischen Positionen, die Presse und Literaturkritik nach Martin Walsers Rede von 1998 in der Paulskirche in Frankfurt am Main, anlässlich der Verleihung des Friedenspreises des

deutschen Buchhandels, ans Licht gebracht haben, und einer Sichtweise wie der ihren, die man als den Ausdruck einer "Stimme außerhalb des Chores" definieren könnte. Diese Stimme wird nun nicht laut, um die Form zu rechtfertigen, in der Walser sein Verhältnis zur Vergangenheit zum Ausdruck gebracht hat und die jüdische Gemeinschaft verletzte, indem er von Schande und nicht von Schuld sprach; wohl aber, um der in Walsers Analyse aufgeführten Ansicht beizupflichten, dass das deutsche Volk zu sich zurückkehren müsse, um die eigene Geschichte und Identität in die Hand zu nehmen, bzw. um sich effektiv zu verbessern und auch, um von anderen Aspekten des kulturellen Erbes des eigenen Landes für die Zukunft zu lernen, damit keine Verbrechen solcher Art mehr begangen werden können. In ihrer abschließenden These behauptet Barnouw, Walser habe es aufgrund einer unangemessenen Verwendung einiger Ausdrücke, die den Verdacht einer mangelnden Anerkennung der von den Deutschen in ihrer nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit begangenen Verbrechen erregt haben, nicht vermocht, seine eigentliche Botschaft zu vermitteln, nämlich nicht die, eine Lanze zugunsten des Vergessens zu brechen, sondern vielmehr zugunsten eines "Nicht-Vergessens", das von der Fluidität der historischen Zeitlichkeit und der unvermeidbaren Transformation der Vergangenheit bei ihrer Eingliederung in die Perspektive des aktuellen Erinnerns und Erzählens gekennzeichnet ist. Als Beweis der historischen Kohärenz mit seiner These hat Walser das Beispiel Goethes gebracht – das uns trotzdem als ziemlich abwegig und unangemessen erscheint – welcher "einen Monat nach dem Ausbruch der Französischen Revolution "[...] ein zärtlich-innigstes Spiegelbildstück vollendet[e]: den Tasso" (*Erfahrungen* 23). Walser hat hinzugefügt, dass

als [Goethe] im Jahr 94 Schiller in Jena in der "Naturforschenden Gesellschaft" trifft, wird, heißt es, die Freundschaft endgültig begründet. Und den einen hat es offenbar nicht gestört, dass der andere eine ganz andere Art von Gewissen pflegte als er selber. Wer war nun da das Gewissen des Jahrzehnts? Liegt das an der Größe dieser beiden, daß eine Freundschaft entstand zwischen zwei wahrhaft verschiedenen Gewissen? Oder gab es damals noch Toleranz? (23-24)

Walser gibt hier den Eindruck, seine ganze Rede diene dem Zweck der Verteidigung des Rechtes des Schriftstellers, sich der Einförmigkeit des zeitgeschichtlichen Perspektivismus zu entziehen (das Beispiel ist auf die Französische Revolution bezogen) und andere Themen und Motive zu

behandeln, die nicht die "deutsche Frage" betreffen. Heute können wir diese Haltung als ein '90er Jahre Abwehr-Syndrom betrachten, das sich eben im Jahrzehnt nach dem Fall der Mauer und nach der Wiedervereinigung herauskristallisiert hat.

Es bleibt aber die unabänderliche Tatsache bestehen, dass es Walser nicht gelungen ist, vor der Zuhörerschaft der Paulskirche das Wort "Schuld" auszusprechen. Die Ausdrücke "Last" und "Schande" haben dieses Konzept, wie aus der folgenden Textpassage hervorgeht, in unangebrachter Weise ersetzt:

Jeder kennt unsere geschichtliche Last, die unvergängliche Schande, kein Tag, an dem sie uns nicht vorgehalten wird. Könnte es sein, dass die Intellektuellen, die sie uns vorhalten, dadurch, dass sie uns die Schande vorhalten, eine Sekunde lang der Illusion verfallen, sie hätten sich, weil sie wieder im grausamen Erinnerungsdienst gearbeitet haben, ein wenig entschuldigt, seien für einen Augenblick sogar näher bei den Opfern als bei den Tätern? Eine momentane Milderung der unerbittlichen Entgegengesetztheit von Tätern und Opfern. Ich habe es nie für möglich gehalten, die Seite der Beschuldigten zu verlassen (Walser, *Erfahrungen* 17).

Wie immer kommt es auf den Zusammenhang in einer Rede an. Walser beklagt, nicht ohne einen Anflug von bitterer Ironie, die Art und Weise, wie die "Intellektuellen" – eine Kategorie, von der er sich offensichtlich distanziert – wahrscheinlich durch Umgehung ihrer persönlichen Verantwortlichkeit die Rechnung mit dem eigenen Gewissen beglichen hätten, um sich dann hinter den das individuelle und kollektive Gedächtnis betreffenden Theorien verstecken zu können.

Der von Walser anscheinend als lästig empfundene große Lärm der Massenmedien um die Notwendigkeit einer Vergangenheitsbewältigung hat sich in seiner Interpretation der Begriffe Last und Scham polarisiert, während die Schuld als ontologischer Bezugswert, im Sinne von Sartre, Camus und Jaspers einfach nur in seiner abschließenden Erklärung, er habe nie daran gedacht, die Schar der Schuldigen zu verlassen, abgeschwächt wurde. Wenn man bedenkt, dass Walser sich hier als Schriftsteller von den Intellektuellen distanziert, die im Namen der Kollektivität sprechen, indem er ihnen polemisch die Rolle als Richtende oder moralische Instanzen zuschreibt, und dass seine Rede die Rahmensituation widerspiegelt, die die Entscheidungen der Protagonisten aus dem Roman *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998) beinhaltet, dann darf man auch die ihm unterstellte Absicht,

dass er eine neue Stunde Null zur Interpretation der zeitgenössischen Geschichte ins kollektive Bewusstsein einzuführen gedenke, ernsthaft in Zweifel ziehen.

So kann man also annehmen, dass Walser in den letzten zwanzig Jahren die Auffassung entwickelt hat, dass es im Wesentlichen steril und sogar kontraproduktiv sei, wenn die Deutschen weiterhin ihre Reue für die Vergangenheit darstellten, weil es sie daran hindern würde, aus dem psychologischen Tunnel der Kollektivschuld herauszutreten.

Es ist in diesem Kontext nicht überflüssig, daran zu erinnern, dass Walser schon auf eine Provokation des Kritikers Marcel Reich-Ranicki, die dieser im *Spiegel* vom 22.5.1964 gegenüber den Schriftstellern bezüglich ihres beredeten Schweigens zum Frankfurter Auschwitz Prozess geäußert hatte, reagiert hat. In einer Schrift mit dem Titel *Unser Auschwitz* (1965) wies er zunächst die Aufforderung, sich alle persönlich schuldig zu fühlen, an den Absender zurück und erklärte im zweiten Teil der Schrift seine eigene moralische Position zu dem Thema, die Matthias N. Lorenz folgendermaßen auslegt, indem er u.a. einen Satz aus der genannten Schrift von 1965 zitiert:

“[W]arum dann überhaupt noch Volk oder Staat, wenn ich mich im prekären Fall auf mein persönliches Unschuldsgefühl berufen kann?” (Walser, *Unser* 199) Deutsch sein, das ist für Walser – wie auch noch 1998 in seiner Friedenspreisrede [...] schuldig sein, ein Konstrukt, das deutsche Juden per se ausschließt. Insofern erscheint der Essay durchaus auch als eine Zurückweisung von jener Einrede Reich-Ranickis, die ihn provoziert hatte. Walser setzte dem unser Auschwitz entgegen, das sich eben nicht ausschließlich auf unseren Anteil an Auschwitz bezieht, sondern vor allem den Anteil von Auschwitz an uns, das heißt: an der deutschen Kollektividentität, um die es dem Autor zu tun ist (138-139).

Im Gegensatz zu Walser hat Grass immer die Idee akzeptiert, dass es zwischen der Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart eine Form des kontinuierlichen Austausches gibt, die dem Erinnerungsbedürfnis entspricht: Nicht zufällig zeigt der Ausdruck *Vergegenzukunft*, unter den der Autor seine Poetik einordnete, dass es möglich ist, die Erinnerungsinhalte in den Mittelpunkt von menschlichen und geschichtlichen Beziehungen zu stellen und sie in der Gesellschaft zu verbreiten. Wie nur wenige andere ist Grass dazu in der Lage gewesen, jegliche nostalgische Note zu vermeiden und auf eine direkte Art die Verantwortlichkeiten zu konfrontieren, die



eine jede Etappe der Gegenwartsgeschichte mit sich gebracht hat. Er hat so mit seinem literarischen Werk einen soliden kulturellen Brückenschlag geschaffen, der das jeweilige Klima zu Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs, der Nachkriegszeit und der Post-Wendezeit zum Ausdruck gebracht hat, unter anderem auch durch die Anwendung des Kunstgriffs – wie bei *Im Krebsgang* (2002) – einer “Wiederauferstehung” der Protagonisten seiner *Danziger Trilogie*. Es erscheint somit als völlig gerechtfertigt, dass Massimo Bonifazio den letzten Abschnitt seiner Monographie aus dem Jahr 2014 *La memoria inesorabile. Forme del confronto con il passato tedesco dal 1945 a oggi* in drei Teile untergliedert, die die Titel *Sofferenze I, II e III* (*Leiden I, II und III*) tragen und sich jeweils auf “Guerra aerea” (Luftkrieg), “Flucht und Vertreibung” und “Sofferenze dei soldati sovietici” (Leiden der sowjetischen Soldaten) beziehen, wobei er das Werk von Grass der zweiten Typologie zuordnet.

Grass und Walser, die beide der Flakhelfer-Generation angehörten, d.h. derjenigen, die zwischen 1926 und 1928 geboren und am Kriegsende zum Einsatz bei der Luftwaffe und der Kriegsmarine gerufen wurden, sind mehrfach als die “Dioskuren” der deutschen Kultur definiert worden. Altersgenossen und durch dieselbe historische Erfahrung vereint, befanden sie sich dennoch auf völlig entgegengesetzten ideologischen Fronten und waren damit sehr unterschiedlich bezüglich der Erzählung von der Geschichte des 20. Jh. angetrieben. Walser bringt auch im Romantitel von 1998 Nietzsches Vorstellung der Ablehnung einer Abhängigkeit von der Geschichte und den Prophezeiungen der Historiker zum Ausdruck – aus der Einsamkeit einer privaten Erinnerung entspringt tatsächlich wie aus einer Quelle der Wunsch zum Reden und verwandelt sich in “in einen sprudelnden Quell”, wie es Zarathustra im *Nachtgesang* beschreibt. Grass war seinerseits ein Brandstifter par excellence, der sich schon immer im Zentrum der aufregendsten Phasen der internationalen Politik des 20. Jahrhunderts befand, wobei er dem deutschen Volk sogar noch anlässlich der Wiedervereinigung “ewige Schuld” zuwies.

Mittlerweile ist aber auch die Ehrlichkeit seiner ideologischen Position dadurch stark in Frage gestellt worden, dass er in seiner Selbstbiographie von 2006, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* eingestanden hat, er habe sich freiwillig als Rekrut bei der Waffen-SS gemeldet, obwohl dies im Zusammenhang mit einem Statement geschah, das noch einmal die besondere Konstellation von Scham und Last in den Vordergrund rückt:

Also Ausreden genug. Und doch habe ich mich über Jahrzehnte hinweg geweigert, mir das Wort und den Doppelbuchstaben einzugestehen. Was ich mit dem dummen Stolz meiner jungen Jahre hingenommen hatte, wollte ich mir nach dem Krieg aus nachwachsender Scham verschweigen. Doch die Last blieb, und niemand konnte sie erleichtern (127).

Volker Neuhaus hat seine Diagnose zu Grass' Verhalten gegenüber der Schuldfrage bereits in seiner Biographie von 1997 mit dem Titel *Schreiben gegen die verstreichende Zeit* folgendermaßen geäußert:

Grass gesamtes Werk setzt sich mit Schuld, Bekennen von Schuld, Benennen und aussprechen von Schuld auseinander: gegenüber Juden, Sinti und Roma und Polen, gegenüber Frauen, gegenüber der dritten Welt, gegenüber der uns beherbergenden Erde. Zweck solchen Benennens und Bekennens aber kann nur Buße im biblischen Sinne von Umkehr, Umdenken, Sinneswandel sein, damit dieselben Verbrechen nicht endlos wiederholt werden (211).

*Filmkultur, dramaturgische und literarische Kultur der Nachkriegszeit:  
Wie kollektiv ist die Schuldfrage?*

Aufgrund ihrer besonderen Eigenschaft, subjektive Welten in Szene zu setzen und allgemein verständlich darzustellen, scheint die Literatur zusammen mit der Filmkultur weitgehend in der Lage zu sein, das in Erinnerung zu rufen, was die historiographischen Erzählungen manchmal nicht erwähnen. Der Historiker Wolfgang Hardtwig hat sich mit diesem spezifischem Punkt befasst, wobei er die erhaltene Kritik an den Absender zurückgegeben und darauf hingewiesen hat, dass das Auswahlverfahren der Medien bei ihren öffentlichen Bekanntgaben oftmals Fakten der Vergangenheit ignoriert, die die Historiker hingegen detailliert erforscht haben. In der Einführung zu seinem Band *Keiner kommt davon. Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945* hat er einen Appell lanciert – d.h. eine Art Aufforderung zur Verantwortungsbewusstmachung – der an die Kultur- bzw. Literaturwissenschaftler gerichtet war, damit diese sich vergegenwärtigten was ihre Spezifik gegenüber der historiographischen Darstellung ausmacht und was ihre aktuelle Konjunktur für das Geschichtsbewusstsein bedeutet (9).

Diesem besonderen Appell folgt eine interessante Beobachtung Hardtwigs über die Benennung der Forschungsbereiche in der Literatur,

die im 20. Jh. nicht mehr hauptsächlich aufgrund von Begriffen der Epoche oder kulturellen Bewegungen gekennzeichnet werden, sondern die Perspektive der Geschichte der Nation unter ihren verschiedenen Aspekten einnehmen:

Wenig spektakulär, aber doch festzuhalten, ist zunächst die Beobachtung, wie sehr für die Epoche seit den 20er Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts allgemein- und literaturhistorische Periodisierungen unter nationalgeschichtlichem Vorzeichen zusammenfallen. Ältere Stil-, Schul- oder Epochenbegriffe von der "Barocklyrik" bis zum "Expressionismus" sind ganz indifferent gegenüber den allgemeingeschichtlichen Epochenbezeichnungen. Für das 20. Jahrhundert ändert sich das, von der "Literatur der Weimarer Republik" oder der "zwanziger Jahre" über die "Literatur im NS", die "Emigrantenliteratur" oder die "Literatur der inneren Migration" [...] (Hardtwig 9)

Ein historisches Ereignis, das aus Gründen der politischen Zensur und durch Tabus unterschiedlicher Art ab der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit jahrzehntelang vertuscht wurde und vergessen geglaubt war, wurde ins Licht gerückt und in den Vordergrund gestellt. Es ist aber auch sicher so, dass der Öffentlichkeitsrummel darum durch andere Interessensgruppen und mit einem völlig anderen politisch-strategischem Ziel veranstaltet wurde.

Was mit anderen Worten durch die Sektoralisierung des Wissens oftmals übersehen wird, ist die Tatsache, dass ein besonderer Fall aus der Geschichte, wie der von dem Untergang des Schiffes Wilhelm Gustloff im Januar 1945, mit seinen politischen und kulturellen Konsequenzen bereits hinreichend in der Filmkultur der Nachkriegszeit behandelt worden war, indes in einer ausgesprochen propagandistischen Aufmachung. In *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* (BRD) von Frank Wisbar wird das Thema der Schuld der Deutschen verallgemeinert, und vor allem herrscht in verschiedenen Sequenzen das triviale Klima der Offizierskreise und die nationalistische Emphase vor, die 1945 mit den öffentlichen Initiativen im Westen einhergeht. So wurde bei einem Vergleich mit einem anderen aus dieser Zeit und zum selben Thema von der DEFA unter der Regie von Lew Arnschtam produzierten Film *Fünf Tage und fünf Nächte* (1961) bemerkt:

Der in den Filmen deutlich werdende Unterschied in der Darstellung deutscher Schuld zeigt sich besonders deutlich in der dramaturgischen Situierung der jeweiligen Tragödie: Während in *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* die Torpedierung und der Untergang des Schiffes den Abschluß und Höhepunkt der Handlung darstellen,

ist der Akt der Bombardierung Dresdens in der DEFA-Produktion der eigentlichen Handlung zeitlich vorangestellt [...] Der ostdeutsche Zuschauer wird darauf hingewiesen, daß die Zerstörung Deutschlands (Dresden übernimmt hierfür eine Symbolfunktion) und ihre Besetzung durch ehemalige Feinde eine Konsequenz des von Deutschen begonnenen Krieges ist (Zahlmann 796).

Die Filmkultur hat ohne Zweifel den Vorteil, einen kathartischen Prozess bei den Zuschauern in Gang zu setzen, was die Literatur in derselben Weise nicht zu leisten imstande ist. Sie vermag das Epos eines Volkes im kollektiven Handeln darzustellen, worauf das Erinnerungsbedürfnis der Gemeinschaft projiziert wird, welche erneut die Etappen des Weges durchläuft, der sie von der Vergangenheit bis zum gegenwärtigen Zustand geführt hat. Diese Fähigkeit macht eine Reflexion über die Kollektivschuld erst möglich, wozu die literarische Erzählung kaum in der Lage ist.

Die ostdeutsche Produktion lässt also keinen Zweifel daran, dass "die Deutschen" im Allgemeinen für so viel Leid verantwortlich sind, ohne dabei dem Publikum die besondere Akzentuierung der von den Russen und Juden – und nicht zuletzt auch von den kommunistischen Widerstandskämpfern – durchlittenen Trauer zu ersparen. Was die westdeutsche Produktion betrifft, so kommen hin und wieder vereinzelt Symbole des deutschen Nationalstolzes im Film auf, wie die Verdienstkreuze und die Ehrenabzeichen auf den Gräbern der Gefallenen, die auf die Vorstellung anspielen, dass allein die Clique der höchsten politischen und militärischen Ämter unter der verbrecherischen Führung Hitlers Deutschland in die Katastrophe geführt habe.

Das Thema der Schuld ist, wie schon angedeutet, eng mit drei anderen Themenkomplexen verflochten: Krieg und Zerstörung, Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen aus den Ostgebieten beim Vormarsch der Russen, Heimkehr. In diesem Beziehungsgeflecht erweist sich vor allem der letzte Aspekt als fruchtbringend für eine Reflexion darüber, inwieweit das Kriegsende im Wesentlichen ein Anlass für individuelles und kollektives Bedauern als Ausdruck verletzten Stolzes angesichts der Niederlage gewesen ist und somit das erste Glied in einer emsigen Phase des Wiederaufbaus auf den Trümmern der Vergangenheit. Man denke hierbei an Sebalds Lektionen über den Krieg, denen die Vorstellung eines Heroismus des Wiederaufbaus mit der Funktion entspringt, den Zustand der Apathie infolge der Kapitulation von 1945 zu überwinden. Sebald betont in seinem Text auch die unterschiedlichen Verhaltensweisen hinsichtlich

der Generationsunterschiede der Schriftsteller, wobei er Enzensbergers Überlegung zitiert:

War die ältere Garde der sogenannten inneren Emigranten vornehmlich damit beschäftigt, sich ein neues Ansehen zu geben und [...] den Freiheitsgedanken und das humanistisch-abendländische Erbe in endlosen verquasteten Abstraktionen zu beschwören, so war die jüngere Generation der gerade heimgekehrten Autoren dermaßen fixiert auf ihre eigenen, immer wieder in Sentimentalität und Larmoyanz abgeleiteten Erlebnisberichte aus dem Krieg, daß sie kaum ein Auge zu haben schien für die allerorten sichtbaren Schrecken der Zeit (17).

Es ist sicher wahr, dass der Prozess der Aufarbeitung der Schuld in einer offensichtlichen Form von Sühne durch die Aufteilung Deutschlands in Einflusszonen und die vor allem von den Amerikanern durchgeführten Maßnahmen zur Entnazifizierung und Umerziehung des Volkes ins Stocken geriet. Dennoch geht aus den historischen Dokumenten hervor, dass man nie den Ausdruck "Kollektivschuld" benutzte, um damit den Besiegten ihren Zustand der Unmündigkeit vorzuhalten. Zu dieser Überlegung kann auf ein Kapitel aus Norbert Freis Buch *Das dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen*, mit dem Thema *Von deutscher Erfindungskraft. Oder: Die Kollektivschuldthese in der Nachkriegszeit* verwiesen werden, wo das Potsdamer Kommuniqué vom 2. August 1945 mit folgendem Inhalt zitiert wird:

Es ist nicht die Absicht der Alliierten, das deutsche Volk zu vernichten oder zu versklaven. Es ist die Absicht der Alliierten, dem deutschen Volk Gelegenheit zu geben, sich darauf vorzubereiten, später sein Leben auf demokratischer und friedlicher Grundlage neu aufzubauen (zit. nach Frei 146).

Frei bedient sich also dieses paradigmatischen Falles, um zu verdeutlichen, inwieweit die Nürnberger Prozesse und die gerichtlichen Vorgehensweisen zur Spektakularisierung der Schuldfrage beigetragen haben. Dabei führt er den Aspekt der Kollektivierung an, während in der deutschen Gesellschaft gleichzeitig – wie er schreibt – "das Prinzip der Ahndung individueller Schuld [galt]" (Frei 146). Sowohl in ihren Studien über die Ideologie des Totalitarismus, als auch in ihren Berichten über das in Trümmern liegende Deutschland, stellte Hannah Arendt eine direkte Beziehung zwischen der Ideologie der Massenvernichtung und einer Kollektivschuld her, die schließlich den Einzelnen der Gesellschaft

gegenüber aus der Verantwortung nimmt und ihm ein brauchbares Alibi liefert, um sich einer Hinterfragung des Gewissens zu entziehen.

Im 13. Kapitel ihres Hauptwerkes *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft* hebt die Philosophin hervor, dass sich die "totalitäre Herrschaft" sowohl vom Despotismus als von der Tyrannei und auch von der einfachen Diktatur aus dem Grund unterschied, dass für sie das Gebot "Du sollst nicht töten" keine Bedeutung hatte, da für die Nazis das Leben keinerlei Wert hatte:

Die Todesstrafe wird absurd, wenn man es nicht mit Mördern zu tun hat, die wissen, was Mord ist, sondern mit Bevölkerungspolitikern, die den Millionermord so organisieren, daß alle Beteiligten subjektiv unschuldig sind: die Ermordeten, weil sie sich nicht gegen das Regime vergangen haben, und die Mörder, weil sie keineswegs aus "mörderischen" Motiven handelten [...] Die Gaskammern des Dritten Reichs und die Konzentrationslager der Sowjetunion haben die Kontinuität abendländischer Geschichte unterbrochen, weil niemand im Ernst die Verantwortung für sie übernehmen kann. Zugleich bedrohen sie jene Solidarität von Menschen untereinander, welche die Voraussetzung dafür ist, daß wir es überhaupt wagen können, die Handlungen anderer zu beurteilen und abzuurteilen (Arendt 945 f.).

Karl Jaspers wiederum verstand sehr wohl, welche möglichen Verdrängungsprozesse sich in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit abzeichnen würden, in einem Spektrum zwischen subjektiver Verantwortlichkeit und der auf das gesamte deutsche Volk ausgeweiteten Anklage wegen Kriegsverbrechen. Seine Betonung darauf, dass der moralischen Schuld des einzelnen Subjektes auch die kriminelle Handlung zugeschrieben wird, die auf einen von den Vorgesetzten erhaltenen Befehl hin ausgeführt wurde, erscheint als einer der wichtigsten Punkte seiner Abhandlung. Wie er schreibt: "Niemand gilt schlechthin ‚Befehl ist Befehl‘" (Jaspers 10). In der Tat zeigen auch die Kultur des Films, die der Dramaturgie und der Literatur der Nachkriegszeit – allen voran Wolfgang Borchert in *Draußen vor der Tür* (1947) – wie sehr die Figur des einfachen Soldaten das eigene Gewissen zu beruhigen versucht, indem er mit einem Vorgesetzten eine offene Rechnung begleicht, der ihn dazu gezwungen hatte, entweder Unschuldige zu massakrieren oder Gefangene zu quälen.

Wolfgang Staudte konnte dank sowjetischer Unterstützung mit dem Film *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, der am 15. Oktober 1946 im Admiralpalast, dem provisorischen Sitz der Berliner Staatsoper, vorgeführt wurde, ein

kinematographisches Werk verwirklichen, in dem das Bewusstsein über das Kriegsverbrechen, die Notwendigkeit einer Strafverfolgung desjenigen, der es begangen hatte, und dessen Läuterung in der Nachkriegsgesellschaft thematisiert wurden. Die beiden interessantesten Aspekte sind vom historisch-kulturellen Standpunkt aus gesehen in erster Linie die Tatsache, dass Staudte von Anfang an ein Thema ausgewählt hatte, bei dem ein Schuldiger von einem Heimkehrer, der auf dessen Befehl hin gekämpft und Weihnachten 1942 an der Hinrichtung von 150 polnischen Staatsbürgern teilgenommen hatte, umgebracht wird. In zweiter Hinsicht handelt es sich darum, dass der Film der Hinrichtung einiger Nazigrößen in den Nürnberger Gefängnishallen nur um Weniges vorausging. Die Verantwortlichen für die sowjetische Zensur lehnten das vom Regisseur vorgesehene Ende ab, wohl aus Angst, es könnte von den Deutschen als eine Art Antrieb zur Selbstjustiz gesehen werden. Dennoch sollte ein gleichzeitiges Zusammenreffen der Prozesse wegen Verbrechen gegen die Menschheit mit dem Einverständnis der Russen zur Produktion für alle diejenigen ein Signal setzen, die hofften, sich als Schuldige ohne eine gerechte Strafe wieder in das bürgerliche Leben eingliedern zu können. Mario Rubino vergleicht in einer Werksanalyse das von Staudte vorgesehene mit dem tatsächlich 1946 in der Filmvorführung dargestellten Ende:

36 Männer, 54 Frauen, 31 Kinder, Munitionsverbrauch 347 Schuß! So lautet der Gegenstand der Anklage, die Mertens erhebt, wobei er mit der Pistole auf Brückner zielt und den Bericht der Repressalie auswendig aufsagt, dessen unerbittlich skrupulöser Text nach ausgeführter Hinrichtung noch eine Zeit lang in der Sequenz 27 erschienen ist. In klarem expressionistischen Stil *noir* zeigt die Aufnahme, wie Mertens bei der Auseinandersetzung von der anfänglichen Großaufnahme bis zur gesamten Figur in Richtung auf eine Wand im Hintergrund zurückweicht, auf die der Schatten seines Anklägers projiziert ist, der so bedrohlich bis zum Ende den Angeklagten ganz bedeckt. (Rubino 220f.)

Als Alternative zur vermiedenen summarischen Hinrichtung des Schuldigen gibt die Sequenz 32 zum Abschluss den zu befolgenden richtigen Verlauf vor. Auf die Ermahnung der Waller [der Frau, mit der Mertens eine Liebesbeziehung eingegangen ist]: “Hans, wir haben nicht das Recht, zu richten”, antwortet Mertens: “Nein, Susanne. Aber wir haben die Pflicht, Anklage zu erheben, Sühne zu fordern im Auftrag von Millionen unschuldig hingemordeter Menschen!” (Rubino 220f.)

Bei der Gegenüberstellung zwischen dem Industriekapitän Brückner, welcher, nachdem er einem fast sicheren Tod entgangen ist, in den Schoß der Familie zurückkehrt und vor seinen Angestellten die Aufrichtigkeit des Deutschen Volkes zelebriert, und dem Arzt Mertens, der in der in Trümmern liegenden Stadt Hilfsbedürftige betreut, setzt sich das Schema der Gegenüberstellung von Gut und Böse endlos fort. Dieses liegt in unendlichen Varianten auch in der Dramaturgie und der Literatur der 40er und 50er Jahre vor. Es sei auf die Worte von Jochen Vogt verwiesen, der in einem interessanten Aufsatz zur Schuldverschreibung die zentrale Frage stellt "Was vermag die literarische Erinnerungsarbeit?" und erwidert, dass die von Mitleidenden und Mitschuldigen hervorgebrachten Texte der Nachkriegszeit "erkennbar Teil an den kollektiven Entlastungswünschen und Schuldprojektionen" (Vogt 216) und dennoch den unbestreitbaren Wert haben, die Komplexität der Beziehung zur Vergangenheit aufzuzeigen und die verschiedenen, wenn auch oft nur partiellen, Varianten der Auslotung der deutschen Gewissen zu veranschaulichen.

Die Auswirkungen des Nationalsozialismus äußern sich nicht nur in der Beziehung der Deutschen zu den anderen Völkern, sondern auch in der Auflösung von Familienbanden, die im Namen des Treueschwurs an den Führer seitens der Ehrgeizigsten und größten Opportunisten zu Bruch gehen. Im *Totentanz* (1946) von Bernhard Kellermann treffen der Richter aus einer kleinen Industriestadt, Frank Fabian, Offizier und katholisch, und der Bruder Wolfgang Fabian, Bildhauer und Gegner des Hitlerregimes, aufeinander. Frank Fabian wird Offizier der Luftfahrtstaffel und Leiter des "Büro Aufbau", muss jedoch seinen ungezügelten Machthunger mit dem Verlust der Beziehungen zu den ihm teuren Personen bezahlen, die nicht zufällig Regimegegner sind, wie auch mit der Nähe zu hassenswerten Individuen, wie dem Gauleiter Rumpf. Der Bruder dagegen, der infolge seiner Erfahrung im KZ Birkholz körperlich und moralisch zerstört ist, stellt den Spiegel von Franks schlechtem Gewissen dar, der sich schließlich voller Scham das Leben nimmt. Die Hauptfigur im Roman *Das Beil von Wandsbek* (1947, erstmals 1943 auf hebräisch veröffentlicht) von Arnold Zweig bringt sich ebenfalls um, da man ihn als Mörder eines Kommunisten entlarvt, während er versucht, sich in der Unternehmenswelt ein neues Leben aufzubauen (Melchert 107-114). In beiden Fällen liegt eine Situation vor, in der fehlgeschlagenes Streben und die Wahrnehmung des Untergangs einen Mechanismus der Selbstzerstörung auslösen, der



jedoch nicht über eine herangereifte, bewusste Sühne der aus ideologischen Gründen begangenen Schuld verläuft.

In einem Interview für die "Göttinger Universitätszeitung" vom 24. Oktober 1947 hatte sich Thomas Mann der Vorstellung gegenüber als zuversichtlich erwiesen, Deutschland wieder einen Besuch abzustatten. Er lebte nun schon seit 1933 im Exil. Das aber nur für kurze Zeit und vielleicht eher in der Hoffnung auf eine Wiederherstellung der intellektuellen Exzellenz, die die deutsche Kultur seit der Goethezeit ausgezeichnet hatte (und um mit Meinecke über das Nationalgefühl und den liberalen Geist des Landes zu sprechen) (Meinecke 1946), als wegen realer gefühlsmäßiger Bindung an das Vaterland. Die Rede kam auf Whitman, George und Rilke, aber auch auf Zuckmayer, der 1946 mit seinem Stück *Des Teufels General* das Gewissen der Deutschen erschüttert hatte (Mann, *Gespräch* 285). Dieses vom Autor in den USA verfasste Theaterstück wurde zum ersten Mal 1946 in Zürich aufgeführt und danach wurde es zwischen 1950 und 1955 fünftausend Mal in den Theatern inszeniert, bis es 1955 unter der Regie von Helmut Käutner auch zu einer Filmversion kam. Auf einem Tatsachenbericht beruhend wirft die Angelegenheit mehr als nur eine Frage bezüglich der Botschaft auf, die der Schriftsteller dem Publikum vermitteln will. Die Figur des Oberst und Führer einer Kampfstaffel, Friedrich Eilers, der dem General Harras, dem Protagonisten, unterstellt ist, zeichnet die Rolle von Ernst Udet nach, der 1941 unter geheimnisvollen Umständen ums Leben kam. Die Figur von Harras, um die sich der Text dreht, ist gespalten zwischen der notwendigen Teilnahme an Hitlers militärischem Vorhaben, demgegenüber er sich aus Ehre verpflichtet fühlt und dem "inneren Widerstand", der bei mehr als einer Gelegenheit zum Vorschein kommt, was der deutliche Bezug zur Solidarität mit den Juden zum Ausdruck bringt.

Somit behandelt Zuckmayer alle von den Alliierten in der Nachkriegszeit erhofften vitalen Themen zur Sühnung der Schuld: das vollständige Auslöschen des Mythos von der Überlegenheit der aryanischen Rasse, die Nutzung der Industrie für friedliche Zwecke, die Abkehr vom siegessicheren nationalsozialistischen Geist, die Läuterung von jeglicher Form des Antisemitismus. Dazu bemerkt Vogt recht zutreffend:

Harras [entspricht] sehr wohl einer in der Wehrmacht (und besonders der elitären Luftwaffe) verbreiteten Haltung. Sie trennt militärisches Handeln und soldatisches Ethos von der "unsauberen" Politik schlechthin und von der des Obergefreiten

Hitler erst recht. Sie trennt, anders gesagt, eigenes schuldhaftes Tun von einer scheinbar unkorumpierbaren Identität ab und entwirkt sie tendenziell (219).

Vielleicht hat auch Mann diesen Eindruck gewonnen, wenn er dem Journalisten gesteht, Zuckmayer könne anscheinend seine Figuren nicht in Schwarz-Weiß schildern, und diese Tatsache laufe schließlich in eine sträfliche Anschauungslosigkeit hinaus.

Festzustellen ist, dass die persönliche Erfahrung der Dramaturgen und Schriftsteller zur Schilderung unterschiedlicher Typologien von Heimkehrern aus dem Krieg, dem Exil, der inneren Migration führt, was sich autobiographisch in den Hauptfiguren ihrer Geschichten widerspiegelt, oder in den Figuren, bei denen die schwierige Beziehung zwischen innerem Unbehagen und dem Elend der sie umgebenden Welt aufgezeigt wird. Bodo Uhse, von 1927 bis 1930 Mitglied der NSDAP, der ab 1931 mit der KPD zusammenzuarbeiten begann, schilderte in seinem Prosatext von 1949 *Die heilige Kunigunde im Schnee*, dass man in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus über all das zu schweigen hatte, was für die Existenz eines Individuums zählte, denn die Wahrheit zu sagen war verboten: "Die Begegnung mit dem Wichtigen war schmerzvoll für uns, darum hüteten wir uns vor ihr" (Uhse 52). Das Bewusstsein über die Kollektivschuld kommt hier offenbar in der kollektiven Verteidigung zum Ausdruck, insofern als das Schweigen eine Art Selbstschutz angesichts der Gefahr des Todes war.

Eine Heimkehr ohne ein Vaterland vorzufinden, sondern nur das fassbare Zeichen eines geistlosen Wettlaufs der Zerstörung, veranlasste Schriftsteller dazu, sich dem Augenblick der Abrechnung mit dem eigenen Gewissen zu stellen. Nicht selten stilisiert sich der Intellektuelle in der Figur des Protagonisten selbst, so wie in *Heimkehr in die Fremde* von Walter Kolbenhoff (1949). Einer der wichtigsten Aspekte in diesem Werk ist die kritische Bemerkung zur christlichen Perspektive des Schriftstellers Ernst Wiechert, der in der Stunde Null der deutschen Geschichte sogleich den autobiographischen Roman *Der Totenwald* publiziert hatte, worin er über seine schrecklichen Erfahrungen im Konzentrationslager Buchenwald erzählt. Er war dort als Regimegegner eingewiesen worden. Wiecherts biblischer Ton, mit dem er in einem seiner Artikel das Schicksal des deutschen Volkes anruft, stößt auf die Sensibilität des Ich-Erzählers in Kolbenhoffs Roman, der nur individuelle Geschichten von Elend und moralischer Niederlage kennt und den Appell an eine metaphysische Dimension verschmätzt (Kolbenhoff 19).

Kolbenhoffs *alter ego* distanziert sich von dem zynischen Rinka, mit dem er in Amerika in enger Freundschaft stand, und den er nunmehr in seiner Eigenschaft als Anarchist nicht mehr wiedererkennt. Denn er hat vor, sich den ehemaligen Nazis gegenüber, die Deutschland noch immer bevölkern, sowohl auf eigene Faust Gerechtigkeit zu verschaffen, als auch mithilfe von Idealisten wie dem Vater von Eva, der bereits vor 1933 vom Ruhm der Arbeiterbewegung geträumt hatte. Kolbenhoff stellt den Mangel an Kommunikation zwischen den Generationen in den Vordergrund und bestätigt die Ideen Meineckes und Arendts von der Zerstörung des solidarischen Paktes zwischen den Individuen als Folge von Hitlers Politik, der sich im Falle einer militärischen Niederlage den Untergang von ganz Deutschland herbeiwünschte. Der erwartete nihilistische Ausgang des Romans wird jedoch mit der Hoffnung auf eine Wiedergeburt überwunden, die der Ich-Erzähler in den Kriegsheimkehrer legt. Dieser könnte sich unter Umständen mit seiner zu Hause auf ihn wartenden Gefährtin wieder ein neues Leben aufbauen.

### *Zum Vermächtnis der Schuldfrage*

Wenn man versuchen will, zu erklären, warum nach dem Berliner Mauerfall und der Wiedervereinigung die Kritik sich so intensiv mit den Schriftstellern und Künstlern beschäftigte, die das Trauma des Zweiten Weltkriegs erlebt hatten, kann man sicherlich den Grund dafür darin ausmachen, dass sie die eigentlichen Verwahrer der "Erinnerungsliteratur" waren und ebenso die Gefangenen in der problematischen Verflechtung von der Notwendigkeit zu erzählen und der starken politischen Konditionierung. Ihre Zeitzeugnisse hat die zweite und dann die dritte Nachkriegsgeneration versucht, zu sammeln. Hardtwig bemerkt weiter, dass das heutige Interesse an den in der Nachkriegszeit geborenen Autoren hingegen geringer ist, da diese von der Teilnahme an dem Krieg nicht betroffen waren und so eine weniger schwere Beziehung zur Vergangenheit hatten als die vorhergehende Generation:

Die Erzähler müssen miterzählen, woher sie ihre Erinnerung an diese Jahre haben, wie gesichert und ungesichert, wie komplex oder fragil sie ist. Sie müssen den Prozess und die Anstrengung des Erinnerns selbst darstellen. Sie brauchen neue Plausibilisierungsstrategien für ihre Geschichten. Zu Recht ist daher festgestellt

worden, dass die Bezeichnung "Erinnerungsliteratur" für die aktuelle Literatur über den Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust missverständlich ist. Denn diese Literatur erinnert uns zwar an die Geschichte und formt damit das Geschichtsbild mit, aber diese Literatur erinnert "'sich' nicht" (12).

Sebald war besonders von bestimmten Autorenfiguren fasziniert, nämlich die Schriftsteller, die Ende des 19. und zu Beginn des 20. Jh. geboren wurden und sicher nicht der "gehobenen" Literatur zuzurechnen waren. Unter Gefahr gelang es ihnen, mit dem Nationalsozialismus zu leben und die entwickelten in ihren literarischen Werken eine Form von "Mythologisierung" der Realität; diese bot ihnen sicheres Geleit in eine Art Limbus, in dem die Schuld sublimiert werden konnte. Wie ist es aber möglich, die emotionale und mithin auch literarische Beziehung von historischer Katastrophe und Hoffnung auf Wiedergeburt auszuhalten?

Die Themen und die Atmosphäre in einigen Romanen, die der Strömung des "magischen Realismus" zugeschrieben wurden, erlebten nach 1989 den Höhepunkt ihrer öffentlichen Anerkennung. Denn Sebald hat sie der Thematik des Leidens der Deutschen zugeordnet, wegen der von ihnen angeführten Repressalien durch den Luftkrieg oder aufgrund ihrer Eigenart, das Thema von Deutschlands Untergang in eben poetisch-mythischer Form zu verklären. Eigentlich geben Autoren wie Kasack, Nossack und Peter de Mendelssohn Sebald Gelegenheit, die hauchdünne Grenze zwischen der Sprache und den zur Darstellung einer lemurischen Welt ausgesuchten Szenarien aufzuspüren, zur Inszenierung eines Hades, in dem die Heimkehrer und Überlebenden wie Gespenster umherziehen. Ein Verdienst dieser Autoren ist ohne weiteres die klare Schilderung des Zustands der moralischen Demotivierung des deutschen Volkes und die photographische Aufnahme von Deutschlands Trümmerlandschaft. Doch die Verwendung von allegorischen Mitteln und esoterischer Atmosphäre verrät unmissverständlich die Zugehörigkeit der Schriftsteller zu einer nunmehr untergegangenen Welt. Für Kasack gelten die Zuschreibungen "pseudohumanistische und fernöstliche Philosophismen" (Sebald 56), für de Mendelssohn "melodramatischer Ton" (Sebald 60). Nossack ersetze, so der Germanist Mittner, das historisch-geographische Alibi durch das "metaphysische",

Die Literatur der lemurischen und apokalyptischen Trostlosigkeit offenbart sich uns [heute] vor allem in der Literatur des vagen und unbeschreibbaren, jedoch

starken Trostes, einer unauslöschlichen Hoffnung, die als absurdum gerade aus der Betrachtung der Ruinen entspringt, die nicht ohne einen Lebenskeim sein konnten, eben weil aus ihnen das Leben völlig entwichen schien [...] Bisweilen lebt ein Schuldbewusstsein auf, aber der Held der *lemurischen Welten* ist vor allem ein vom Krieg psychisch Traumatisierter (Mittner 1566f.).

Den psychisch Traumatisierten wurde erst wieder nach 1989 Bedeutung und Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt, u.a. in den Familienromanen. Darauf verweist der Germanist Gerhard Friedrich in seinem Aufsatz *Opfererinnerungen nach der deutschen Vereinigung als "Familienroman"*, der zur abschließenden Krönung dieses synthetischen Überblicks über die Literatur zur Schuldfrage folgendermaßen beginnt:

Es ist nicht wirklich neu, dass Deutsche sich als Kriegsoffer wahrnehmen. Das war in der Rhetorik der Vertriebenenverbände, in rechtsradikalen Schriften und in der privaten Erinnerung der Familien schon immer das dominante Motiv in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Erfahrung des Krieges. Neu ist seit Mitte der 90er Jahre: Die erinnernde Wahrnehmung der Deutschen als Kriegsoffer wird sowohl in Sachbüchern als auch in der erzählenden Literatur immer häufiger. (205)

Wenn sich also der Aspekt des erlittenen Traumas und das Gefühl des Identitätsverlustes in der Literatur der Nachkriegszeit in die Domäne der Literatur verlagern, um damit einmal mehr einen direkten Zugang zur individuellen Schuldfrage und der kollektiven Verantwortlichkeit zu umgehen, so geht dies eigentlich von der von Willy Brandt am 10. Oktober vor dem Schöneberger Rathaus formulierten Aufforderung zur Wiederentdeckung einer nationalen und nicht nur staatlichen Einheit aus. Vermutlich war das der Auslöser für die nun ganz auf die Familie und die Beziehungen zwischen den Generationen gerichtete Aufmerksamkeit. Dennoch stehen Familienroman und – biographie nicht nur für ein literarisches Phänomen als Folgeerscheinung der Pop-Literatur Anfang der 90er Jahre, vielmehr verhält es sich so wie in Friedrichs Überlegung:

Die generelle Privatheit der Inhalte dieser Erinnerungsliteratur reflektiert gerade das große Problem der Deutschen mit ihrer jüngsten Geschichte. Sie reflektiert das Akzeptieren des auch nach der Vereinigung noch gültigen "Verbots" Opfererinnerungen als "sacrificium" zu interpretieren und sie damit über den Bereich der individuellen Erfahrung hinaus in ein verallgemeinerndes und sinnstiftendes Narrativ zu überführen und ist damit alles andere als "einfach" persönlich und spontan, wie es die Erzählung des Opas für seine Enkel tatsächlich wäre. (218)

Walters Position ist eine Umkehrung dieser Tendenz. Er betont, dass die Spektakularisierung der Zeitzeugenschaft und die Romanproduktion nicht notwendigerweise miteinander im Einklang stehen müssten. Vielmehr sei es besser, wenn die Erzählliteratur und die historiographische Literatur keine gemeinsamen Ziele hätten. Grass hingegen hat, wie bereits bemerkt, wiederum den entgegengesetzten Weg eingeschlagen, als er in der letzten Phase seines Lebens das Geständnis seiner eigenen jugendlichen politischen Schuld in *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* als mindestens so dringend empfand wie die Veröffentlichung eines neuen wertvollen Werks, das eben durch den ausgelösten Skandal um seine politisch-moralische Tragfähigkeit und nicht seines dichterischen Wertes wegen, ein großes öffentliches Interesse erfahren hat.



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# “Bist du Jugoslawe oder was? Ich bin das Oder Was”: Topographie der Traumata in Vladimir Vertlibs *Zwischenstationen*

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“forgiveness only forgives the unforgivable”  
(Derrida 32)

## *1. Einleitung*

Krieg, Vertreibung und Gewalt sind alles traumatische Ereignisse, die zweifelsohne, vor allem in der Kindheit und Jugend, psychische oder auch physische Traumata auslösen können. Ein Trauma kann durch eine physische Verletzung am Körper oder auch durch eine psychische Belastung im Geist verursacht werden. Es gibt viele Wege, Traumata zu überwinden: Beim Niederschreiben persönlicher Traumata versuchen manche AutorInnen der deutschsprachigen Literatur, ihre seelischen und körperlichen Wunden zu Papier zu bringen und folglich ihre Traumata zu bewältigen. Diesen Weg “der Heilung” wählte auch der österreichische Schriftsteller russisch-jüdischer Herkunft, Vladimir Vertlib, der in seinem Buch *Zwischenstationen* die Odyssee einer sowjetisch-jüdischen Migrantenfamilie auf ihrem Weg in den Westen erzählt.

Der vorliegende Beitrag gliedert sich in zwei Teile: Zunächst werden Konzepte der *Traumaforschung* in der Literatur dargestellt. Ferner wird die Darstellung von Traumata in der zeitgenössischen deutschsprachigen Migrationsliteratur in groben Zügen erörtert und im Hinblick auf ihre Gestaltung in Städten als *Erinnerungsorte* diskutiert. Im Anschluss daran

wird das Buch *Zwischenstationen* vorgestellt und die Relevanz dieses Buchs für die Schilderung des Traumas und dessen Verhältnis zur Stadt als Ort traumatischer Prozesse aufgezeigt.

## 2. *Trauma und Literatur*: Turning Trauma into Literary Narrative

Zuvor soll jedoch der Begriff *Trauma* definitorisch umrissen werden. Das körperliche Trauma (von griech. τραύμα “Verletzung oder Wunde”) ist eine Verletzung des Organismus, die durch plötzliche schmerzhaftere äußere Ereignisse, wie Unfälle und Gewalttätigkeiten, hervorgerufen wird. Das psychologische Trauma entsteht als Konsequenz aus einem Ereignis oder einer Reihe von Ereignissen, die das Individuum eine Erfahrung machen lassen, die als kritisch und schwierig erlebt wird. Obwohl im Rahmen der Kulturwissenschaften der Begriff des *Traumas* in der Zwischenzeit ziemlich inflationär gebraucht wird und zu einem Modewort geworden ist, gilt immer noch das, was Cathy Caruth in ihrer Studie ausgeführt hat:

There is no firm definition of trauma, which has been given various descriptions at various times and under different names. However, in its most general description, trauma is described as an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (181).

Diesbezüglich hat Campana betont, dass der Trauma-Begriff heute inflationär verwendet wird und “[...] auf eine Integration der Gewalt und des gewalttätigen Hereinbrechens, die ihre Opfer stets mit zerbrochener Identität und affizierten Körpern zurücklassen, [verzichtet]” (Campana 10). Eine traumatische Erfahrung verursacht langfristige Veränderungen des Körpers, des Geistes und der Seele, die zwangsläufig die Identität ändern und häufig eine lebenslange Belastung bleiben. Auch Assmann hat den elastischen Trauma-Begriff einzuengen versucht, er bezieht sich dabei ausschließlich auf die Opfer historischer Ereignisse und Verbrechen, wie zum Beispiel die Sklaverei und den Genozid an diversen Völkern, die unsere Geschichte bis ins 20. Jahrhundert und darüber hinaus prägen. Diesbezüglich hat er betont:

Der Trauma-Begriff, der erst 1980 ins Handbuch der Amerikanischen Psychiatrie eingetragen worden ist, sollte m. E. ausschließlich auf die Opfer der Geschichte bezogen werden, wie die aus Afrika verschleppten Sklaven, die durch Feuerwaffen und Bakterien ausgerotteten Ureinwohner verschiedener Kontinente, den Genozid an den Armeniern im Schatten des Ersten Weltkriegs, und den Genozid an den europäischen Juden und anderen entrechteten Minderheiten im Schatten des Zweiten Weltkriegs, sowie auf weitere Genozide des 20. Jahrhunderts (Assmann, *Erinnerungsorte* 5).

In diesem Zusammenhang hat Krall zu Recht dargestellt, dass Trauma Verletzung bedeutet. Traumatisierte Menschen, so Krall, werden mit der Erfahrung konfrontiert, in einer belastenden Situation schutzlos, ohnmächtig und hilflos anderen Menschen oder Ereignissen (Gewalttäter, Krankheit, Krieg etc.) ausgeliefert zu sein (Krall 7). Wie gut ein Trauma verarbeitet wird, hängt von der körperlichen und seelischen Kraft einer Person und der Art des Traumas ab. Für viele Leute, insbesondere für Schriftsteller, ist das Schreiben die beste Strategie, traumatische Erlebnisse zu überwinden. Aber welche Rolle spielt die Literatur in der Verarbeitung traumatischer Erlebnisse? Wenn wir einen Blick auf die Darstellung von Traumata in der Literatur werfen, werden wir gewahr, wie mithilfe der Literatur traumatische Erfahrungen und Ereignisse ins kollektive Gedächtnis integriert und verarbeitet werden. Denn beim Konzept des Traumas sind wir mit einem weiten Feld konfrontiert, das nicht nur aus psychologischer Sicht, sondern auch mit einem größeren Bewusstsein erkundet wird. Die verbindende Kraft des Traumas in der Erzählung wurde bereits von vielen Wissenschaftlern festgestellt. Die Schlussfolgerungen und Ergebnisse der *Trauma Studies* der letzten Jahre haben nicht nur in den Kulturwissenschaften, sondern auch in der Literaturwissenschaft ihre Spuren hinterlassen. Wer heute vom Trauma in der Literatur spricht, greift auf verschiedene Studien und Bereiche zurück: auf *Trauma des Krieges und Literatur* von Assmann (1999), auf *Das hört nicht auf. Trauma, Literatur und Empathie* von Fricke (2004) und auf *Trauma und Literatur: das Nicht-Erzählbare erzählen* von Kopf (2005), um nur einige zu nennen. Wenn Gewalt Sinn zerstört, kann – Kopf zufolge – die Literatur dieser Zerstörung entgegenwirken und es können mit ihrer Hilfe traumatische Erfahrungen ins kollektive Gedächtnis integriert werden. Am Beispiel von zwei populären Autorinnen aus Algerien bzw. Simbabwe, Assia Djebar und Yvonne Vera, versucht Kopf einen Bogen zu spannen, von

der psychoanalytischen Traumaforschung zu einem Konzept von Literatur als Zeugenschaft und Aufarbeitung von Kolonialismus und dessen Folgen (vgl. Kopf, *Trauma und Literatur*). Kopf beschreibt in *Trauma, Narrative and the Art of Witnessing* ebenfalls die positive Wirkung der gegenseitigen Erzählung von erlebten Geschehnissen. Laut Kopf ist der Akt des Zuhörens und Mitfühlens genauso wichtig, wie der Akt des Erzählens selbst, da so das traumatisch Erlebte vom Opfer am besten in sein Erinnerungsgedächtnis integriert und transformiert werden kann (43). Eine andere Meinung dazu hat Gobodo-Madikizela, der Trauma als “loss of control, loss of one’s identity, loss of the ability to remember, and loss of a language to describe the horrific events“ (vii) definiert. Trauma wird hier als Verlust der Kontrolle und der eigenen Identität festgelegt, was dazu führt, dass die Fähigkeit, sich zu erinnern und das traumatisch Erlebte in Worte zu fassen, verloren geht bzw. unterbunden wird. Doch kann Literatur tatsächlich heilend wirken? Durch die Mittel des Erzählens kann ein Trauma geheilt werden, denn beim schriftlichen und mentalen Erfassen und Erzählen des Erlebten kann das Trauma erstmals bewusst und direkt “angesprochen werden” und damit ein Heilungsprozess ausgelöst werden. Über Erzählung und Trauma äußern sich Gobodo-Madikizela und Von der Merwe folgendermaßen:

[t]urning trauma into literary narrative means turning chaos into structure. A narrative has a topic, and normally keeps to that point; the plot of the story usually creates a causal link between different events; characters act according to their identities, and their actions show some kind of continuity; and patterns are created and repeated to indicate central themes. In all these ways, the shattering effect of the trauma is transformed by the author into (relative) coherence and unity (Gobodo-Madikizela 60).

Durch den Erzählprozess wird das vorherrschende Chaos im Kopf strukturiert und geordnet. Die traumatischen Ereignisse werden in Worte gefasst und in eine Handlung eingefügt. Die schrecklichen Gedanken, hervorgerufen durch das Trauma, werden nun beschrieben und dem Zuhörer und sich selbst erklärt, somit können im Erzähler Einheit und Ordnung entstehen, die den Gedankenkreislauf erstmals durchbrechen. Das ist im Grunde die potenzielle Macht der Literatur.

### 3. Städte als Orte der Erinnerung und des Traumas

“Menschen lagern ihre Erinnerung nicht nur in Zeichen und Gegenstände aus, sondern auch in Orte, in Zimmer, Innenhöfe, Städte, öffentliche Plätze und Landschaften”, so Assmann in ihren Überlegungen über Gedächtnisorte in Raum und Zeit (*Der Schatten* 217). Wenn wir in unserem Gedächtnis Traumata mit Orten verbinden, dann werden Städte, Grenzen und Landschaften als Erinnerungsorte dargestellt, die als “langlebige, Generationen überdauernde Kristallisationspunkte kollektiver Erinnerung und Identität” zu verstehen sind (Etienne und Schulze 7). Unser Gedächtnis enthält verschiedene Orte unserer Kindheit, die traumatisch und nicht traumatisch sein können. Traumatische Orte können semiauthentisch und überdeterminiert sein, da sie sich in einem unklaren Zwischenraum zwischen Authentizität und Inszenierung, zwischen Retention und Rekonstruktion befinden, ferner ist ihr Gedächtnis uneinheitlich und irreduzibel (Assmann, *Firma* 204 f.). Mit negativen Erlebnissen behaftete Orte, die man im Laufe des Lebens erlebt, sind Teil unseres Gedächtnisses, unseres Wesens und unserer Identität.

Das Verhältnis zwischen Trauma und Identität wird in der Forschung kontrovers diskutiert. Traumatische Erfahrungen und Orte stellen eine Diskontinuität der Identität dar und beeinflussen die Persönlichkeit eines Individuums. “Trauma”, so schreibt Assmann in dem zitierten Aufsatz, “ist ein Gegenbegriff zu Identität. Traumatische Erfahrungen von Leid und Scham finden nur schwer Einlass ins Gedächtnis, weil diese nicht in ein positives individuelles oder kollektives Selbstbild integriert werden können” (Assmann, *Erinnerungsorte* 5). Traumatische Erfahrungen werden nicht in das eigene Selbstbild aufgenommen, da sie vom Gedächtnis automatisch verdrängt werden und nicht zu einem positiven Selbstbild beitragen würden. Dieser automatische Vorgang des Selbstschutzes, der im Trauma-Konzept anzusiedeln ist, grenzt sich von unserem Verständnis der persönlichen Identität ab und wird mit spezifischen Orten verbunden.

Unter den vielen Autoren, die in ihren Werken Traumata und Städte als Erinnerungsorte aufs Papier gebracht haben, sind vor allem die Werke von Morrison und Sebald “the two most recognized of trauma fiction” (Luckhurst 90) zu nennen. Morrison und Sebald sind nicht die einzigen, es gibt andere Autoren der zeitgenössischen deutschsprachigen Migrationsliteratur, die unterschiedliche Traumata erlitten und aufs Papier gebracht haben. Sie erzählen von Kriegen und Terror, von schwierigen

Identitäten, traumatischen Erfahrungen an den Grenzen und von Überwindung von Klischees, in, durch und außerhalb von Deutschland, zwischen Irak, Aserbaidschan, Schlesien, Serbien und Bosnien. Einige Beispiele dafür sind: die Geschichte einer Entführung im Irak in dem Werk von Sherko Fatah, Preisträger des Adelbert-von-Chamisso-Preises 2015, *Der letzte Ort* (2015). Die Protagonisten Albert, ein Deutscher, der im Irak arbeitet, und Osama, sein Übersetzer, werden von religiösen Extremisten als Geiseln genommen. Krieg, Vertreibung, Familienkonflikte, Traumata und Neurosen sind Themen in dem Werk von Ulrike Draesner *Sieben Sprünge vom Rand der Welt* (2014), deren Romanfiguren Bombenangriffe, Hunger und Tod erlebt haben und traumatisiert sind. Olga Grjasnowa hat in ihrem Werk *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012) die Geschichte einer traumatisierten Studentin, einem jüdischen Kontingentflüchtling aus Aserbaidschan, erzählt. Das Trauma an den Grenzen wird ferner auch im Buch *Einsamkeit mit rollendem "r"* (2014) von Ilma Rakusa und in der Erzählung *Seltsame Materie* (2000) von Terézia Mora am Rande thematisiert. Der Bosnien-Krieg wird aus der Sicht eines Kindes im Roman *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert* (2014) von Saša Stanišić betrachtet. Der junge Protagonist flieht wegen des Bürgerkriegs in Bosnien mit seinen Eltern in den Westen. Auch die Protagonistin in dem Roman *Tauben fliegen auf* (2010) von Melinda Nadj Abonji, deren traumatische Kindheitserlebnisse mit ihren Erfahrungen in der Gegenwart eng verwoben sind, stammt aus dem ehemaligen Jugoslawien. Die verschiedenen traumatischen und nicht traumatischen Orte befinden sich in Abonjis Roman zwischen der Schweiz und Serbien. In all diesen Werken wird die Emigration als ein schmerzvoller Prozess und eine traumatische Erfahrung beschrieben, wobei die Wunden der Erzähler, dank Papier und Stift, langsam zu (ver)heilen scheinen.

#### 4. Vladimir Vertlibs Zwischenstationen

“Ein Deutsch schreibender jüdischer Russe, der zur Zeit in Österreich lebt” (Vertlib, *Spiegel* 139): Mit dieser Formulierung Vladimir Vertlibs könnte man gut das Profil dieses interkulturellen Autors beschreiben. Was sein literarisches Werk betrifft, ist seine schriftstellerische Heimat der “Grenzbereich, die Gleichzeitigkeit und das Nebeneinander” (Vertlib, *Spiegel* 59). Ein Autor, der mit seiner Beschreibung ständiger



Veränderungen, Stationen in der Diaspora und mit oft autobiografischen Passagen aus der Sicht eines Kindes im Roman *Zwischenstationen* einen herausragenden Platz in der Szene der interkulturellen Literatur besetzt. 1966 wurde Vladimir Vertlib in Leningrad (heute Sankt Petersburg), UdSSR, geboren. Fünf Jahre später mussten die Eltern wegen des Antisemitismus das Land verlassen, um danach verschiedene Stationen zu durchlaufen: Israel, Österreich, Italien, Österreich, die Niederlande und dann wieder Israel, wieder Italien, wieder Österreich, dann New York, Boston und dann schließlich und endgültig Österreich. Eine komplexe und vielfältige Topografie der Traumata verbunden einerseits mit einem Kosmopolitismus und andererseits mit einer gescheiterten Zugehörigkeit zum Nirgendwo, die mit verschiedenen Gefühlen von Angst aufgrund komplexer Traumata gemischt ist. Vertlib ist ein Autor, der seine eigenen traumatischen Erlebnisse literarisiert und Fremdheit und Heimatverlust in der Abbildung verschiedener Erinnerungs- und traumatischer Wohnorte seines Lebens thematisiert hat. In diesem Zusammenhang hat Conterno zu Recht betont, dass der Protagonist des Romans *„mehrfache Traumata“* erlebt: dem Trauma der Emigration mit dem gleichzeitigen zwanghaften Erlernen einer neuen Sprache und dem Einfügen in eine neue Kultur werden das Trauma des psycho-physischen Wachstums und der Konfrontation mit der jüdischen Identität beigefügt. Dazu kommen noch andere kleine Traumata, Enttäuschungen und Niederlagen und durch deren Wechselwirkung ergeben sich Wunden, die oft schwer heilbar sind (Conterno 271).

In dem 1999 erschienenen Roman *Zwischenstationen* hat Vertlib aktuelle Situationen, wie etwa die Alltagssituationen von Einwanderern, die Schwierigkeiten des Ausländers, die Stärken und auch Schwächen der Mehrsprachigkeit und was es bedeutet, Jude zu sein, beschrieben. Die Traumata, die der Protagonist erlebt, bekommt der Leser nicht auf jeder Seite zu spüren, sondern sie sind durch eine feine Ironie verschleiert. Der Protagonist in *Zwischenstationen* ist ein *„junger Pikaro“* (Kucher 182), der durch den erzwungenen ständigen Ortswechsel verschiedene Traumata erlebt, aber am Ende seiner Odyssee ein klareres Bewusstsein von sich selbst erlangt und dadurch seine Wunden heilen kann. Bei Kindern und Jugendlichen, so Krall, können traumatische Erfahrungen physische und psychische Verletzungen hervorrufen, die den Entwicklungs- und Sozialisationsprozess nachhaltig beeinträchtigen (7). Die Erzählerfigur in dem Buch *Zwischenstationen* ist ein namenlos bleibendes Kind, das im

Jahre 1971 noch nicht wusste, dass die Zeit im Exil lange dauern würde und dass es weite Teile der Welt bereisen würde, auf der Suche nach finanzieller Stabilität und nach unbeschwerter Sorglosigkeit.

Obwohl ich, wie mir scheint, schon zwanzig Jahre unterwegs bin, werden die Zielbahnhöfe angeblich erreicht. Auch meine Heimatstadt Leningrad verließen wir mit dem Zug, damals, als wir aus Rußland emigrierten, meine Eltern und ich. An jenen Abend erinnere ich mich genau. Man hatte mir, einem Kind von fünf Jahren, nicht gesagt, daß wir auswanderten. Ich ging in den Kindergarten, und jegliches Geplapper hätte gefährlich werden können. Stattdessen hieß es, wir machten eine lange Reise, ein Begriff, den man verwenden konnte, ohne das Kind belügen zu müssen (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 8).

Mit diesen Worten schildert die Erzählerfigur im Roman *Zwischenstationen* das Exil ihrer Familie aus Russland, indem sie den Leser *in medias res* mitten in das Erlebte einführt und mit dem Verständnis eines Erwachsenen nochmals das Erlebte Revue passieren lässt. Das ist nur der Anfang einer Reise in die verschiedenen Länder und Kulturen aufgrund der Migrationsversuche ihrer Familien (die Familie der Erzählerfigur); eine lange und fordernde Reise, bei der sich das Leben der Protagonisten zwangsläufig verändert. In *Zwischenstationen* erlebt der Protagonist die Situation aus überraschender Distanz, obwohl er oft heimlich die ständigen Streitereien der Eltern, die Ängste, die Traumata mitbekommt und immer neue Zweifel aufkommen. Die Stationen, das Unbekannte, die benachbarten fremden Österreicher, die vom Fenster aus lauschen, und die ständige Instabilität machen aus ihm ein besonderes Kind, das sich auf jeder Seite des Romans deutlich von den anderen Kindern unterscheidet. Es ist eine schwierige Situation, die jedoch aus der Kindheitsperspektive mit einem ganz eigenen und manchmal humoristischen Unterton, der keine Zwischentöne kennt, präsentiert wird. Diese Erzählperspektive beeindruckt den Leser von der ersten bis zur letzten Seite des Buches, da die Erzählweise ständig wechselt. Ort und Zeit sind gut definiert und in eine Atmosphäre bestehend aus Freundschaft und Einsamkeit, Trauma und Stille, Bewegung und Langweile, Heimat und Heimatlosigkeit und Fremdem und Eigenem eingebettet. Die Erzählung besteht aus kontinuierlichen Bewegungen, unendlichen Haltestellen und Metropolen, die mit einer Rückblende in die Anfänge der Emigration des Ich-Erzählers beginnen und sich wie ein Kreis in Österreich in der Vorstadt Salzburgs schließen, wo der Protagonist

am Ende des Buches “ein peripheres Dasein führen” wird (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 291).

### 5. *Topographie der Traumata*

Die zahlreichen und ganz unterschiedlichen Städte, Räume und Plätze, die in Vertlibs *Zwischenstationen* eine wesentliche Rolle spielen, lassen so eine leicht überschaubare Topographie von Traumata aus der Kindes-Perspektive entstehen, an denen der Leser mit starkem Interesse und mit dem Gefühl, immer woanders zu sein, teilnimmt. St. Petersburg, Tel Aviv, Wien, Rom, Wien, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Rom, Wien, Brooklyn, wieder Wien und Salzburg: Langsam stößt der Protagonist und damit auch der Leser selbst in entfernte, fremde Städte vor und letzterer erlebt die Erfahrung, in mehreren Welten zu Hause zu sein, mit. Vertlib ist ein Autor, der Geschichten zusammenfügt, seine Orte der Erinnerung und der Traumata in *Zwischenstationen* reflektiert und sich von den Zwischenstationen der Lebensläufe seiner Protagonisten inspirieren lässt. Es sind Bruchstücke eines Lebens, das ständig verschiedene traumatische Orte wechselt, die aber alle verbunden sind mit der schwierigen Suche nach dem Gleichgewicht zwischen Gegenwart und Vergangenheit, angetrieben vom Bedürfnis des Autors, die Begebenheiten nachzuerzählen, die eine Veränderung bewirkt haben. Teilweise sind die Szenen in den Kontext der europäischen, amerikanischen und israelischen Geschichte der Gegenwart eingebunden. Das Kind hat kein richtiges Heimweh, obwohl es immer das Gefühl hat, im Dazwischen zu sein. Der Junge hat Heimweh ohne Heimat. Er weiß nicht, was er wirklich will, er ist müde, verängstigt, aber auch oft Träumer, trotz der Zweifel und Ängste, die ihn bekümmern.

Vielleicht kehren wir tatsächlich nach Israel zurück. Ich weiß nicht, ob ich das will. Ich weiß längst nicht mehr, was ich wirklich will. Manchmal mache ich Runden durch den Bezirk und stelle mir vor, ich sei anderswo, in einem fernen Land, dessen Namen ich nicht wissen möchte (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 228).

Am Anfang des Buches gründen die Traumata des Protagonisten auf den erlebten historischen Geschehnissen rund um die Sowjetunion im Jahre 1971. Der Autor schildert eine unangenehme Schlüsselszene, die er in seinen noch jungen Jahren erlebte hatte, in der seine Schlafstätte samt

Schreibtischschubladen von zwei Männern durchsucht und durchwühlt wurden. Die Angst in jenen Jahren sei allgegenwärtig gewesen und weit verbreitet unter seinen Mitmenschen, schildert der Protagonist mit kindlichem Ton:

1971 stand die Existenz der Sowjetunion noch für mindestens zweihundert Jahre fest, und der Eisene Vorhang trennte für immer. Als ich die Eltern fragte, warum alle weinten, gaben sie keine Antwort, sahen weg zu Boden (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 9).

Die Leute haben Angst vor möglichen Racheaktionen und das kleine Kind versteckt sich zwischen den Rücken der Oma, immer wenn sie einer suspekten Person trifft. In Tel Aviv etwa begegnet der Protagonist einem ukrainischen Kind, das sich in einer unverständlichen Sprache äußert, es klingt weder wie russisch noch wie hebräisch. Diese Begegnung löst in ihm einen Schrecken aus und lässt ihn einige Schritte zurückweichen. Gequält von seltsamen Gewissensbissen kann er nachts nicht einschlafen. Die Angst begleitet ihn viele Male in diesem Land: Angst, sich bei seinen erkrankten Zimmerkollegen anzustecken und auch vor seinen niedergeschlagenen Eltern, die sich mehr denn je stritten. Die Rückkehr nach Wien stellt – nach den enttäuschenden Erfahrungen in Israel – keine Verbesserung dar. In Wien wohnt der Protagonist und seine Familie in einem Haus in Brigittenau, das fast ausschließlich von russischen Juden belegt ist. Die Menschen in Wien sind generell niedergeschlagen und in der Luft liegt Nervosität, die sich langsam in Verzweiflung verwandelt, schildert der Protagonist, der sich nachts nicht mehr alleine auf den eiskalten Korridor wagt. Er spielt mit den Kindern anderer Immigranten und manchmal denkt er, dass er in Israel sei und andere Male wieder in Russland, auch wenn er und seine Familie in Wirklichkeit nun in Wien leben. In der österreichischen Hauptstadt ist die Angst jedoch eine andere: jene Angst, dass man die Nachmittage alleine verbringen muss, während die Eltern arbeiten. Panik erfasst ihn und er hört nicht auf zu weinen und schlägt die Türe mit seinen blutenden Händen zu. In Amsterdam jedoch versucht er, die Wartezeit mit Spaziergängen zu überbrücken. Seine Familie wartet (zunächst) auf eine Arbeiterlaubnis in den Niederlanden, danach auf eine Aufenthaltserlaubnis und schließlich gar auf ein niederländisches Visum, auch ein französisches, ein norwegisches.

Amsterdam war ein durchschaubares Labyrinth aus Wasser und Stein. Auf unseren Spaziergängen suchten wir immer nur die Wartezeit abzukürzen. Doch die Zeit schien stillzustehen. Zuerst warteten wir auf eine niederländische Arbeitsbewilligung, dann auf eine Aufenthaltsgenehmigung, auf ein neuseeländisches Visum, ein schwedisches, ein französisches, ein norwegisches. Zehnmal zum Bahnhof und zurück, und es kam die erste Absage. Nach zwölf Spaziergängen kam die nächste, nach sieben weiteren die übernächste [...] “Dein Vater wartet auf die Zukunft”, sagte Mutter. “Es ist, als würde er einem Regenbogen nachlaufen oder seinen eigenen Schatten fangen wollen” (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 77).

In dieser Szene ist der Protagonist mit dem Vater in Amsterdam, sie warten vergeblich auf eine Aufenthaltsgenehmigung. Die beiden versuchen, die Zeit des Wartens mit ihren langen Spaziergängen zu überbrücken, obwohl die Zeit still zu stehen scheint. Der Protagonist fühlt sich wie erdrückt von den Menschen.

Nach der langen Fahrt schwankte der Boden unter meinen Füßen. Die vielen Menschen um mich herum schienen mich erdrücken zu wollen. Laute in einer fremden Sprache schlugen auf mich ein Eine weibliche Stimme bellte Unverständliches lautsprecherverzerrt durch den Raum. Die Worte auf den Reklameschildern und Anzeigetafeln kamen mir vertraut vor. Trotzdem konnte ich sie nicht verstehen (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 86).

Der Protagonist wartet, umgeben von Fremden, deren Sprache er nicht versteht. Er hat ein Gefühl von Angst, Abscheu und Ekel und will nicht ständig weggehen. In Italien verkriecht er sich in seinem Zimmer mit seinem Koffer voller Bücher und, anstatt die Zeit auf den Schulbänken zu verbringen, verbringt er sie in den Vorzimmern der Büros und Konsulate. Er weint, wenn ihn die Menschen beleidigen und *Tschusch* oder *Ausländer-Kind* nennen. In Boston kann er nachts nicht schlafen, er schwitzt und stellt sich (schon) die Polizei vor, die an seine Tür klopft, weil er eine falsche Sozialversicherungsnummer in der Bibliothek angegeben hat. Die letzte Etappe im Buch ist Salzburg, eine Stadt, die endlich eine positive Seite an sich hatte und keine traurigen Erinnerungen der Kindheit und der Emigration hervorrief: “Etwas Positives hat die Übersiedlung nach Salzburg allemal. Diese Stadt hat nichts mit all den Erinnerungen an früher zu tun, an Kindheit, an Emigration” (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 286), schreibt er. In Salzburg kann der Protagonist am Ende der Odyssee schreiben, ohne von seinen Emotionen übermannt zu werden, da er in seinem neuen

Leben in der zauberhaften österreichischen Stadt nicht ständig mit seinen Erinnerungen an die Emigration konfrontiert wird und diese nicht immer wieder neu durchleben muss. Die letzte Übersiedlung nach Salzburg hat etwas Positives, weil die Stadt “nichts mit all den Erinnerungen an früher, an Kindheit, an Emigration” (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 286) zu tun hat. An Wien hat er zu viele Erinnerungen:

In Wien werden die Straßen manchmal zu eigentümlichen Lebewesen, die sich verwandeln, als wären sie zeitfressende Monster, und plötzlich bin ich wieder das Kind in einem feindlichen Umfeld, umgeben von Menschen, deren Sprache und Denkweise ich nicht verstehe. Längst abgerissene Gebäude erstehen, Gesichter aus der Vergangenheit ziehen an mir vorbei. Ich suche das Vertraute und stoße auf jene beklemmenden Gefühle, die mich immer heimsuchen, wenn ich sie am wenigsten erwarte. Salzburg hingegen ist eine friedliche und beruhigende Kulisse aus Stein und Berg und Wald, geschichtslos, nur gegenwärtig (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 286).

Der Roman endet mit der Beschreibung des Zielorts Salzburg, wo sich der Protagonist nicht mehr “ausländisch” fühlt. In der letzten Szene im Zug unterquert der Protagonist “die Trasse der ersten auf österreichischem Boden gebauten Autobahn” (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 292), das Symbol der Freiheit und des zukünftigen Fortschritts, geprägt von Optimismus. Und der Leser hat das Gefühl, dass der Protagonist endlich einen Ort, an dem fast alles stimmt, gefunden hat. Dieser Ort ist ein deutschsprachiges Land, Österreich. Das ist ein Ansatz, den besonders ein interkultureller Autor wie Vertlib glaubhaft vertreten kann: das Tabu-Thema “Kollektivschuld” (vgl. Salzborn 17-41) anzusprechen und das Trauma der Schoah, das immer noch in der Geschichte und im Gedächtnis der Menschheit verankert ist. Durch verschiedene Erzählstrukturen schlägt der Protagonist sogar eine Möglichkeit vor, wie man die gewissermaßen ausweglose Situation abschwächen kann, er erlebt so den Übergang von “being a victim” zu “becoming a witness” (Amir 59). In Wien kann der Protagonist endlich lernen und die Deutschprüfung bestehen, jedoch find ihn der Gymnastik-Lehrer unsympathisch. In einer der ersten Gymnastikstunden fragt der Lehrer ihn aufgrund seines offensichtlichen slawischen Akzentes, ob er Jugoslawe sei oder was. Er antwortet: “Ich bin das Oder Was” und löst damit in der Klasse Gelächter aus. Sehr interessant ist die Art, in der Vertlib seine Geschichten schreibt und erzählt: Traumatische Erinnerung wird somit zu narrativer Erinnerung. Es gibt eine Korrelation zwischen der

Art in der eine traumatische Geschichte geschrieben ist und der heilenden Kraft des Schreibens für ein kollektives Gedächtnis durch narrative Strukturen. In *Zwischenstationen*, vor allem auf den letzten Seiten des Romans, scheint es, als ob Österreich in gewisser Weise die Trauerarbeit, was die NS-Vergangenheit angeht, bewältigt hat. Während am Anfang des Romans ein slawischer Akzent für die Wiener eine intellektuelle Unterlegenheit und Faulheit bedeutet, ändert sich diese Ansicht am Ende des Romans. Der Protagonist ist Österreicher geworden, er ist nicht mehr der Ausländer. Auf der letzten Seite des Romans ist er noch im Zug, aber noch immer in Österreich, zwischen Wallersee und Salzburg, wo "Wiesen, Industrieanlagen und Einkaufszentren abwechseln mit der Eintönigkeit von Familienhäusern" (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 292). Als er aussteigt, kauft er sich den erstbesten grünen Hut mit Feder als Symbol des Tiroler Heimatgefühls, oder besser als Symbol einer Integration und Überwindung von Klischees, die er von seinem Vater geerbt hat. Jetzt wird er unterwegs nicht mehr von den Passanten beobachtet oder gemustert werden so wie früher. Am Ende seiner Odyssee ist er tatsächlich zum Österreicher geworden – "besser gesagt, zum Wiener" (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 291) – und er ist sich dessen voll bewusst, dass er im Laufe der Zeit alle Vorurteile, die in der Stadt präsent sind, internalisiert hat. Das Ende des Romans steht im Gegensatz zu dessen Anfang, am Ende ist der Protagonist tatsächlich zum Österreicher geworden, während er am Anfang als Ausländer in seiner zweiten Heimat etikettiert wurde. Als er nach 20 Jahren wieder nach Russland fährt, ist er "schon auf den ersten Blick als Ausländer zu erkennen" (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 7). Ein Ausländer in seiner Heimat, der sich im Ausland zu Hause fühlt. Amerika ist nicht mehr "das Land, in dem die Träume wahr werden" (Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen* 205), Israel ist nicht das ideale Land für Juden, in Amsterdam gab es auch eine wirtschaftliche Krise und Österreich war nicht so schlecht, wie der Vater immer gedacht hat. Am Ende des Buches hat der Protagonist die in Österreich gängigen Klischees über Wien übernommen, alle Vorurteile werden korrigiert und die Traumata durch verschiedene Erlebnisse verarbeitet und überwunden. Mit dem Schließen des letzten Kapitels endet nicht nur das Buch, sondern auch der "Genesungsprozess" des Protagonisten. Es scheint, als habe ihm das Schreiben geholfen, seine Traumata zu verarbeiten und einen Neuanfang zu wagen: das Leben an einem sicheren Ort zusammen mit dem Gefühl, auf einer langen Reise endlich angekommen und in der Gesellschaft integriert zu sein, ermöglicht

es, Traumata und schlimme Geschehnisse und Erinnerungen zu bewältigen und letztendlich zu überwinden. Genau das sind Funktion und wahre Kraft der Literatur.

## 6. *Schlusswort*

Es gibt viele Wege, Traumata zu überwinden. In jeder (Lebens-)Situation, sei es bewusst oder unbewusst, sei es direkt oder indirekt, versucht der menschliche Körper mit seiner Umwelt zu kommunizieren. Auch wenn die Traumata der Opfer noch nicht durch bewusste mündliche oder schriftliche Kommunikation aufgearbeitet werden, so werden die ersten Schritte dahin bereits von unserem Körper intuitiv geleistet, um der Seele Handlungsbedarf aufzuzeigen. Vielleicht dauert der Schritt der Erkenntnis und der bewussten Aufarbeitung seine Zeit/mehrere Jahre, aber ein Fundament zur Heilung ist im Menschen vorhanden, auf dem der Mensch aufbauen kann – durch Literatur, durch Kreativität und Reflexion (vgl. Watzlawick).

Kehren wir jetzt zur Beziehung zwischen Trauma und Literatur und auf die Frage am Anfang dieses Beitrages zurück: Welche Rolle spielt die Literatur in der Verarbeitung traumatischer Erlebnisse? Literatur kann heilend wirken nicht nur auf den Einzelnen, sondern auch auf eine ganze Nation. “Literature and art”, so schreibt Kopf in dem zitierten Aufsatz, “contribute to the social recognition of personal suffering and traumatic reality” (*Trauma* 56), sie nehmen in der Traumaverarbeitung eine wichtige Rolle ein, da das Schreiben eine innere Befreiung von traumatischen Erfahrungen ist. Autoren wie Vertlib, “add new perspectives to the already extensive body of memory literature” (Dagmar 65). Diese Art der Literatur, die uns neue Perspektiven eröffnet, bereitet den menschlichen Geist auf die vielen Möglichkeiten und Entscheidungen im Leben vor – wie etwa die Begegnung mit dem Fremden und dem Anderen. Wenn wir unsere vergangenen Traumata überwinden möchten, müssen wir (bewusst) einen Dialog schaffen, nur so können wir neue Perspektiven eröffnen und das Trauma erkennen, überwinden und an ihm wachsen.





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**Voices from Beyond**

*Voci d'oltretomba*



# Ashes. Words and Images in the Forms of Remembrance

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## 1. Trauma as a Political Issue

My first and only meeting with Tony Harrison happened a few years ago, in May 2010,<sup>1</sup> when I was involved in a presentation of his work with specific reference to his film poems.<sup>2</sup> The event – *Poesia in scena, poesia in video* – was meant to reflect on how words and images interlace in Harrison’s poetry of commitment and it plausibly included the screening of *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992), introduced by Andrea Lorenzini, who had translated and edited the subtitles of the film. During the meeting, the poet explained his position on the Holocaust and the way in which *The Gaze of the Gorgon* tried to approach and resist Adorno’s statement that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of how it has become impossible to write poetry today” (34). While proposing commitment through poetry as a possible way out of Adorno’s “barbarism”, Harrison also mentioned *The Shadow of Hiroshima* (1995), somehow connecting two different holocausts in the same historical frame and showing how they can both become the hub of poetic vision.

Quite obviously the notion of trauma kept cropping up, and it was presented as an experience that cannot be *merely* individual or *simply* collective: it necessarily interweaves the individual perspective and the collective dimension in ways that can be described as defensive answers to unbearable conditions (Scarry 60-81; Luckhurst 4-7). Trauma drives both the individual victim and the community – be it a whole ethnical group or

a bombed city – to respond to a number of factors (generically related to space and time) in ways that are constantly remoulded and rewritten (Scarry 28-38). These responses not only redefine the individual identity but also the national one. “Trauma” – writes Luckhurst – “is a piercing or a breach of border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication” (3). Harrison grounds his poetry in this very assumption. In an interview with John Tusa, in 2009, he explains how tragedy is a fundamental component of both the individual and the social experience of the human being, who is constantly in charge of “coming to terms with, sometimes even celebrating, the darker parts of experience”<sup>3</sup>.

The act of ‘coming to terms’ and ‘celebrating’ often takes the form of commemoration as a ritual to reconstitute a cohesive communal identity after a highly traumatic event (Herron, Dodge, Crawley, Mitchell 79), and it finds its most effective, though ambiguous, tool in shared myths. In their analysis of the poem “Shrapnel” (2005),<sup>4</sup> Herron, Dodge, Crawley and Mitchell quote Harrison’s description of his childhood in “The Inkwell of Dr Agrippa” (1971) to show how the tragedy of Hiroshima triggered a reflection on the modes and modality of celebration as a way to resist and eventually overcome trauma. The “collective masking of tragedy through the fabrication of superficial mythology” (80) has a Janus-faced quality. On the one hand, it reinforces the feeling of being part of a re-built community, on the other it evokes a sudden and unexpected breach in the previous feeling of security and fraternity that the community was supposed to make possible, thus unveiling the illusory strength of the community itself. If it is quite true that joy and celebration may remain artificial in any act of commemoration, it is also undeniable that they respond to the social and individual need to re-appropriate one’s own identity after a traumatic event. Within this context, Harrison is concerned with the risk of transforming the commemoration into an empty rite, encouraging the process of forgetting rather than granting forms of remembrance that would be cohesive for the community because they are felt as “appropriate to a particular locale or period in history” (Herron, Dodge, Crawley, Mitchell 80).

This approach may prove extremely effective when analysing *The Shadow of Hiroshima*. Both the film and the poem were conceived as a commemoration, on the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, exactly ten years ago<sup>5</sup>. On this occasion, Tony Harrison, a poet laureate already known for his deeply committed idea of literature, was asked to create a text aimed at preserving the memory of one of the worst tragedies in

human history, and he did so by producing a film poem, a brand new hybrid text: he combined words and images, with the objective of documenting the facts and at the same time providing an unusual and highly personal *vision* of them.

I will go back to the use of images in reporting war and to the many ambiguities implied in their exploitation. What is relevant here is that Harrison must have been aware that an atrocity made visible is not in itself readable as a protest against war. Harrison's position is by no means unusual. Commenting on Jarecke's very famous photograph of the dead Iraqi soldier, John Berger points out that, though perceived as the plain statement of a fact (the death of a soldier that, in its barbaric materiality, contradicted the official portrayal of the Iraqi war as an almost bloodless conflict), the photograph potentially elicits a response that is different from the one expected by the printed press using it. The image is likely to be perceived – and in fact *was perceived* – as referring to circumstances that are *extra-ordinary* and that do not belong to the reader's everyday experience. It therefore tends to be located out of time and space, as an iconic representation of the general human condition, henceforth losing intensity. This generalizing perspective weakens and neutralizes the protest against the barbarity of war instead of intensifying it, because any protest springs from the awareness of a specific spatial and historical frame (Berger 290). The removal of this specific spatial and historical frame unavoidably results in a loss of political strength (Whitehead 351)<sup>6</sup>.

My approach to *The Shadow of Hiroshima* means to show how Harrison succeeds in re-politicizing the use of images and words in the commemoration of a tragedy, by proposing a highly historicized and deeply individual vision of the atomic bombing and therefore reminding his audience that Hiroshima was not universal evil (at least, not only this), but a very specific event, that belongs to the history of a specific conflict and affected the successive development of both Japanese culture and US imperialism. In stating this, I would suggest that maybe Rowland is simplifying a little when he writes that:

The Final Solution, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and a projected nuclear war are all linked, therefore, by the referents or signified referents of fire, mass murder and Christianity. Flames function as synecdoches in my three examples of H/holocaust: the crematoria which disposed of the victims of Nazi atrocities are compared to the devastation caused by an atomic bomb blast. This connection is

central to Harrison's poetry. The trope of fire runs throughout his work to connect diverse referents (Rowland 16).

It seems to me that, as Berger says, this critical approach runs the risk of transforming the historical reference to a very specific tragedy into something universal that belongs to war in general and that only accidentally – and therefore unimportantly – takes the form of a particular city, a particular community and a particular voice. It is quite true that the trope of fire belongs to both Harrison's poetics in general, and to the context of WW II as a worldwide conflict. And it is also true that the poet was not new to reflections on wars<sup>7</sup>. Consequently he must have been well aware of war as a traumatic experience, in which the individual perception of the impending risk of death fatally combines with the impact of violence on society as a whole, emphasizing a struggle for survival that, instead of collating the community, works as a disruptive force, affects the previously operating social relations and ultimately determines their revision in a situation of emergency. All of this belongs to a universal vision of war, and it is the ground in which Harrison's film poem is rooted. At the same time, and more importantly, I want to stress that the poet's vision in *The Shadow of Hiroshima* also takes a resolutely situated flavour, so that the tension between private grief and public tragedy is articulated in ways that can be understood as referring to *that* place and *that* time. While I share Rowland's definition of Harrison as "a humanist poet" (218), I wouldn't speak of "failure of representation" as to be understood as "a flawed success" (261).

The political emphasis of Harrison's vision resides in the poet's exploitation of the *facts* of the nuclear strike, how they happened and why: they are vital components of his representational choices. In other words, Harrison is fully aware, and makes it clear, that the bombing of Hiroshima resulted in the destruction of a city and caused 14.000 victims (plus the ones who died even many years after the bombing as a consequence of nuclear contamination). It also put an end to WW II, determining the utter cancellation of the Empire of the Sun and triggering the birth of the Republic of Japan through a process interlacing the memory of the most ancient Japanese traditions, but also forgetting the imperial legacy. It also affected the culture, the political choices and the subsequent development of US imperialism, suddenly remoulded by the awareness that their international power had to be built on grounds that were no longer military.



In his vision, Harrison combines all these historical aspects, preserving the ambiguities of a process that is, in fact, still to be completed, in a portrait of words and images.

## 2. *Listening to the Invisible: the Speech Act of a Ghost*

In their seminal study published in 1992, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub define testimony as “a *discursive practice*, as opposed to a *pure theory*. To testify – to *vow to tell*, to *promise* and *produce* one’s own speech as material evidence for truth – is to accomplish a *speech act* rather than to simply formulate a statement” (5).<sup>8</sup> I feel this definition is particularly suited to the kind of operation Harrison puts into practice when writing *The Shadow of Hiroshima*.

The first and most relevant device the poet exploits – and that is subsequently translated into a filmic voice-off – is the choice to develop the poem as a dialogue between a Western narrator and an Eastern immaterial presence. Shadow San appears in the first line of the poem. He represents, literally, the voice of a ghost:

“This voice comes from the shadow cast  
by Hiroshima’s A-bomb blast.  
The sound you hear inside this case  
is of a man who fans the face  
he used to have before the flash  
turned face and body into ash.  
I am the nameless fanning mall  
you may address as Shadow San”. (Harrison 3)<sup>9</sup>

In its structure, *The Shadow of Hiroshima* is mostly shaped as a long, intensely subjective, meditation on an eye-witness account of events that are widely documented and universally known. The prevailing point of view is *individual* and *personal*. Shadow San speaks as an ordinary man, all the more so when the narrative voice tells the stories of other individual victims that are to be commemorated and often stand for a number of unknown, nameless victims who disappeared leaving no trace at all. The same ethical duty to remember the lost ones is bestowed on Hiroshi Hara (Hara San), who survived the burning of his school and is forever condemned to remember what happened to his friends:

His schoolmates' shrieks from blackened lips  
haunt Hara San each time he dips  
his brush in water from the stream  
to give relief to those who scream,  
all his dying schoolmates, those  
whose skin slid off their flesh like clothes. (Harrison 6)

All these mute and invisible presences, though impossible to name, are not only icons but what is left of *real* people in a *real* city, affected by a *real* bombing. The emphasis on a poetic vision that is to be firmly rooted in specific events in a definite historic and spatial context appears unmistakable, and well supported by the strategy of first person narrative. Some metrical instability and the occasional switching from the iambic tetrameter, that Harrison felt was more suited to his film poems, to trochees add more emphasis to the portrayal of the young victims<sup>10</sup>. Memory is openly suggested as the only way out of trauma, both for Hiroshi Hara and in a more global perspective.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the device of the first person eye-witness acquires a specific flavour because of the peculiar characteristics of Shadow San. It is certainly true that the familiar, faltering and partial pace of testimony provides the bare bones of the storytelling. But the eye-witness does not exist any longer, and he therefore needs the poet's help, in his "one-day parole", to perform his role as a witness:

and you will be my eyes to see  
this fiftieth anniversary. (Harrison 3)

We know that, as happened to most victims of the bombing, Shadow San's body was literally dissolved by the explosion; its only surviving trace was an image cast on a brick step. By choosing Shadow San as a first-person narrator – an eye-witness who needs new eyes – Harrison is in fact developing a theory of tragedy and witnessing in which the profile of a ghost has a central role. The poet had already experienced a quite similar device in "A Cold Coming", a poem that can, in several respects be read in conjunction with *The Shadow of Hiroshima*. In a broader historical context, moreover, the choice of relying on a witness defined by the removal of his own body evokes the Holocaust as "a radical historical crisis of witnessing [...] an event eliminating its own witness" (Felman & Laub XVII). Harrison

retrieves the voice of the vanished testimony that is not easy to listen to. It is faltering and uncertain, and it speaks a language that is mostly made up of silences:

“Dead men’s mouths make only M,  
the M in Dome, the M in Bomb,  
tuned to the hum that’s coming from  
the A-Bomb Dome that I hear hum  
all round this baseball stadium,  
still after all these fifty years  
reverberating in my ears.  
Can you *not* hear it? Or the choir?” (Harrison 7)

In her seminal study *The Body in Pain*, Scarry mentions, as “a fifth dimension of physical pain”, “its ability to destroy language, the power of verbal objectification, a major source of our self-extension, a vehicle through which the pain could be lifted out into the world and eliminated” (54). Scarry is referring to the consequences of torture as affecting the relation between body and language, but I think that the principle she states may be also applicable here. The inability to speak in understandable words makes it impossible to “lift the pain” even when the suffering body is also a dead body. The only available sound is pre-linguistic, pre-verbal and soaked in sorrow.

And this sound is plural: “a choir”. Here we get to another keypoint in Harrison’s poem. Shadow San, as we said, explicitly mentions some other characters (Kobaishi San, or Hiroshima’s champion pigeon man; Hara San, the painter who survived; Mitsufuji San, who likes singing, playing and laughing). But he also makes it very clear that he is speaking in the name of a whole community. His monologue is implicitly multi-vocal, and his objective is quite plainly to conjure up the city that used to exist and that was utterly pulverized by the nuclear strike. His wrecked life echoes the devastation of other lives and also a whole city and its architectural symbols:

“My shadow’s eighty, so is this  
devastated edifice,  
built 1915 by a Czech  
now A-Bomb Dome, symbolic wreck  
left standing for our meditation  
on nuclear death and devastation.” (Harrison 4)

Again, Harrison is creating poetry from something that always happens in conflicts, when an urban site is hit and destroyed. “When Berlin is bombed, when Dresden is burned,” writes Elaine Scarry, “there is a deconstruction not only of a particular ideology but of the primary evidence of the capacity for self-extension itself: one does not, in bombing Berlin, destroy only objects, gestures, and thoughts that are culturally stipulated but objects, gestures and thoughts that are human, not Dresden buildings or German architecture but human shelter” (61). The feeling of disruption affecting the urban community is therefore connected not only to the physical losses – the bodycount that marks any war tragedy – but also to the destruction of a whole culture, which was in fact and for the reasons stated above, radical and absolute in the case of Japan. So it is true, as Luckhurst reminds us, that “[...] traumatic identity is now also commonly argued to be at the root of many national collective memories” (2), though ‘collective memories’ result from the combination, melting and the re-articulation of the individual ones. In terms of political choices, these principles stand out very clearly in Harrison’s mind. Quite obviously, he wants to interlace the personal and the public, the individual and the national, even the Eastern and the Western, always proposing a two-sided perspective, and leaving the audience the burden of deciding how to decode the message.

For this reason, I am not sure I share Rowland’s position on how the Western narrator and Shadow San interact in *The Shadow of Hiroshima*. In his *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust*, Rowland writes:

More problems arise when the subject positions of the Western narrator and the Shadow San appear to blur. Littered with close-ups of the neon and tin-can detritus of Coke-culture, the programme suggests a deep-seated hatred of the American presence in present-day Japan. [...] Rather than a celebration of postmodern hybridity, the film displays a disturbing version of cultural difference which covertly longs for the utopia of a Japan uncontaminated by American influence. (62)

I do not believe nostalgia is an issue here, no more than “Harrison’s renowned hatred of mass culture” (62) that seems to find “an ally in, or even initiated, in San’s anti-Yank invective” (62). What appears to happen here is that we have several semantic fields interlacing, each of them presenting multiple complexities. If alive, Shadow San would be an eighty-year-old Japanese, who had gone through a nuclear strike, the end of the Empire, the remaking of Japan and the rebuilding of the city. His profile is

exploited, as it should be, to present the astonishingly fast pace of change in post-war Japan, and his emotional reaction (disorientation, sorrow, and, why not, nostalgia) is only plausible, in the light of his age and position. The Western narrator – clearly a co-protagonist – provides the perspective of a European observer, considering the Eastern world, but also the deep change concerning US imperialism, switching from military invasion to economic monopoly.

Shadow San is explicitly critical about the US cultural invasion, certainly epitomized by the many references to sports and the baseball stadium. There is a grotesque implication in the coordinate of space that Harrison provides when speaking of this place:

Close to the Dome on soil where heat  
burnt the soles off people's feet,  
on Saturdays, close to Ground Zero,  
crowds cheer the current sporting hero. (Harrison 7)

While commenting on this, Shadow San reverses the grandiosity of the stadium, exploiting it to give relevance to the enormous number of the victims of the nuclear strike:

“You'd need a stadium five times higher  
to seat all those who died by fire.  
Where you see baseball I can hear  
all those thousands who can't cheer.  
Listen, can't you hear the choir  
of those who perished in the fire?” (Harrison 8)

The point here is that what has been destroyed is not only Shadow San or his house, but a whole community, a city of people and buildings, “a space produced by the interaction of historically and geographically specific institutions, social relations of production and reproduction, practices of government, forms and media of communication, and so forth” (Donald 6). This conglomeration of bricks, mortar, flesh and feelings has been made invisible. Harrison's words repoliticize the commemoration of the death of a city making it into a vision that is something more than the image of a massacre.

### 3. *Seeing the Invisible: "You Will Be My Eyes"*

The *Shadow of Hiroshima* is incomplete if considered merely as a poem. The visual aspect is basic in defining the meaning of the text, and it cannot simply be removed in my analysis. Harrison's work with images appears fully aware of the implications of this stylistic choice, and it contributes to the lyrical atmosphere of the whole text.

As a film, *The Shadow of Hiroshima* begins with a reference to history: black and white images of the nuclear explosion, soon followed by familiar representations of the destruction of the city. The scratched and old sequences are soon followed by new colour footage portraying contemporary Hiroshima: urban landscapes, people moving around and scenes of everyday life, introduced by the morning ritual of Tai Chi. Music, sounds and a voice-off reciting the first lines of the poem articulate the process of storytelling, emphasizing moments of official and private mourning and insisting on the image of the Bomb Dome as the symbol of a tragic event that is not to be forgotten. The skeletal remains of the building, representing the only architecture left standing after the nuclear strike, is exploited as a sort of 'visual punctuation', imposing a rhythm that echoes the mainly iambic tetrameter of the poem. Any metrical instability is soon reinforced through unexpected visual development, so that the music of words is paralleled by the pace of images.

The colour footage is utterly dominated by water imagery (basically the Motoyasu river); frequent shots of the sky and of flying doves and pigeons belong to the same semantic cluster and emphasize the idea of change and flux. Conversely, the black & white sequences – which only appear at the beginning of the film – develop around symbolic references to fire, smoke and nuclear destruction. The opposition appears simple, though never simplified, and it multiplies and transforms the words of the poem into a vision.

It is quite obvious that, when choosing the form of a film poem, Harrison is aware that he is calling into play a number of complex considerations on the use of images – past and present – in commemorating a massacre. This is why the process of decoding implies a number of synchronic and diachronic considerations on the portrayal of war. In her article on the poetry of protest in connection with Tony Harrison's work on the Gulf War, Anne Whitehead shares Sontag's position about the truthfulness of the photographic images of a massacre. She suggests that these images

are ambiguous, in that “they may give rise to a call for peace, but they may also provoke a cry for revenge” (351). And in fact, in her *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag clearly warns us that words – the ones given in the photographs’ captions – may be the key to highly different, sometimes conflicting, meanings, because “all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions” (9).

We know that one of the most unusual stylistic aspects of *The Shadow of Hiroshima* is the combination of poetry and filmic vision in a text meant for a commemoration. So, in a way, the combination suggested by Sontag is respected, though in Harrison the relationship between them is neither explanation nor mystification. Words are not supposed to describe, force a meaning for and provide the key to images. They simply ‘go hand in hand with’ them, in the same way as thoughts are supposed to wander when the eyes see something unexpected. At the beginning of the poem, Shadow San puts the poet in charge of “being his eyes” (Harrison 3), apparently (and ironically) relying on the objectivity of the vision and the self-evidence of images. Which is not the case.

Particularly in the new footage, Harrison quite obviously creates a bridge between the need for everyday life to go on in modern, re-built Japan, and the impossibility of forgetting, effectively represented through the image of the Bomb Dome constantly shown all through the film and drawn and re-drawn by Hiroshi Hara, the painter. Ostensibly mimetic, the reference to the ordinary actions of ordinary people is interrupted by the stubborn attempt of Hara San to paint the Dome, infusing his drawing with his memory of how “scorched throatscroak / where new thirsts get quenched by Coke” (Harrison 12). Though the black and white images of the historic bombing are shown only at the beginning of the film, the trauma of the nuclear strike is evoked through images that do not belong to a condition of war but rather to the ordinary life of the contemporary community. The origin of trauma is implied rather than exhibited, and the audience is in charge of decoding this implication, reconstructing things long past, that are not shown and that appear possibly more sorrowful precisely because they are unexpectedly invisible.

Quite obviously, Harrison is not the first writer to rely on images to represent a war trauma. In 1938, Virginia Woolf had already drawn a reflection on the barbarity of war from photographs that appeared to her as a “crude statement of fact addressed to the eye” (31). On this ground, in *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf justified her anti-war position, concluding

that, whatever your education, social class, political affiliation, and even gender, watching the photographs of victims of the Spanish War may result in only one conclusion: “War is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped. For now at last we are looking at the same picture: we are seeing with you the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses” (21). Woolf’s line of reasoning was grounded in what was thought to be a scientific approach to the act of vision: the process of understanding images was experienced as resulting from what might be called a physiological chain-reaction, basically mechanical, until the visual stimulus/memory link was activated. Even then, there was no subjectivity in the interpretation of the images: since photographic documents were still perceived as totally true to facts, objective and absolutely mimetic, they were likely to be processed and understood in the same way by different human brains.

Harrison’s position is understandably different from Woolf’s. So much so that Harrison needs words, other images, music, and sounds to articulate a meaning that is not necessarily implied in the traditional visual representations of the Hiroshima nuclear holocaust. They are not self-evident, because no image is true in itself. Woolf’s position, though historically motivated, is of course untenable today: any image mediates between facts and opinions, therefore it needs facts to acquire meaning, otherwise it simply masks a *void of meaning* (Franzini 24). Thus, no image speaks for itself. Instead, it draws its meaning from the context it refers to, it belongs to a very specific *locus* in space and time: in this case, Hiroshima on the morning of August 6, 1945. Though the film is almost totally set 50 years later, the sequence of described actions develops in a precise timespan (between 8:15 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.), thus obliging the audience to constantly go back to the same timespan half a century before, when any possibility of everyday life for ordinary people was cancelled by the nuclear strike. The final melting of the clock in water, just before the film credits, marks the dissolution of time, and has a tragic flavour comparable to the final vanishing of Shadow San.

I saw the saddened shade retire  
to face again the flash and fire. (Harrison 10)

In conclusion, it is certainly true that “Some events refuse to be told as stories” (Mirzoeff 90). They go far beyond what Benjamin defined “information” (Benjamin 217-234) and they need different representational



tools to be narrated. For this reason, Harrison chooses to rely on a combination of words and images, organized so as to synaesthetically produce a vision of the consequences of war, and a highly political one. 'Political' is to be intended in its etymological meaning, as pertaining to the economy of the *polis*. Within this frame, *The Shadow of Hiroshima* shows how images can be made into poetry so as to mirror the horror of war even when this war is not explicitly and visually portrayed. And to reject it, not only as universally evil, but mostly as a kind of evil affecting a very specific population at a very specific time.

On this issue, I agree with Anne Whitehead when she says that "He [Harrison] forges a post- Holocaust poetics which is characterized by awkwardness and embarrassment, and insists that it is better to confront the horrors of war from a distance than to remain silent" (356). Distance is in fact a key issue in Harrison's work, and in this specific case, it is reinforced by the author's belonging to the Western world, and therefore not fully able to understand the Japanese culture.

It may be better, as Mitsufuji San wonders, to forget (Harrison 10), but trauma is not worked out through removal. And the ultimate doubt is spoken by the poet itself, in the final lines of *The Shadow of Hiroshima*:

Or are we all like Shadow San  
facing inferno with a fan? (Harrison 17)

These lines seem to be conceived as a highly politicized call for action, and they define a form of resistance through poetry that is Tony Harrison's most precious hallmark.



- 1 Tony Harrison was invited as a guest to the Festival Trevigliopoesia. The programme is available at: <http://www.trevigliopoesia.it/archivio/2009/programma.html>. The meeting was on 29 May 2010, at the Museo Civico, Chiostro della biblioteca, in Treviglio (BG).
- 2 The film poems – *Loving Memory* (1987), *The Blasphemers' Banquet* (1989) *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992), *Black Daisies for the Bride* (1993) – are available at the Docucity archive ([www.docucity.unimi.it](http://www.docucity.unimi.it)), Università degli Studi di Milano.
- 3 The interview was broadcast on 11 April 2001 and is available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00nc89r> (accessed 20 August 2015). It was included in the BBC series run by John Tusa, managing director of the Barbican Centre and focussed on leading creative figures in contemporary UK.
- 4 The poem refers to London 7/7 and it originally appeared in the 21 August 2005 edition of *The Independent on Sunday*.
- 5 As I write, it is the 60th anniversary of the bomb: 6 August 2015.
- 6 In drawing this conclusion, Whitehead, too, refers to Berger's reflections on Jarecke's photograph (351).
- 7 The famous poem on Jarecke's photograph of the burnt Iraqi soldier, "A Cold Coming", appeared in *The Guardian* in March 1991, while "The Cycles of Donji Vakuf" and "The Bright Light of Sarajevo", on the Balkan wars, were both published in September 1995. On Tony Harrison and War, see Rylance 137-160.
- 8 On this issue, Agamben has been reflecting a lot, pointing out the relevance of testimony in connection with archive building. Though published later, his reflections in this field are groundbreaking, as they appear in his *Quel che resta di Auschwitz. L'archivio e il testimone* (1998).
- 9 As Rowland explains, the disembodied voice belongs to the blasted shape of a victim of the nuclear strike, "whose body was reduced to a fading smidgeon on a step now ensconced in Hiroshima's Peace Museum" (61).
- 10 Rowland provides a very precise analysis of this section of the poem, that proves very useful, though I do not completely share his conclusions (62).



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# Telling Otherwise: Collective and Personal Remembering and Forgetting in Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life*<sup>1</sup>

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This essay aims at exploring collective and personal remembering, as well as the notion of forgetting as a kind of “rebeginning” (Augé 57) in Kate Atkinson Costa prize-winning *Life After Life* (2013). In Atkinson’s novel Ursula Todd is born on February 11 1910, dies and is born again and again to undo the traumatic events that caused her previous death(s). The narrator’s retelling of Ursula’s life takes the reader through the two wars, and to different incarnations of Ursula’s life, which finally set things right for her and for her beloved ones. The sense of *déjà vu* and constant repetitions underline the novel’s main premise: what if? Indeed, it is a historical novel about the consequences of the past upon the present and the future, as well as about the decisions we as individuals make all the time, and how they can affect others. Therefore, it is also a novel about temporality. The prevalence of historicity and memory in contemporary criticism in recent years has led to a turn to the past; meanwhile, the future has attracted less attention, being understood only as potentiality of the present, as I will explore later. However, Atkinson’s *Life After Life* stresses the drive towards the future and the inherent connections between past and future as another way of memorialising the past. In addition, this essay will also look into the ways in which Atkinson’s novel engages with the concept of collective memory that underscores networks of individual and communal relations. Lastly, Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, alongside philosophical enquiries about time and death, expounded in Ricoeur’s

*Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1953) and Marc Augé's *Oblivion* (2004), provide the main theoretical underpinnings of this essay.

### *Temporality in Life After Life*

Ursula Todd, the protagonist of the novel, is born on 11 February 1910, but her umbilical cord is wrapped around her neck, which leads to her premature death. Dr Fellowes does not arrive in time due to a snowy storm, and then, Ursula's mother, Sylvie, does not get the medical aid needed in such a situation: "The little heart. A helpless little heart beating wildly. Stopped suddenly like a bird dropped from the sky. A single shot. Darkness fell" (24). This is the first of countless deaths Ursula suffers in the novel; however, she is given the chance to re-live her life many times, due to little shifts of the events and situations. This way, she dies and re-lives her life with her family at Fox Corner, through the main historical events of the twentieth century: the Great War, the Spanish flu epidemic, the Second World War and the London Blitz, and she reaches the 1960s. Clearly, the novel interweaves the personal affairs of the Todd family, particularly, those related to Ursula, with historical occurrences, thus neatly interlocking the private and the public. In other words, the novel follows the pattern of Atkinson's early works in "the interconnection of public and private stories" (Parker 25). Interestingly, the novel opens with a scene at a café in Munich in 1930: she is about to shoot a man she calls "Führer"; the reader wonders if the protagonist manages to kill Adolf Hitler, thus leading him/her to reflect upon the alternative trajectories worldwide politics may have had, should Adolf Hitler have been killed at that German café.

Reviews of this widely acclaimed novel have interpreted it as Atkinson's "making various points about human life – that they hang by a thread and that our identities are not necessarily fixed (and could easily have been other); that our destiny is uncertain; that writers control their characters and can produce many versions of them" (Cartwright 2). Given the complex structure of the novel, I would like to take Atkinson's endnote as a starting point:

Miss Woolf, the moral centre of the Blitz chapters, tells Ursula that “we must bear witness” for “when we are safely in the future”. I am in that future now and I suppose this book is my bearing witness to the past.

And somewhere in that past, in the ethereal world of fiction, it is always a snowy night in February 1910 [...] To research the background of this book I read as much as possible before beginning and then tried to forget as much as possible and simply write. (Atkinson, “Author Note” 618)

The above-mentioned passage touches upon some of my main critical concerns regarding *Life After Life*. On the one hand, I am particularly interested in the stress on the future and death in connection with historicity and the critical work by Paul Ricoeur and Martin Heidegger. On the other, I will focus on the link between forgetting and “rebeginning”, following Ricoeur and Marc Augé, as I will develop later. Indeed, past, present and future fuse in this passage, and in the novel as a whole, which seems to suggest an altogether different vision of the contemporary historical novel, shifting the emphasis on to the future. According to Paul Ricoeur, “it is especially history that is involved methodologically in this eclipsing of the future [...] the inclusion of futureness in the apprehension of the historical past will move strongly against the prevailing flow of the clearly retrospective orientation of historical knowledge” (346). Then, the issue of temporality is key to the understanding of the role of the historian. Arguably, Atkinson succeeds in including “futureness” in *Life After Life*, and in so doing, she proposes a future-oriented approach to historicity. In fact, she looks back to the past by proposing alternative futures, in which repressed events are unlocked, thus connecting past, present and future, and activating change.

Since the late 1980s we have witnessed the proliferation of critical works on the interaction of history and fiction, ignited by the current interest in memorialising and commemorating the past, as happened in 2014 with the centenary of the First World War.<sup>2</sup> Recently, studies such as Alan Robinson’s *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory and the Contemporary Novel* (2011), Kate Mitchell and Nicola Parsons’s edited collection *Reading Historical Fiction: The Revenant and Remembered Past* (2013), and Elodie Rousselot’s edited volume *Exoticizing the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction* (2014), to name just a few, explore new conceptualisations to address history, memory and the past in contemporary fiction. To a greater or lesser extent, these works engage

with the ambivalent relationship between history and fiction from the late 1990s onwards, and point out the need to find new terms and definitions for narratives that depart from the ‘historiographic metafiction’ mode, *pace* Linda Hutcheon (105-23). For example, Elodie Rousselot embraces the term “neo-historical” to refer to this new category: “the neo-historical carries out its potential for radical possibilities in more implicit ways. Its use of verisimilitude is crucial in this respect: in seeking to reproduce the past so faithfully – at least on the surface – the neo-historical critical engagement with that past may appear to be absent, while it is in fact seamlessly embedded into the fabric of the text” (5). Significantly, other critics like Victoria Stewart, Peter Middleton and Tim Woods address that shift in contemporary historical fiction, and indicate “that much current fiction dealing with the past has a different emphasis” (Stewart 13). Already in Atkinson’s first novel, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995), there seems to be a tension between postmodern beliefs and a reshaping of postmodernism, perhaps anticipating the advent of the so-called “post-postmodernism”, which has as yet received scant critical attention in contemporary criticism. In fact, Fiona Tolan perceived in Atkinson’s first novel an existing friction between “postmodernist impulses toward multiplicity and limitless expansion and traditional historiographic beliefs in containment and the discoverable real” (288). Arguably, Kate Atkinson’s *Life After Life* represents a move-on from postmodernism and provides a more nuanced way of dealing with time, memory, and past and present negotiations.

By means of forgetting and rebeginnings, Ursula has several iterations and the chance to escape from her deaths or near-deaths many times. Those accidents are traumatic events and processes, which Ursula endlessly re-enacts by re-living and re-writing them, albeit slightly changed. This way, Ursula’s narrative offers “a means of transforming traumatic memories into narrative memories” (Andermahr and Pellicer-Ortín 2). It remains unclear how much she remembers her past lives, although as the novel progresses, she is more aware of her ability to undo certain personal and historical moments through the traces of her many pasts. In this line, Dominick LaCapra states that a narrative can explore alternative paths in the past in the light of deferred effects or knowledge in the present (18). This is precisely what Atkinson’s novel achieves.

Definitions of trauma provided by well-known Trauma critics, such as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Lawrence Langer, and Shoshana Felman, among



others, dwell upon the notion of backwardness, since “[v]iolence saturates time, reorders it from progressive movement into recursive movement via flashbacks and other time disorders associated with post-traumatic stress syndrome” (Gilmore 92). If, for survivors of trauma, “temporality is structured through permanent simultaneity” (Gilmore 93), *Life After Life* shatters the notion that in trauma that past and future coexist in the present: by re-writing the past event, the novel provides a new and alternative path that bears important bearings upon the future. One instance is Ursula’s death, as a toddler, at sea, when she was jumping the waves with Pamela, her elder sister, while being on holiday in Cornwall: “No one came. And there was only water. Water and more water. Her helpless little heart was beating wildly, a bird trapped in her chest. A thousand bees buzzed in the curled pearl of her ear. No breath. A drowning child, a bird dropped from the sky. Darkness fell” (Atkinson, *Life After Life* 47). In another re-enactment of her life, Ursula and Pamela are rescued by a stranger, a clerk, who happened to be there when the girls went into the sea (56). This way, Ursula is given another life, full of potentialities.

At times she is able to set things right also for her beloved ones. For example, in one variant of Ursula’s life, Bridget, the maid, dies of the Spanish flu on the day after the celebration of Armistice in London. Teddy, Ursula’s beloved brother, also catches the infection and dies within the next few days. In the following re-birth, Ursula attempts to avoid his tragic demise by forging a letter and thus preventing Bridget, who is already ill, from arriving home:

*Dear Bridget, I have locked and bolted the doors. There is a gang of thieves – [...]* Next morning there was no Bridget in the house. Not, more puzzlingly, was there any sign of Pamela [Ursula’s eldest sister]. Ursula felt overwhelmed by a relief as inexplicable as the panic that had led her to write the note the previous night [...]. “I sent Pamela to Mrs Dodds to fetch Bridget home,” Sylvie [Ursula’s mother] said. “You sent *Pamela*?” Ursula echoed in horror. “Yes, Pamela”. “Pamela is with *Bridget*?” “Yes,” Sylvie said. “Bridget. What is the matter with you?” Ursula ran out of the house [...]. “What is the matter?”[...] “Whatever is it? *Tell* me,” Pamela said, caught up now in the dread. “I don’t know,” Ursula sobbed. “I just felt so worried about you.” (135-36)

This time Ursula is not fully aware of what is happening, but it is clear that she feels the need to stop the course of her family's actions. Towards the end of the novel, when she is holding a conversation with Nigel, Pamela's son and Ursula's favourite nephew, she seems to be remembering when she met Hitler in a past life: "I think it was the eyes, he had the *most* compelling eyes. If you looked in them you felt you were putting yourself in danger of believing—'You met him?' Nigel asked, astonished. 'Well', Ursula said. 'Not exactly. Would you like dessert, dear?'" (555). There are moments in which Ursula suffers from *déjà vu*, as suggested by Sylvie, Ursula's mother, who unsympathetically tries to find a rational explanation for Ursula's feeling that "[w]ords and phrases echoed themselves, strangers seemed like old acquaintances" (Atkinson, *Life After Life* 151).<sup>3</sup>

The Italian philosopher Paul Virno affirms that "when we fall mercy to *déjà vu*, we seem to be repeating something, but we cannot say *what it is* that we are repeating: the specific content of the repetition is established only by the actual experience [... thus] the doctrine of the eternal return serves as an antidote to nihilism" (44-45). On one occasion, Ursula repeats her visit to the psychiatrist that she had visited earlier on in the novel, and Dr Kellet explains the symbolism of the drawing Ursula makes: "'it's a snake with its tail in its mouth' [...] '[i]t's a symbol representing the circularity of the universe. Time is a construct, in reality everything flows, no past or present, only the now'" (Atkinson 579). Similarly, one reviewer has noted that "Ursula's existence is cyclical, swinging in different directions to encompass new (and sometimes unwelcome) possibilities" (Kellogg 1). Ursula's time loops, which allow for change, underline the potentiality of the future, or "actuality to come", which is 'always' and permanent, from Virno's point of view (67, 70). Significantly, this interpretation of Atkinson's novel owes much to "the philosophies of the future", best represented by Martin Heidegger in his *Being and Time* (1953), where the main argument is the "*nexus between historicity and death*...[t]he future is the predominant temporal dimension only because it is home to death" (Virno 56). Atkinson takes on the role of the historian in *Life After Life*, and thus, her novel approaches twentieth-century history, and particularly, the Second World War, placing the emphasis on possibilities and the future, and exploring "the 'what ifs?' of a life" (Lakeland 24). Ursula's life projects itself to the future which, following Virno's theories, is full of potential. In philosophical terms, Heidegger's "Being-towards-death" is closely linked to the temporality of the future: "we must characterize being-toward-death

as a *being toward a possibility* [...] toward something possible [...] to be out for something possible” (Heidegger 250). In the novel, Nigel embraces that notion of historicity towards the future, towards a possibility: “History is all about ‘what ifs’” (553). To explore those “what ifs?”, Atkinson states in her author’s note that she read as much as she could, and “then tried to *forget* as much as possible and simply write” (“Author Note” 618; emphasis added). I would like to turn now to the concept of forgetting as a kind of “‘rebeginning’ or finding the future by forgetting the past” (Galloway 3).

Paul Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) and Marc Augé’s *Oblivion* (2004) treat forgetting as a positive figure. For example, Ricoeur utilises the notion of “the reserve of forgetting”, which is characterised by the “survival of images”, and opposed to a more negative figure of forgetting, conducted through the erasure of traces (Ricoeur 436). This forgetting that preserves can be perceived when towards the end of the novel, Sylvie saves her new-born daughter, Ursula, from her death by finding a pair of surgical scissors: “‘One must be prepared,’ she muttered. ‘Hold the baby close to the lamp so I can see. Quickly Bridget. There’s not time to waste’. Snip, snip. Practice makes perfect” (Atkinson 602). After the many deaths of Ursula that occur throughout the novel, Sylvie seems to ‘remember’ or at least finds in her memory a faint recollection of what was needed to save her daughter’s life: a pair of surgical scissors. This seems to support the argument that “[r]emembering and forgetting are two sides – or different processes – of the same coin, that is memory. Forgetting is the very condition for remembering” (Erl 9).

In addition, “practice makes perfect” is a kind of motto Sylvie keeps saying in the novel, which highlights the capacity of the return, repetition and rebeginning to set things right for the individual and the community, too: “‘What if we had a chance to do it again and again,’ Teddy said, ‘until we finally did get it right? Wouldn’t that be wonderful?’” (Atkinson, *Life After Life* 522-23). In this sense, Marc Augé contends that the notion of *rebeginning* “indicates the complete opposite of a repetition: a radical inauguration, the prefix *re-* implying that from then on, a same life may have several beginnings” (57). Clearly, Ursula fits into the description of a same life having several beginnings, since, following Augé, “death itself, at the end of a reversal attested to in every culture, may also be conceived of as a rebeginning” (83). Although hardly ever mentioned in the novel, rebeginning is connected with the theme of resurrection and reincarnation. Ursula resurrects and rebegins every time she reaches death

or her near-death, just like the historian, who mobilises historicity by showing his/her debt with respect to the past (Ricoeur 380-81). As far as reincarnation is concerned, Dr Kellet, Ursula's psychiatrist, mentions it in passing (Atkinson 191, 578). The topic is again tackled at the end of *A God in Ruins* (2015), *Life After Life*'s companion piece, devoted to Teddy, Ursula's most beloved brother.<sup>4</sup> This companion piece can be considered as "one of Ursula's lives, an unwritten one", as the author sustains in her Author's Note (385). Interestingly, Teddy is erased from history at the end, when he dies in one of his air raids. Thus the novel sweeps away his life entirely. Later, Nancy, his childhood companion and girlfriend, wonders about reincarnation, and the possibilities of Teddy returning as something else. The author, as the historian, allows for the characters to have more than one life and thus, "[t]he creative power of repetition is contained entirely in this power of opening up the past again to the future" (Ricoeur 380).

Time and space are superimposed in the novel, and this multi-layered structure proves to be one of Atkinson's probing attempts at considering time as dynamic, and not constraining. Atkinson wished to craft a complex novel from the structural point of view: "I knew that I wanted something more complex than that, something downright *trickier*, something multi-layered and slightly fractal" (Atkinson, "Author Note" 617). The multi-layered structure resembles that of the palimpsest, "created by a process of layering – of erasure and superimposition –" (Dillon 12). It is my contention that the palimpsest serves as an apt metaphor for the novel as a whole where time and space are superimposed, and where Ursula's life is built upon a process of layering. Therefore, each variant of Ursula's life is an added layer or text upon the fabric of the novel, which collapses temporality: "[t]he present of the palimpsest is only constituted in and by the 'presence' of texts from the 'past', as well as remaining open to further inscription by texts of the 'future'" (Dillon 37).

At this point it might be of use to draw attention to the similarities between *Life After Life* and *Atonement* (2001), a heavily intertextual and "palimpsestuous novel", following Sarah Dillon.<sup>5</sup> Briony Tallis, the protagonist, produces a novel, which is "marked by the other possible narratives which it could have been" (Dillon 97). Likewise, *Life After Life* offers a textual layering of all the possibilities and choices Ursula has at hand when she re-begins. There are more common elements between McEwan's novel and Atkinson's: *Life After Life* begins with a view of the

prelapsarian Edwardian period, in which the Todd children grow up and live at Fox Corner, like the family in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. One critic has considered *Life After Life* against the backdrop "of a classic English country-house novel" (Lakeland 24), and a similar comment has been also made with relation to *Atonement*. Ultimately, if McEwan's narrative is about the interplay of the personal and the collective, the private and the public, the same can be argued in relation to *Life After Life*.

### *Communal/Cultural Memory in Life After Life*

I will now turn to discuss the interlocked processes of remembering and forgetting, not only applied to individuals, as happens with Ursula, but also to the community. Communal memory is particularly mobilised in the act of telling otherwise: "[t]hrough narrating one's identity otherwise, a community can work through its past, have an acceptable understanding of itself, and to justice to others" (Leichter 124). Therefore, this essay also looks into the ways in which Atkinson's novel engages with Ricoeur's concept of collective memory that is based upon networks of individual and communal relationships.

Atkinson's fiction has manifested her concern with history and collective memory ever since she published *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995), a novel which opens in York, where the "streets seethe with history" (10). In *Life After Life* history is as important as in Atkinson's early fiction, as looking back allows for the long-forgotten or less privileged historical events to acquire more predominance, opening up potentialities and futureness. If we envisage possible futures, we bear witness to the past, resurrect events of that past, thus connecting past and present and activating change. One critic has posited that the most important historical event depicted in the novel is the London Blitz, where, for her, "the logic of the novel [leads]: the war should not have been allowed to happen" (Hore 2). Considered as "the best fictional depiction of life in the Blitz" (Lakeland 25), the central section of the novel is devoted to the sustained bombing of London for eight months between 1940 and 1941. In it, Ursula experiences the London Blitz as an ARP (Air Raid Precaution) warden, and suffers from the trauma of re-living in different incarnations the bombing of a cellar in Argyll Road, where a dozen people have sheltered in November 1940. She works alongside Miss Woolf,<sup>6</sup> a retired hospital matron, who

becomes a senior warden:

Skirting the treacherous crater from last night, she discovered Miss Woolf sitting behind a dining table salvaged from the wreckage, as if she were in an office, telling people what they should do next – where to go for food and shelter, how to get clothes and ration cards and so on. Miss Woolf was still cheerful, yet heaven knows when she had last slept. The woman had iron in her soul, there was no doubt about that. Ursula had grown enormously fond of Miss Woolf, she respected her almost more than anyone else she knew [...] (465).

This scene is an example of Miss Woolf's understanding of her sense of herself "as sharing a common life with others" (Leichter 114). Paul Ricoeur's conceptualisation of intersubjectivity can be utilised to analyse the interdependence among individuals and the communities. If one reviewer of the novel has affirmed that "Ursula is one woman, rendered in multiple iterations, which makes this a story about the creation of self" (Kellogg 1), it could be argued that *Life After Life* recounts the process of the creation of the community. In so doing the novel re-enacts networks and relationships, fostering the idea that "reading oneself is the key to self-understanding" (Simms 101). This is to be applied not only to the individual, but also to the community. Seen in this light, the fictional production of "cultural memory is an ongoing process, characterized by a dynamic interplay between text and context, the individual and the collective, the social and the medial" (Erl 171).

Atkinson's novel promotes the encounter with the other as another self, which facilitates and expands the "sense of meaning and opens up the possibility for genuine community" (Leichter 118). Miss Woolf indeed creates such a community in her heroic actions during the London Blitz, by forging links with the members of the squad. She is raising everyone's spirits despite the horrible scenes of bombed houses, filthiness, and death everywhere. However, at one point the women's voluntary service (WVS) canteen is bombed and the messenger boy, Anthony, who is scooting past on his bicycle, is hit. This time, it is Ursula who is cheering Miss Woolf up, as she finds his death unbearable:

"Oh Anthony", Miss Woolf said, unable to say anything else [...] She stifled a sob with her hand. Tony made no sign of having heard them and they watched as he slowly turned a deathly pale, the colour of thin milk. He had gone.

"Oh, God", Miss Woolf cried. "I can't bear it".

“But bear it we must”, Ursula said, wiping away the snot and the tears and filth from her cheeks with the back of her hand and thinking how once this exchange would have been the other way round (512).

This section on the London Blitz illustrates the theme of the novel since death or life depends on the “capriciousness of the bombs and just where you were standing when they hit” (Lakeland 25). Anthony dies by chance, and his death, inexplicable as it is for Miss Woolf, breaks something inside the senior warden whose strength and courage have been instrumental in saving lives on many occasions. Ursula provides comfort when Miss Woolf most needs it, and thus, they represent an example of intersubjective relationship by means of encountering the other as another self.

Miss Woolf, as an individual, is a wounded subject, and so are the other wardens. Then, the novel seems to suggest that it is necessary to exorcise the past wounds by memory and mourning through *telling otherwise*, following Ricoeur: “through narrating one’s identity otherwise, a community can work through its past, have an acceptable understanding of itself, and to justice to others” (Leichter 124). The sense of the community that the novel promotes is connected with what Kate Atkinson has said about the purpose of the novel: *Life After Life* is about being English, “[n]ot just the reality of being English but also what we are in our imagination” (“Author’s Note” 616). This way, Atkinson’s novel bears striking similarities with *Atonement*, as mentioned earlier, which also examined established definitions of Englishness, as well as with Atkinson’s earlier work that also challenged and exposed “the cracks and contradictions in the ideology of Englishness” (Parker 64). In order to do so, Atkinson shows a duty to do justice in interlocked ways, which gives predominance to secondary voices or to alternative stories other than the dominant ideology. According to Ricoeur (86-92), to do justice involves to turn towards others, as Ursula does in her encounter with the German other.

In one of Ursula’s incarnations, she is determined to improve her knowledge of modern languages, and in the summer of 1933 she goes to Munich as “part of her adventurous year in Europe” (*Life After Life* 391). In this iteration of her life, she marries Jürgen Fuchs (who will work for the Ministry of Justice in Munich), gives birth to a daughter, Frieda, and has the possibility of enjoying the hospitality of Eva Braun at Hitler’s summer house on the mountains. The reader is to know the magnetic attraction that Hitler had for women: “Women in particular seemed to love the Führer.

They wrote him letters in the thousands, baked him cakes, embroidered swastikas on to cushions and pillows for him [...]” (428). In 1945, Ursula lives in Munich but the city is being bombed by the Allies day and night: Frieda, an unhealthy girl, with a poor chest, is suffering the cold. When the Russian tanks are already in the city, Ursula decides to kill her little daughter, and to commit suicide in one of the most harrowing scenes of the novel:

She held tightly on to Frieda and soon they were both wrapped in the velvet wings of the black bat and this life was already unreal and gone. She had never chosen death over life before and as she was leaving she knew something had cracked and broken and the order of things had changed. Then the dark obliterated all thoughts (445).

It is difficult to ascertain how much she remembers of this life, but witnessing the war from the enemy’s viewpoint grants Ursula with a more sympathetic perspective about German casualties. While suffering the ravages of hunger and cold in Berlin, Ursula is comparing the consequences of the bombing in both Berlin and London: “After the British raid on the zoo they had gone to see if there were any animals they could eat but plenty of people had got there before them. (Could *that* happen at home? Londoners scavenging in Regent’s Park zoo? Why not?)” (440). This underlines the levelling effect of war casualties, which is further reinforced in *A God in Ruins*, when Ursula wonders if Teddy feels uneasy about attacks on civilian population, considered a legitimate target (277), a contentious issue in the last few years as far as war history is concerned. Following Ricoeur, among the others we are indebted to are the victims (89).

In fact, Ricoeur argues that the duty of memory, or the notion of debt to the past, situates us in a privileged position as mediators between the past, present and future. “*We must remember these people when we are safely in the future*”, Miss Woolf states (*Life After Life* 164); and this future-oriented perspective, already developed in the earlier section of this essay, keeps our duty to the past alive, making us responsible for those who came before us, and who provided us with a heritage:

The duty of memory is not restricted to preserving the material trace, whether scriptural or other, of past events, but maintains the feeling of being obligated with respect to these others, of whom [...], not that they are no more, but that they were.



Pay the debt [...] but also inventory the heritage (Ricoeur 89).

There is one moving scene in the novel when Ursula, as an ARP, relives the bombing of a shelter in Argyll Road and fails to avoid the death of a baby. The cellar where the residents of the house have found shelter looks like “a crypt [...] full of the ancient dead” (*Life After Life* 509). The dead are compared to Roman ruins and the relics preserved from the eruption of the Mount Vesuvius in the first century A.D., where villas and streets had been buried under ashes:

The dead here – men, women, children, even a dog – looked as though they had been entombed where they had been sitting. They were completely cloaked in a shell of dust and looked more like sculptures, or fossils. She was reminded of Pompeii or Herculaneum. Ursula had visited both, during her ambitiously titled ‘grand tour’ of Europe (507).

By means of a simile, where the dead people are compared to the remains of those underground cities, the novel recognises a debt to the past, treating it like a heritage that has to be preserved and acknowledged. More importantly, the novel shows that we should feel the obligation to do justice for the sake of future generations (Leichter 124). In a similar key, Atkinson states that the writer has to *care* about what s/he is writing, particularly when there is “a moral imperative” (“Author’s Note” 388). Furthermore, she affirms that “[i]f this is a refutation of modernism or post-modernism or whatever has superseded post-modernism, then so be it” (“Author’s Note” 388), a statement that agrees with my discussion of the neo-historical novel as representing a move-on from postmodernism.

### *Conclusion: “History Is All About ‘What Ifs’”*

As the notion of “circularity” (Atkinson, *Life After Life* 192) represents the backbone of the novel, it seems fitting that this essay should conclude by means of a re-beginning of what was first stated in the introduction. In this piece I have dealt with Atkinson’s *Life After Life* as a novel with a special concern with temporalities in relation to history and memory. I have focused particularly on the future and death in connection with

historicity, drawing on Paul Ricoeur and Martin Heidegger's theories, as well as on the link between forgetting and "rebeginning", following Ricoeur and Marc Augé. Also, I have proved that the drive towards the future or "futureness" signals another way of memorialising the past and of showing a duty to the dead. In this sense, a concept of communal memory, in which Ricoeur's intersubjective model provides an apt critical notion, is at stake here, since it facilitates the production of networks of individual and communal relations.

Ultimately, the novel suggests alternative trajectories as a metaphor of the infinite possibilities an author faces when writing fiction. One critic has aptly noted that "Atkinson sharpens our awareness of the apparently limitless choices and decisions that a novelist must make on every page, and of what is gained and lost when the consequences of these choices are, like life, singular and final" (Prose 4). Therefore, fiction writing bears resemblance to the inherent potentialities that memory condenses: "[...] memory is fluid, ever-changing, even while it appears to remain the same. Due to its capacity to relate past, present, and future – envisioning alternative trajectories through a recourse to the past, activating forgotten knowledge in the present, making sense of the new by comparing it to the old – memory is the very apparatus that enables change" (Erl 174). Both memory and fiction are treated as similar forces: protean, ever-changing, putting together past, present and future orientations and possibilities. If we envisage possible futures, we manifest our debt to the past, recuperate forgotten events of that past, thus creating new possibilities for the future. Atkinson has posited that she cannot conceive a novel as "a two-dimensional space where the text ceases to be an interface between the self and the wider world" ("Author's Note" 388). This calls for an ethical position of the author who, like the historical fiction writer, reclaims the past for the future generations by *telling otherwise*.



- 1 The research carried out for this essay has been financed by MINECO (Research Project FFI2013-44154-P). I would like to express my gratitude to Victoria Stewart and María Magdalena Flores-Quesada, who, to varying degrees, have inspired my writing of this essay.
- 2 The *Cultures of Commemoration* Conference, held at the University of Portsmouth (11-12 July 2014), considered commemorative practices in contemporary literature and culture in the year that marked the centenary of the First World War. Other events contributed to the commemoration of relevant historical moments, such as the project “Transforming the D-Day Museum”, sponsored by the Portsmouth D-Day Museum Trust. *Lest We Forget* was Portsmouth Museum’s First World War Centenary Exhibition (19 July 2014–25 January 2015), inviting “visitors of all ages to uncover personal stories that reveal the fates of those involved on their journeys of chance, choice and destiny in the First World War” (n. p.).
- 3 The strained mother-daughter relationship in *Life After Life* is not uncharted territory for Atkinson. One has only to remember her early work, especially her trilogy *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995), *Human Croquet* (1997) and *Emotionally Weird* (2000), where the mother-daughter bond features prominently. According to Emma Parker, “[throughout the trilogy] Atkinson persistently depicts the pain of feeling unmothered or inadequately mothered, as well as the enduring power of the mother-daughter bond” (18).
- 4 Atkinson has labelled *A God in Ruins* a companion piece, rather than a sequel. It is about Teddy’s life and his role as a Halifax pilot in the strategic bombing upon Germany. In a way the novel fictionalises the controversy about the bombing campaign in WWII, which ended up hitting civilians, and not only military targets (Atkinson, “Author’s Note” 388-89). Also, it capitalises on the relevance of the secret, since during WWII Nancy, Teddy’s wife, was doing something “abstrusely mathematical”, according to Ursula. Teddy knew that it was “German codes” (Atkinson, *A God* 115), and later the plot discloses that she was working at Bletchley Park, deciphering intercepted German coded messages alongside Alan Turing, mathematician who cracked the Enigma code machine. In 2014 the award-winning film *The Imitation Game* (dir. Morten Tyldum) featured Alan Turing’s achievement, which

helped saving thousands of lives during WWII. For a further exploration of the importance of secrecy “as both a theme and a structural device in contemporary fiction” (Stewart 2), and as a crucial element in WWII, please consult Victoria Stewart’s *Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories* (2011).

- 5 Victoria Stewart has been the first critic, to the best of my knowledge, to indicate the similarities between Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* (2001) and Atkinson’s *Life After Life*. Fiona Tolan notes that in *Behind the Streets at the Museum* Ruby sees history as a palimpsest (287).
- 6 It remains clear that Miss Woolf’s name pays homage to Virginia Woolf, the modernist writer, whose London house was destroyed in the London blitz.



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# Rhétoriques du trauma: le souvenir et l'oubli dans *Le ciel de Bay City* de Catherine Mavrikakis

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## *1. Introduction*

Dans son étude sur Spiegelman, Marianne Hirsch a proposé le terme de “post-mémoire” pour décrire les narrations d’un passé traumatique réalisées par des générations qui n’ont pas vécu ce passé directement mais qui ont été marquées par les récits familiaux avec lesquels elles ont grandi. Hirsch a étudié les réponses générationnelles à la mémoire et au trauma. La post-mémoire serait, selon elle, la réponse de la deuxième génération au trauma de la première, la réaction des enfants face aux expériences traumatiques de leurs parents (218). En effet, les enfants de la deuxième génération se voient confrontés à la souffrance de leurs ascendants et à leurs propres réactions face à ce passé qu’ils découvrent. L’héritier adopte les mémoires et expériences traumatiques de ses parents comme si elles étaient les siennes propres et il les inscrit dans son histoire. Comme le souligne Hirsch, dans le cas de la seconde génération, la mémoire est indirecte: elle se base non pas sur le souvenir des événements mais sur des représentations, des narrations, des images avec lesquelles ces enfants ont grandi, mais qui sont si intenses qu’elles deviennent des souvenirs par elles-mêmes (220). Dans *La mémoire saturée*, Régine Robin fait aussi référence à cette “transmission de traumatismes de la guerre ou du génocide par ceux qui n’ont pas connu la guerre ou qui étaient trop jeunes pour comprendre la gravité des événements” (322). Le trauma serait ainsi transmis d’une génération à l’autre, les descendants recevant ses effets à travers les

histoires, les actions et les symptômes des ascendants. Pour la deuxième génération, l'association avec le passé se réalise à travers l'imaginaire, notamment grâce aux récits entendus, aux films ou aux photographies.

Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe et Laurent Demanze soutiennent que la littérature contemporaine s'attache "moins aux lieux de mémoire et aux communautés préservées qu'à l'inquiétude d'un sujet qui se réapproprie le legs des ascendants et tente d'en reconstruire le récit de manière fragmentaire et fugitive à la fois" (6). L'héritier doit construire son identité tout en assimilant le passé traumatique de ses ancêtres, un passé "empreint de négativité", "fragilisé par les secousses, voire les ressacs, d'une modernité dont on accueille et réévalue à la fois le désir de rupture" (Lapointe, Demanze 7). Le sujet essaie de se distancier de cet héritage afin de forger sa propre identité, mais le souvenir du passé s'impose à lui comme un devoir éthique. Comme l'explique Laurent Demanze:

Tout se passe comme si ces héritiers problématiques étaient tiraillés entre la nécessité moderne d'une *destitution* des figures parentales pour advenir à soi et le souhait d'une *restitution* des vies de l'ascendance pour qu'elles ne sombrent pas dans l'oubli (12).

Catherine Mavrikakis est une écrivaine, née à Chicago en 1961, et qui vit actuellement à Montréal. Dans ses romans, l'auteure met en relief les paradoxes qui entourent la notion de mémoire, l'importance du souvenir, mais aussi le besoin qu'éprouve le sujet d'un certain oubli pour pouvoir continuer à vivre. Or, oublier signifie trahir, être infidèle envers l'histoire familiale, d'où le désarroi des personnages. Cette étude montre l'importance qu'acquiert la post-mémoire et le trauma dans le roman *Le ciel de Bay City*, publié en 2008. Dans cette œuvre, Mavrikakis nous montre comment le souvenir de la Seconde Guerre mondiale continue à être très présent dans la vie d'une famille française partie aux États-Unis après la guerre. Nous observerons la dialectique qui apparaît entre la mémoire et l'oubli, le ressentiment et les remords, l'héritage et la survie.

## 2. *Les secrets du passé*

*Le ciel de Bay City* s'ouvre avec une date "Les années soixante et soixante-dix", un espace, "Bay City", et sous le signe de la mémoire, "je me



rappelle” (Mavrikakis 9). La narratrice, Amy, retrace les différentes étapes de sa vie depuis son enfance passée dans le Michigan au sein de sa famille d’origine française. Cette reconstruction mémorielle passe aussi par l’évocation du passé de la mère, Denise, et de la tante, Babette, qui ont vécu les bombardements lors de la Seconde Guerre mondiale et la déportation de leurs parents. Denise et Babette sont des survivantes: cachées par une famille normande catholique, elles ont évité les camps de concentration et la mort. Après la guerre, elles se sont installées aux États-Unis, où elles ont essayé d’oublier ces événements. Si, lorsqu’elles ont peur, pendant les tempêtes, elles racontent “des histoires terribles de la Seconde Guerre mondiale” (Mavrikakis 14), elles évitent de parler de l’histoire familiale, et notamment de la mort d’une grande partie de la famille dans les camps de concentration.

Afin de se distancier du passé et de se réinventer, Denise et Babette ont changé de pays mais aussi de religion: face à la religion juive de leurs parents, Babette pratique un catholicisme exacerbé; Denise est athée et pense que “la religion conduit au pire” (Mavrikakis 20). Le passé constitue pour elles un tabou, un interdit, un secret qu’elles cachent à leurs enfants. Denise n’hésite pas à gifler sa fille, Amy, si cette dernière pose des questions sur ce sujet. Abandonnée par son père et méprisée par sa mère, Amy est pratiquement élevée par sa tante Babette. L’absence du père et surtout l’attitude dédaigneuse de la mère peuvent expliquer le souci identitaire de la protagoniste, et le besoin qu’elle ressent de connaître ses racines, de découvrir l’histoire familiale. Elle cherche à connaître le passé afin de retrouver et de reconstruire son propre héritage. Bien qu’elle soit née aux États-Unis, elle est obsédée par la mémoire des événements de la Seconde Guerre mondiale qu’elle n’a pas vécus. Les bombardements, les déportations, les camps de concentration hantent ses cauchemars. Pour elle, ce passé est associé à son identité et elle sent le besoin de connaître ce qui est arrivé afin de comprendre aussi les horreurs qui hantent ses rêves la nuit. La protagoniste n’appartient pas à la génération de ses grands-parents, qui furent des victimes directes de la Shoah et qui sont morts dans les camps de concentration. Elle n’appartient pas non plus à la génération de sa mère, qui a vécu la guerre dans son enfance. Cette distance devrait, à priori, la protéger de l’horreur de ces événements. Malgré cela, Amy semble être le personnage de la famille le plus traumatisé par le passé. Elle a intériorisé ces drames dans sa propre histoire et elle est devenue elle-même une victime. Amy essaie de connaître davantage le passé de sa

famille pour trouver un point d’ancrage qui lui permettrait de renforcer son identité et de trouver un sens à son histoire personnelle et à celle de ses aînés. Cependant, sa curiosité ne pourrait être satisfaite qu’à travers des images, des récits, des documents transmis d’une génération à une autre dont sa mère la prive.

Selon Hirsch, pour la seconde génération la connexion avec l’événement est indirecte et se fait à travers des représentations qui se basent parfois sur le silence au lieu de la parole, sur l’invisible au lieu du visible (220). Dans le cas d’Amy, le silence de la mère ne fait qu’intensifier son imagination, sa représentation du passé. Denise ne parle pas de son enfance, mais Amy observe l’attitude des deux sœurs, elle essaie d’écouter leurs chuchotements, et elle pose fréquemment des questions à sa tante. Si celle-ci refuse souvent de lui répondre, elle ne peut éviter de lui confirmer la ressemblance entre ses cauchemars et le passé: “Oui, oui, c’était comme cela. Tu vois tout”, lui déclare-t-elle (Mavrikakis 115-116). À travers l’observation, Amy doit déchiffrer les contradictions, créer ou imaginer là où elle ne peut reconstruire le passé. C’est à travers un appel téléphonique qu’elle découvre les origines juives de sa famille. Elle sent alors qu’elle est “Juive, une fausse Juive dont on cache encore l’identité, une Juive amputée d’elle-même et qui porte une prothèse de catholicisme” (Mavrikakis 23). Les films, et notamment les “remakes imaginaires de la Seconde Guerre mondiale” (Mavrikakis 102), complètent aussi sa perception du passé, tout en lui présentant des “scénarios catastrophe” (Mavrikakis 102).

Toutefois, le premier contact d’Amy avec la mort est constitué par la tombe où est enterrée sa grande sœur. Amy se sent honteuse de vivre alors que sa grande sœur Angie est morte à la naissance. Elle associe le mépris de sa mère envers elle avec la mort de cette sœur qu’elle a remplacée. Ses cauchemars deviennent l’endroit où se manifestent ces angoisses refoulées. Sa sœur y apparaît, décomposée, pourrie par la mort. À ce rêve s’ajoutent ceux où apparaissent les victimes de la Shoah, dont la cousine de sa mère, morte à Auschwitz en 1944. Amy elle-même se sent la nuit “poussée dans une chambre à gaz alors que des milliers de gens hurlent en se crevant les yeux” (Mavrikakis 28). L’angoisse de la protagoniste est suscitée par son contact quotidien, imaginaire, avec la violence mortifère du passé, avec les morts qui traversent ses cauchemars et qui la supplient de les aider.

Ses cauchemars sont violents et pourtant Amy ne peut en parler. Sa mère lui interdit de raconter ses rêves et seule sa tante écoute ses récits afin d’y retrouver des ressemblances avec sa propre expérience: “Elle sait

tout, lançait-elle à ma mère. Elle sait ce que des membres de la famille ont vécu. [...] Je te le dis. Notre vie, Amy la vit la nuit” (Mavrikakis 115). Comme l’explique Caruth: “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (*Trauma* 5). Selon cette spécialiste: “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event of an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on” (*Unclaimed* 4). Le sujet traumatisé est incapable d’assimiler l’expérience vécue et celle-ci réapparaît dans sa conscience à travers les symptômes traumatiques. Or, Amy n’a pas vécu la Seconde Guerre mondiale et les seuls événements traumatiques qui ont marqué son enfance sont la mort de sa sœur Angie (qui a eu lieu avant la naissance d’Amy) et le mépris de sa mère.

Pour un travail de classe, la protagoniste décide de tenir le journal de ses rêves pendant deux mois. Les contenus de ce journal poussent le professeur à contacter la psychologue qui “jugea l’affaire sérieuse” (Mavrikakis 117), mais ni la psychologue ni les différents psychiatres que consulte Amy, spécialisés en PTSD (*Post-traumatic Stress Disorder*) ne sont capables de l’aider. Pourtant, dans les groupes de thérapie, les récits qu’elle fait de ses cauchemars ressemblent énormément aux expériences qu’avaient vécues les autres membres du groupe, des “hommes de trente à cinquante ans, de[s] vétérans de la guerre de Corée ou du Vietnam” (Mavrikakis 119). Amy insiste bien sur la distance qui la sépare de ces hommes: “moi, contrairement à tous ces anciens soldats, je n’étais pas allée faire la guerre au Vietnam ou en Corée. J’étais une jeune fille de dix-sept ans, sans aucun souvenir personnel, vierge de tout événement traumatisant” (Mavrikakis 119). Et pourtant Amy porte en elle la mémoire de l’Europe. Les psychiatres essayent de chercher sans succès des signes d’abus sexuels ou d’incestes qui pourraient expliquer les cauchemars. Le dernier psychiatre consulté soutient l’hypothèse “d’un traumatisme transgénérationnel qui venait de [l]a mère et de [l]a tante” (Mavrikakis 119). Toutefois, lorsqu’il essaie de faire venir les “deux sœurs traumatisées à son institut de recherche” (Mavrikakis 119), Denise et Babette refusent et la thérapie d’Amy se conclut sans que ses cauchemars aient cessé. Désormais, Amy doit continuer à supporter ses cauchemars en silence: “Je ne racontai plus mes rêves à personne. Je ne parlai plus de mon judaïsme. Je continuai pourtant à être hantée, sachant que jamais je ne pourrais me départir de mes vies nocturnes” (Mavrikakis 120).

Comme le souligne Demanze, “le récit de filiation est le lieu d’une hantise, d’une rémanence d’un passé qui ne passe pas” (22). La permanence de ce passé se matérialise souvent dans la figure du spectre ou du fantôme, dans la réapparition des ancêtres. Si la Shoah a eu lieu dans le passé et dans un autre continent, la narration réduit cette distance en faisant apparaître des figures de ce passé européen aussi bien dans les cauchemars d’Amy que dans le sous-sol de sa maison. Amy découvre dans le cagibi la présence des spectres de ses grands-parents morts à Auschwitz que sa tante Babette cachait en secret. Le cagibi est situé au sous-sol, l’endroit le plus bas de la maison. Selon Bachelard, la cave représente l’inconscient et lorsqu’on y descend on descend dans un monde en profondeur, on descend en nous-mêmes (141). Cette descente est aussi une descente vers le passé, les racines. Les spectres témoignent de la permanence obsédante du passé, malgré la distance spatiale et temporelle des événements. La présence des spectres met aussi en évidence les mensonges de la mère sur l’histoire familiale, le crime mémoriel sur lequel la famille a établi les fondations de sa nouvelle vie en Amérique. Daniel Laforest voit même dans l’apparition de ces phantasmes une mise en question des bases sur lesquelles a été construite la communauté nord-américaine (163). Le sous-sol devient, comme l’explique Mathieu Arsenault, cet espace “où les vivants peuvent à leur guise descendre sous terre visiter le souvenir des morts qui ne trouvent leur place nulle part” (2009: 45) dans cette banlieue américaine indifférente à l’Histoire.

Ce qui frappe Amy c’est notamment l’état de saleté dans lequel se trouve le cagibi, une saleté qui reflète le côté obscur du passé de la famille, et qui n’est pas sans évoquer les “poussières” et “débris accumulés de l’histoire” (Mavrikakis 81). Le passé s’incruste au cœur du présent. Les spectres ont un aspect physique fragile, vieilli, décharné. La protagoniste perçoit que “leur dégradation physique est due à des mauvais traitements”, subis à Auschwitz (Mavrikakis 83). Selon Abraham et Torok, les spectres qui viennent hanter la conscience des héritiers seraient l’expression d’un manque, ils représenteraient “les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres” (426). Lorsqu’Amy découvre les spectres, Babette lui dit: “Ah! tu voulais savoir, Amy, eh bien, tu sais maintenant” (Mavrikakis 83).

La scène de la découverte des grands-parents bouleverse le réalisme du récit. Comme l’explique Lapointe, le “léger décrochage par rapport au réel” qui caractérise les romans de Mavrikakis est “si léger qu’il en devient trompeur [...] happe et repousse le lecteur, le laissant dans une

zone indécise où l'inconfort domine" (146). La présence des spectres rend visibles, matériels, les crimes de l'Histoire. Elle oblige Babette et Amy à 'voir' le passé et surtout à en parler. Amy peut désormais partager le secret familial, connaître ses racines. De cette manière, le récit insiste sur les événements qui ont eu lieu, tout en mettant particulièrement en relief les effets de cette mémoire sur la protagoniste, sa propre réponse face au passé.

Babette raconte alors à sa nièce les recherches qu'elle a faites pour découvrir l'histoire de ses parents. Elle décrit comment ceux-ci ont laissé leurs filles dans une famille catholique normande pour les protéger, et comment ils sont morts ensuite à Auschwitz: "Je suis comme toi. Quelqu'un qui veut savoir" (Mavrikakis 84) déclare-t-elle. D'ailleurs, le passé se cache non seulement dans le cagibi mais aussi dans le placard de la chambre de Babette, qui a un double fond, et où elle conserve en secret les archives concernant les événements qui ont eu lieu:

Oui, j'ai les lettres, les témoignages, j'ai tout, caché dans le placard de ma chambre. Oui, je connais la vérité même si ta mère m'interdit de penser à tout cela, même si ta mère ne veut pas que je sache. J'ai fait des recherches, j'ai récupéré une boîte entière de documents (Mavrikakis 84)

Cette boîte contient des vestiges du passé, des traces significatives qui, par leur matérialité, constituent des preuves de l'existence de ces événements. Babette montre à sa nièce des lettres, des photographies, qui témoignent de sa vie d'enfant juive en France et de la situation de ses parents morts à Auschwitz. La photographie rend non seulement visible le passé, mais elle permet de l'authentifier, de le prouver. En accumulant tous ces documents, Babette a pu reconstruire l'histoire de la famille, de ceux qui sont morts en 1914-1918, et des quarante-huit membres assassinés dans les camps de concentration nazis. L'une des lettres, celle que le père de Babette a envoyée à une cousine alors qu'il était à Auschwitz, est particulièrement importante. Dans celle-ci, il raconte la terreur qu'ils endurent, la mort de sa femme et la certitude qu'il mourra bientôt. La reconstruction du passé étant toujours lacunaire, ni Amy ni Babette ne sont capables de comprendre comment cette lettre du grand-père a pu éviter la censure. Ces lettres "sont là [...] dit Babette, et elles parlent pour ceux qui se sont tus" (Mavrikakis 144). Elle conserve aussi "un grand cahier noir" dans lequel Babette a "reconstruit la vie de ses grands-parents, parents, tantes, oncles et cousins depuis 1879, date de naissance de l'ancêtre Rosenberg" (Mavrikakis 147).

Comme le signale Marie-Claude Gourde, “le livre, par sa matérialité, devient ce somptueux monument funéraire construit à la mémoire de la douleur, tel un lieu de recueillement où peut enfin être déposé le souvenir exorcisé de cette perte” (48). Pour Amy la découverte de cet archive est fondamentale: elle a finalement l’impression d’avoir “droit à [s]es ancêtres, d’avoir accès [...] à [s]a tante et à [s]a mère” (*Mavrikakis* 148). Il s’agit d’une expérience essentielle qui contribue à élargir le cercle des membres de sa famille en l’ouvrant en direction du passé et en lui montrant les expériences subies par ces générations. Les archives et le dialogue avec sa tante, qui lui raconte des bribes de son enfance, donnent à Amy accès finalement à cette mémoire et lui offrent la possibilité d’une construction de soi.

Elle découvre aussi que Babette est comme elle, obsédée par l’histoire familiale, une obsession qui se manifeste dans le cas de sa tante dans ses efforts pour nettoyer la maison, dans une tentative de nettoyer le présent des cendres du passé: “Du corps de mes parents, de mes oncles, de mes tantes, nous continuons à respirer les restes, poussés par les grands vents. [...] C’est bien pour cela qu’il faut tout laver, tout le temps, pour ne pas étouffer sous les cendres des nôtres”, signale Babette (*Mavrikakis* 84-85). Malgré ses efforts, le cagibi est là, sale, témoignant de ce passé qui ne passe pas, de ce passé anachronique qui parasite les consciences.

L’interdit familial de parler du passé fait qu’elles ne puissent consulter ces archives qu’en cachette. Le passé est un tabou auquel il ne faut pas songer mais qui est présent dans leurs consciences, comme le rappellent ces spectres des grands-parents qui se cachent dans le cagibi et qui deviennent pour Babette et Amy un secret de plus à garder.

### *3. Le feu de Bay City*

La narration de ce roman ne considère pas seulement comment se réalise la transmission de la mémoire (et du trauma), mais aussi comment commence le trauma lui-même. La vie d’Amy met ainsi en évidence différentes étapes qui reflètent d’une part son enfance, marquée par les cauchemars qu’elle associe au passé de sa mère et par sa volonté de connaître ce passé; ses dix-huit ans, où Amy subit elle-même une expérience traumatique; puis l’âge adulte marqué par sa propre fille qui à son tour veut connaître le passé de sa mère.

Lorsqu’Amy découvre l’histoire familiale, elle doit vivre non seulement avec cette mémoire mais aussi en sachant que les spectres de ses grands-parents sont cachés dans le sous-sol. Elle ressent une rage profonde face aux cruautés du passé, une angoisse ontologique qui la pousse à vouloir faire *tabula rasa*, à vouloir tout détruire. La nuit de ses dix-huit ans, elle met le feu à la maison, aidée par les spectres de ses grands-parents, qui disparaissent dans les flammes. Conséquence de cet acte violent, toute sa famille périt.

Ainsi, le feu ravage la maison de la famille et Amy est la seule survivante. Selon la narratrice, c’est elle-même qui aurait mis le feu à la maison, en voulant en finir avec les secrets et les horreurs du passé. La narration suggère toutefois une alternative aux causes de l’accident: des braises du barbecue qui seraient restées allumées auraient provoqué le feu et non pas Amy. Comme l’explique la narratrice, indignée:

J’ai eu beau accumuler toutes les preuves contre moi, me rappeler mes faits et gestes, raconter aux médecins, aux policiers, la semaine avant l’incendie et tous les détails de mon dix-huitième anniversaire. [...] Personne n’a voulu me croire. [...] je suis innocente. Je n’ai rien fait. J’ai subi simplement un intense stress post-traumatique qui m’a donné un sentiment de culpabilité pathologique [...] Les tests, les experts, les conclusions sont formels. Je suis simplement une victime, une pauvre victime d’un horrible accident [...] (Mavrikakis 45)

Après l’incendie, Amy est internée dans le *Detroit Psychiatric Hospital* (Mavrikakis 40), convaincue de sa culpabilité. Comme l’indiquent Geninet et Marchand, “pour certaines personnes, se tenir en partie responsable de l’événement diminuera leur perception d’un monde où le hasard peut frapper à tout moment” (13). Internée à l’hôpital, Amy essaye de rédiger ses aveux. Au début elle est incapable d’émettre le moindre son. Elle n’arrive pas non plus à écrire des phrases cohérentes, étant donné que le choc traumatique est une expérience qui excède le langage et qui se situe au-delà des mots. Peu à peu, elle réussit à écrire, mais malgré ses aveux, personne ne croit à sa culpabilité et l’on attribue ses propos au “choc émotif” vécu: “Marcie Warren m’explique que j’ai vécu un grand choc émotif. Ma culpabilité de survivante crée cette conviction intime de responsabilité et suscite en moi un besoin de punition. Je suis déclarée comme personne souffrant d’un syndrome post-traumatique” (Mavrikakis 277).

Il est intéressant de constater que si à l'hôpital Amy est tout d'abord incapable de parler et d'écrire, avec le temps non seulement elle trouvera sa voix mais elle deviendra la narratrice de ce roman. Le désarroi du personnage continuera toutefois à se percevoir à travers les phrases courtes et entrecoupées qui sont fréquemment utilisées le long de la narration pour suggérer son agitation. Le rythme rapide et le manque de linéarité dans la structure du roman, reflètent aussi le trouble intérieur qui caractérise la protagoniste.

Pendant longtemps, Amy cherche un sens à toutes ces morts, elle essaie de comprendre pourquoi l'événement traumatique a eu lieu, sans cependant se souvenir exactement de ce qui est arrivé: "Je ne sais pas ce qui m'est vraiment arrivé le 5 juillet 1979. Je ne sais pourquoi je n'ai pas péri avec ma famille dans les flammes que j'ai attisées ni comment j'ai regardé tout le monde cramer du haut de mon sapin-cabane" (Mavrikakis 46). Le lecteur ne saura jamais si Amy a effectivement provoqué l'incendie ou pas.

Cependant, Amy voit bien que pour abandonner l'hôpital elle doit arrêter de s'attribuer la faute de l'incendie. Ainsi, elle finit par "apprendre à mentir", apprendre "l'histoire qui convient au monde des vivants" (Mavrikakis 280). La survie d'Amy aggrave la perception négative d'elle-même qu'elle avait déjà dans son enfance en tant que survivante de sa sœur Angie. Dans son esprit, la mort de sa famille se mêle aux morts du passé. "On n'en finit jamais de la honte d'exister" (Mavrikakis 39), déclare la narratrice. Survivre aux morts de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, à sa sœur Angie et à l'accident de Bay City provoque chez elle un remords aigu. Selon Gourde, le "survivant est un être de l'entre-deux; ni vivant, ni mort, déchiré dans cette position insupportable" (70). Se sentant morte, Amy fait graver sur la tombe collective son propre nom à côté de ceux des membres de sa famille, auxquels elle ajoute ceux de ses grands-parents. La tombe, en tant que lieu de mémoire, et notamment l'épithaphe, fonctionnent à la façon de *reminders* (pour reprendre l'expression de Ricoeur 49), des indices qui viennent authentifier que ces personnes ont vécu, que ce passé a effectivement eu lieu, là où toutes les autres traces de l'histoire familiale ont été détruites. En effet, ce ne sont pas seulement les membres de la famille qui ont été anéantis par l'incendie, mais aussi toutes les archives témoignant de l'histoire familiale. Du passé, il ne reste que l'épithaphe inscrit sur cette tombe, et la mémoire défaillante d'Amy. Cet épithaphe met en question aussi l'authenticité des lieux de mémoire, la véracité de la mémoire qui est transmise malgré les traces écrites de ce passé.



Amy, en incluant son propre nom sur la tombe, modifie l'histoire: elle se déclare morte. Puisque son identité est désormais fondée sur l'horreur (des événements de l'histoire familiale, mais aussi de ceux qu'elle a vécus), elle cherche à laisser derrière elle cette identité et à devenir une autre personne pour pouvoir continuer à vivre. Il s'agit d'un geste d'auto-fondation qui définit une nouvelle temporalité et une nouvelle identité.

Ricoeur distingue entre la trace en tant que document écrit et éventuellement archivé et la trace comme affection résultant du choc d'un événement (2000: 16). Si les traces matérielles du passé d'Amy ont disparu, la protagoniste conservera pourtant la trace de ce passé en elle-même. En effet, malgré la mort de toute sa famille et ses tentatives d'oublier, Amy continuera à être chargée du fardeau de la mémoire, et à être hantée par la mémoire des morts.

Avant l'incendie, la protagoniste rêvait d'atteindre l'âge adulte, de partir de Bay City, ou bien d'un événement qui détruirait toute sa famille et qui constituerait une séparation radicale, une rupture entre le monde de l'enfance et l'âge adulte, entre Bay City et une nouvelle vie. Toutefois, le feu, la destruction, la violence, ne l'ont pas libérée du poids du passé. Elle est tiraillée entre sa volonté d'acquérir une identité propre et sa dette envers ses aïeux. D'ailleurs, malgré cette mort symbolique, Amy ne peut pas renier de la chaîne généalogique de sa famille. Au contraire, en tuant Amy Duchesnay, elle élimine ce qu'il y avait de faux et de supplanté dans son identité. Duchesnay était le nom de la famille catholique qui avait adopté et caché sa mère et sa tante lorsque leurs parents ont été déportés. Les deux sœurs avaient conservé ce nom après la guerre. Amy, par contre, décide de reprendre les noms de ses grands-parents, juifs et morts dans les camps de concentration. Elle devient Amy Rozenweig Rosenberg et de cette manière, elle revendique ses origines réelles. Ce nom devient le dernier vestige de l'existence de ce passé, mais aussi une forme de préserver et de continuer ce lignage.

Lorsque quelques années plus tard Amy a une fille, Heaven, elle décide de lui raconter l'histoire de ses ancêtres et de sa famille. Amy devient ainsi à son tour un maillon entre le passé et le futur et elle refuse le silence qui avait caractérisé sa propre mère. Heaven est curieuse et veut tout savoir, elle demande à sa mère "de tout lui raconter" (Mavrikakis 100). Amy n'hésite pas à transmettre cet héritage mémoriel à sa fille et elle réalise même un voyage avec Heaven à Auschwitz, afin de voir les endroits qui sont supposés être ceux de la fin d'une grande partie de sa famille, morte

dans les camps. L'espace créé par la perte est en quelque sorte comblé par sa propre fille. Face au passé et à la mort, Heaven constitue un espoir de futur. Pour Amy, la naissance de Heaven constitue une renaissance: "C'est avec Heaven que je suis parvenue à me dépouiller de tout" (Mavrikakis 213), affirme-t-elle. Toutefois, la protagoniste continue à voir les cadavres du passé, ce "peuple des morts, des sans-visage, [qui] s'infiltrait, vivait et mourait en [elle]" (Mavrikakis 100). Amy essaie de rappeler à sa fille les origines indigènes paternelles afin que celle-ci ait un autre héritage que celui de sa mère. Le père de Heaven est, en effet, "un Indien d'Amérique", un "Cherokee de l'Oklahoma" (Mavrikakis 209). Cependant, Heaven ne porte pas le nom de son père mais ceux qui évoquent le passé de sa mère: "Tout comme moi, elle porte deux patronymes: Rozenweig, Rosenberg" (Mavrikakis 209).

D'autre part, Heaven se sent vite déçue par ses origines paternelles. En effet, si elle pensait que les Cherokees étaient caractérisés par la justice et la liberté, elle est surprise de voir qu'ils ont rejeté en 2004 le mariage homosexuel et qu'en 2007 ils ont voté l'expulsion des descendants métis, des anciens esclaves. Elle s'approche alors plus des origines d'Amy, commence à lui parler en français et part à Bay City pour y chercher des "traces de la jeunesse de sa mère" (Mavrikakis 211). Lorsque Heaven demande à Amy de l'accompagner au cimetière de Bay City, Amy refuse: elle se sent incapable d'y retourner, le trauma étant toujours présent.

Bien qu'Amy essaie de protéger sa fille de son passé, à la fin du roman elle la trouve endormie aux côtés des spectres de toute sa famille morte: des grands-parents exterminés dans les camps et des membres décédés dans l'incendie de Bay City. "Ma fille chérie habite elle aussi l'histoire" (Mavrikakis 292), pense alors Amy. La troisième génération continue à subir la mémoire, l'histoire. Le passé familial hante toujours le présent. La protagoniste ne peut contrôler ses souvenirs et ne peut non plus éviter que sa fille soit à son tour chargée du poids mémoriel de ce passé. Amy décide alors de se coucher aux côtés de sa fille et des différents spectres de sa famille. Cette scène met bien en relief le caractère intemporel de l'expérience traumatique. Elle suggère aussi la mort éventuelle d'Amy, qui, comme le reste de sa famille, pourrait devenir un spectre de plus hantant les nuits de sa descendance.

#### 4. *L'espace dans la construction identitaire*

Si l'expérience traumatique est intemporelle, elle ne semble pas non plus connaître des frontières spatiales. La narration de ce roman juxtapose souvent différents espaces et différentes temporalités afin de mettre en relief la complexité du processus mémoriel. De nombreux historiens ont montré le lien qui existe entre le lieu et la mémoire, et la manière dont les lieux contribuent à la construction de l'identité sur un plan aussi bien collectif que personnel. Ricoeur a souligné l'importance du lien entre la "mémoire corporelle" et la "mémoire des lieux", entre l'"ici-maintenant" et le "là-bas" géographique et historique (2000: 51). Amy ne cesse de tisser des liens entre l'"ici" constitué par le continent américain où elle habite et l'espace européen qui hante ses pensées. Toutefois, après l'incendie et son départ de Bay City, 'là-bas' devient aussi, paradoxalement, sa ville natale, celle où a eu lieu l'horreur.

Dès le début du roman, Bay City apparaît comme un espace sans racines, où les maisons préfabriquées se distinguent à peine, "clonées les unes sur les autres" (Mavrikakis 9). La rue où habite Amy dans son enfance est "Véronica Lane, une rue au nom sans histoire" (Mavrikakis 10) et même la maison en tôle a été fabriquée ailleurs, dans une usine de Flint. Face à l'Europe de l'Histoire et notamment de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, apparaît l'Amérique, et plus concrètement les États-Unis. Le long de sa vie, la protagoniste est tiraillée entre le souvenir du passé européen et le rêve américain auquel elle essaie de s'attacher pour oublier l'horreur vécue par ses ancêtres. Comme elle le déclare: "Je suis une Américaine de deuxième génération, la fille d'Alice Cooper et du groupe The Germs. Je suis un monstre *made in USA*" (Mavrikakis 222). Au K-Mart, où elle travaille dans son adolescence, elle peut "consomme[r] l'Amérique", être "loin de l'Europe et de ses tourments. K-Mart est sans histoire" (Mavrikakis 126). À travers la musique, les cigarettes et la sexualité, elle cherche un certain oubli. Elle essaie même de libérer ses grands-parents du passé en conduisant leurs spectres en voiture vers l'ouest, en leur faisant partager le rêve américain:

Le ciel de l'Amérique au-dessus de nos têtes semble bénir notre course folle à travers l'histoire. [Nous] fonçons enivrés vers le vingt-et-unième siècle. Il faut délivrer mes grands-parents du poids du temps. Il faut effacer la souffrance, l'horreur et les conduire au seuil du futur. Je veux que la voiture accélère tambour battant vers

l'avenir, que la route de Chicago soit celle de la délivrance. Il reste à conquérir l'Amérique. L'oubli sera notre devise [...] Je ne crois qu'au rêve américain et même s'il est parfois pénible, il est toujours neuf (Mavrikakis 187)

Toutefois, cette course folle s'avère un échec. Elle-même ne peut oublier le passé malgré le paysage américain. Bien qu'elle revendique son appartenance à l'Amérique, le passé continue de la hanter: "La seconde génération d'immigrants est maudite. Il faut des siècles pour se remettre de l'histoire de sa famille" (Mavrikakis 243), déclare-t-elle.

Même sa mère et sa tante sont incapables de se dépouiller de leurs origines françaises et les membres de la famille sont considérés comme des étrangers dans le quartier. Babette essaie de s'attacher à sa culture à travers la langue française qu'elle enseigne, la cuisine, les vêtements et le décor de la maison. Denise ne renonce pas non plus à ses origines françaises en se déclarant d'ailleurs profondément gaulliste et républicaine.

Babette et Denise fêtent le Jour d'Indépendance de l'Amérique puisqu'elles "croient dans cette nation qui leur a permis d'oublier le passé, de refaire leur vie" (Mavrikakis 225). Toutefois, Amy soupçonne qu'en réalité, à travers la fête du 4 juillet, Denise et Babette célèbrent en secret le 14 juillet avec quelques jours d'avance. Les couleurs avec lesquelles elles décorent la maison pour cette occasion sont le bleu, le blanc et le rouge, qui suggèrent aussi bien le drapeau des États-Unis que celui de la France.

Le 4 juillet est à la fois la fête de l'Amérique, l'anniversaire d'Amy et le jour où toute sa famille périt dans les flammes. Pour les États-Unis, il s'agit du "Jour de l'Indépendance, de la liberté, de la coupure avec l'Ancien Monde" (Mavrikakis 129). Pour Amy, avant l'accident, et surtout à l'aube de ses dix-huit ans, il s'agit d'une journée d'espoir, où elle croit pouvoir s'affranchir du passé. En effet, dans son adolescence, Amy rêve de partir ailleurs, de quitter Bay City afin de trouver une certaine libération. Elle cherche à se libérer de sa famille, de sa maison et songe même à des bombes qui tomberaient sur le toit, faisant tout disparaître. Ces rêves expliquent aussi la sensation de culpabilité que ressent la protagoniste après l'incendie.

Si l'Europe est marquée par la violence de son passé et les cendres des morts, l'Amérique est, quant à elle, caractérisée par la pollution. La couleur mauve de Bay City témoigne d'un ciel rendu toxique par les fumées des usines de Dearborn. Ces fumées suggèrent à la protagoniste les liens "entre l'industrialisation, les abattoirs d'animaux destinés à la consommation de

masse et le massacre des Juifs” (Mavrikakis 250). D’ailleurs, la narratrice rappelle la relation entre les usines américaines et les camps nazis: elle décrit comment la filiale allemande de la société Ford s’est enrichie grâce au travail des prisonniers et comment le journal hebdomadaire de Ford était profondément antisémite. Amy songe aussi à la bombe atomique, qui mit fin à la guerre et qui fut conçue aux États-Unis. Ce Nouveau Monde se voit ainsi teinté lui aussi par les cendres de l’histoire. “Tout a commencé sous le ciel de l’Amérique. Le Michigan est complice des morts d’Auschwitz” (Mavrikakis 251), déclare la narratrice.

Ainsi, la différenciation entre l’Amérique et l’Europe et les tentatives d’Amy de s’éloigner du passé se voient vite heurtées par la réalité. L’Amérique est elle aussi marquée par la violence et la mort et Amy ne peut éviter de songer aux âmes des indigènes exterminés sur cette terre. Elle en arrive à la conclusion que l’Amérique constitue “Un territoire hanté par les morts d’ici ou d’ailleurs, venus de partout” (Mavrikakis 53). Aux fumées des usines se mêleraient ainsi, selon elle, les “fumées grises d’Auschwitz”, qui planeraient sur le ciel mauve de Bay City (Mavrikakis 36). Le ciel contient les cendres de toutes les victimes de l’Histoire. Il est d’ailleurs significatif que la protagoniste souffre d’un problème respiratoire dès sa naissance.

La rage et la frustration sont les sentiments que ressent le plus Amy. Elle est incapable de comprendre et de donner un sens aux différentes morts qui ont marqué sa vie et celle de sa famille. Le ciel est l’espace cruel qui reste indifférent face aux maux des humains et contre lequel elle lance son poing rageur. Amy devient pilote de ligne et réalise son rêve de voyager, tout en cherchant dans le ciel les “âmes flottantes de ceux qui ne sont plus” (Mavrikakis 49). A travers son errance, ses voyages constants, elle essaie de trouver en vain un sens à la mort. Elle s’installe finalement au Nouveau-Mexique, où, contrairement à sa ville, le ciel est intensément bleu. Tout comme l’avait fait sa mère, elle s’éloigne de son espace natal. Malgré cela, le souvenir de Bay City et de l’incendie la poursuivra: “Je ne quitterai jamais Bay City. Je sais qu’une partie de moi ne sortira pas de la couleur mauve des couchers de soleil sur les maisons de tôle du Michigan” (Mavrikakis 43).

Amy fait un voyage en Inde et se baigne dans les eaux sacrées du Gange, où elle cherche à se “nettoyer du passé, laisser le ciel de Bay City couler au fond du Gange vert” (Mavrikakis 153). Malgré la pollution de ces eaux, cette expérience constitue pour elle une renaissance. En se rasant les

cheveux au bord du fleuve, elle a l'impression de laisser derrière elle "toutes les traces de l'histoire" (Mavrikakis 153). Ainsi, la vie d'Amy est faite de ruptures et de recommencements, de morts symboliques et de renaissances remplies d'espoir. La découverte des spectres, l'incendie de Bay City, son voyage en Inde, la naissance de sa fille constituent des moments forts qui marquent les différentes étapes de la vie de la protagoniste. Chacun de ces moments lui suggère la possibilité d'un renouveau et d'une auto-fondation: "Mes naissances ne peuvent être que multiples", déclare-t-elle, "quelqu'un comme moi doit subir toutes ses réincarnations dans une seule vie et il n'est rien de plus brutal que de mourir à soi sans arrêt" (Mavrikakis 159). Malgré ces différentes renaissances où elle essaie de s'affranchir du passé, la mémoire la poursuit et la rattrape sans cesse.

## 5. Conclusion

James Berger propose le concept de la "fin du témoignage" pour mettre en relief comment la troisième génération de romanciers évoquant la Shoah n'est plus caractérisée par le témoignage direct de faits vécus, mais par des autobiographies et des *Bildungsromane* d'écrivains qui n'ont plus vécu ces événements directement (69). À travers l'écriture, le sujet garantit la transmission de l'histoire et tente de se libérer de sa dette envers les générations passées. Dans *Le ciel de Bay City*, Amy raconte sa vie, mais il ne s'agit pas d'un récit de formation où le sujet acquiert un apprentissage grâce à la succession des événements. La protagoniste ne trouve pas de sens à la mort des autres et elle continue à être hantée par l'histoire.

La mise en écrit d'une expérience traumatique est cependant fondamentale pour que le sujet puisse assimiler l'expérience vécue. En effet, comme l'explique Anne Martine Parent, "seul un récit, en tant que 'synthèse de l'hétérogène', peut parvenir à [...] introduire du sens" (116) là où il semble ne pas y en avoir. L'écriture apparaît comme un besoin ontologique que ressentent les personnages face à l'expérience douloureuse: Babette retrace par écrit la vie de sa famille; Amy rédige un journal sur ses cauchemars; après l'incendie, elle écrit ses aveux et raconte, en qualité de narratrice de ce roman, les différentes étapes de sa vie. D'ailleurs le récit des jours qui ont précédé l'incendie occupe la partie centrale de l'œuvre. L'écriture peut aider la victime du trauma à maîtriser son expérience. Toutefois, comme le souligne Régine Waintrater, "Aucun récit ne peut

venir à bout de l'horreur. Celle-ci ne se laisse pas appréhender sur un mode linéaire, avec un début, une suite et une fin: c'est parce qu'il porte la marque d'un traumatisme infini que le récit testimonial est difficile à construire et difficile à entendre" (86). D'ailleurs, la narration du *Ciel de Bay City* n'est pas linéaire et montre jusqu'à quel point le trauma détruit le sens et la cohérence traditionnelle du récit. En refusant le réalisme et en plongeant le lecteur dans le doute quant à la véracité de certains faits racontés (la raison des cauchemars; la présence des spectres; les causes de l'incendie), le récit reflète l'impossibilité de maîtriser complètement l'expérience traumatique. La narration ne peut être que fragmentaire, lacunaire. Le présent qui est utilisé pour raconter les faits qui ont eu lieu devient le temps du trauma, le temps de la fatalité mais aussi de la survie. Il reflète la permanence de ces événements dans la conscience du personnage.

Heaven, qui représente le futur, hérite aussi du passé de sa mère. Elle est située dans une position complexe, entre un passé marqué par l'horreur et un futur incertain, caractérisé par les dangers écologiques et nucléaires contre lesquels elle combat. Elle essaie de comprendre le passé. Toutefois, face à l'histoire, Heaven défend le pardon: "Il faut pardonner, pense-t-elle, pardonner à tous" (Mavrikakis 251). La rage, la violence n'ont fait qu'intensifier le trauma: l'incendie, qu'Amy affirme avoir déclenché, n'a pas éliminé la douleur que ressent la protagoniste et la hantise du passé. C'est en essayant de connaître et de comprendre le passé, et surtout à travers le pardon que Heaven cherche à assumer les horreurs de l'histoire. La scène finale, où elle dort parmi les spectres de sa famille, suggère la permanence de cette mémoire qui continue à hanter les personnages et son acceptation par la mère et la fille, qui décident finalement de dormir blotties contre les fantômes de leurs aïeux.



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# **Restless Faultlines**

*Faglie in movimento*



# Lettera al carnefice: trauma e perdono in *Incendiary* di C. Cleave

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L'ormai consolidato interesse nei confronti dei *Trauma Studies* ha portato a applicare la categoria dell'esperienza traumatica a una gamma sempre più ampia di situazioni in cui un soggetto o una comunità si trovano a vivere una perdita, una mutilazione di natura fisica, sentimentale, affettiva, ideale. Un nuovo approccio critico nei confronti del trauma come categoria teorica fa i conti con un più ampio spettro di significati del termine rispetto al suo focus modernista:

[...] the 'new' trauma theory is still in process of developing paradigms to match those of its classical, psychoanalysis-inspired predecessors. That is, classical trauma theory provide us with powerful hermeneutic for linking events of extreme violence, structures of subjective and collective experience, and discursive and aesthetic forms. Once we have revealed the specificities hiding under the apparently neutral and universal face of this understanding of trauma – its attention to events and not systems; its assumption of privileged, secure subject positions; its investment in fragmented modernist aesthetics it is incumbent on us to provide the counter-forms that would maintain trauma as an object of inquiry. (Rothberg, *The Future of Trauma Theory* XI)

C'è l'esigenza dunque di riconfigurare la categoria del trauma tenendo conto della sua progressiva pervasività, anche in forme e attraverso generi e linguaggi diversi da quelli classici novecenteschi. La letteratura contemporanea sul tema presenta, infatti, non solo alcune delle

peculiarità divenute tipiche del racconto traumatico durante il '900, dal linguaggio frammentario alle sequenze temporali non lineari, difatti le nuove produzioni letterarie sono ulteriormente modificate dalle influenze provenienti dalla dimensione mass mediale. Ne è esempio il romanzo *Incendiary*, del giornalista inglese Chris Cleave, che mescola il genere classico del romanzo epistolare al racconto del nuovo trauma mediato dal racconto dei mezzi di comunicazione di massa. Il romanzo è composto da una serie di lettere in cui la vittima, dopo aver subito una tragica perdita a causa di un attentato terrorisco, si rivolge direttamente al suo carnefice: Osama Bin Laden. In questo modo Cleave mostra ai suoi lettori come al giorno d'oggi la piaga del terrorismo abbia segnato non solo la vita di centinaia di persone, ma anche nutrito l'immaginario collettivo.

### *Trauma latente e terrorismo agente*

Dalla sua accezione medica, o psicologica originale, dal *PTSD* dei veterani del Vietnam, ci si è mossi ad applicare il linguaggio del trauma anche allo spazio, alle geografie che gli eventi traumatici ridisegnano con scenari sempre nuovi, nei quali le vittime si trovano a fare i conti con una realtà spazio-temporale sconvolta. Il moltiplicarsi dei *traumascape* di cui parla Maria Tumarkin nel suo omonimo testo e l'esposizione mediatica ossessiva a cui sono soggetti gli eventi catastrofici hanno cambiato anche il rapporto con gli spazi in cui la storia si compie. Marco Belpoliti (42, 111, 118) suggerisce, infatti, come il concetto stesso di rovina, inteso come traccia fisica del passato sul territorio, abbia subito una significativa trasformazione: da elemento da preservare per mantenere viva una memoria collettiva, culturale e sociale, a segno traumatico che getta un'ombra di inquietudine sul futuro. Nella scelta di lasciare queste tracce visibili, o in quella di rimuoverle, qualora una scelta risulti possibile, ci si trova davanti al problema di come agisca la memoria individuale e collettiva nel confrontarsi con un *traumascape*. Se, da una parte, l'istituzione di un simbolo commemorativo legato all'evento aiuta il confronto e l'elaborazione dell'accaduto, dall'altra, rischia di segnare irreversibilmente lo spazio, bloccandolo nella sua realtà catastrofica. Esempio più tristemente celebre nell'occidente contemporaneo potrebbe essere il dibattito durato molti anni sul sito di *Ground Zero* a New York. Mentre la battaglia per l'eventuale ricostruzione delle torri si muoveva a

livello burocratico, economico, architettonico, come racconta Philip Nobel nel saggio *Sixteen Acres* (2005), allo stesso tempo le discussioni su come fosse più giusto riempire il vuoto lasciato dalle torri accesero un dibattito internazionale in ambito filosofico, antropologico, sociologico. I media furono palcoscenico di tali riflessioni, mostrandosi da una parte come sito per raccogliere le testimonianze e comprendere l'accaduto, dall'altro come mezzo di propagazione traumatica. Questa propagazione agisce tramite la possibilità di una costante rievocazione degli eventi supportata dalle testimonianze fotografiche o video, come nel caso delle immagini dell'impatto degli aerei nelle torri. La forza traumatica nell'incontro con i media amplia il suo bacino di utenza, tanto che studiosi come Daniele Giglioli hanno affermato che ormai "Trauma è oggi tutto ciò di cui si parla" (*Senza Trauma*, 7). Certamente, con gli attentati terroristici del XXI secolo, il problema della rappresentabilità del trauma è ben diverso da quello che si era posto nel secolo scorso riguardo gli orrori dell'Olocausto: mentre nel caso di Auschwitz l'elemento del silenzio e dell'apparente mancanza di notizie su ciò che stava accadendo nei campi di sterminio aveva garantito il perpetuarsi delle atrocità naziste, attraverso l'evoluzione dei mezzi di comunicazione di massa nel XXI secolo il terrorismo agisce sfruttando il racconto del trauma per fortificare il suo raggio d'azione. La portata delle azioni del terrorismo viene, infatti, amplificata dalla diffusione che ne fanno i media, grazie alla documentazione non solo ricorrente sulle pagine dei quotidiani o nei notiziari, ma ampiamente disponibile soprattutto sul web. La registrazione di un evento catastrofico o violento, se, da una parte, fornisce materiale importante per un chiarimento sulle dinamiche attraverso cui l'evento stesso è stato possibile (come il racconto delle infiltrazioni terroristiche nelle maglie di una realtà composita e cosmopolita), dall'altra, ne alimenta e amplifica la forza traumatica che va, e se strumentalizzata mira *programmaticamente* a andare, oltre la singola notizia, rendendo familiare l'idea di trauma incombente e onnipresente nella sua imprevedibilità. Il concetto di "no end to war" e di "indiscriminate choice of its victims", con cui lo storico Walter Laqueur (*No End to War* 9) descrive già nel 2004 il terrorismo nel terzo millennio, fa precisamente riferimento a questo clima di paura che vede nei media un mezzo di proliferazione, diffusione, propagazione di un fenomeno che agisce sulla psiche collettiva, ormai costantemente sotto assedio. Individuato l'eco dei mezzi di comunicazione di massa il terrorismo ne sfrutta il potenziale per penetrare nell'immaginario collettivo. Dopo l'attacco al *World Trade Center*, evento prima del quale il

fenomeno del terrorismo di matrice fondamentalista era molto meno sotto i riflettori mediatici occidentali, oltre a non essere così sofisticatamente organizzato, i garanti della sicurezza internazionale, i politici, le associazioni umanitarie, o anche semplicemente i testimoni delle conseguenze di tali meccanismi sulla società contemporanea, per combattere tali modalità di appropriazione hanno innanzitutto dovuto approntare le strategie volte a inquadrare il fenomeno anche da un punto di vista propriamente descrittivo, per poterne comprenderne la portata. L'Unione Europea ha posto l'accento sugli elementi collettivi a cui il terrorismo mira, descrivendolo come "an act aimed at seriously altering or destroying the political, economic, and social structure by member countries" (documento UE citato da Laqueur 234). In quest'ottica risulta chiaro come la strategia privilegiata dai carnefici preveda, quindi, il colpire le vittime su più piani attraverso i mezzi cui si è accennato e che aiutano a generare nell'aggredito una sorta di spaesamento multidimensionale, un divario angosciante tra il piano reale in cui accadono i fatti e quello immaginario, che nutre la paura e le fobie. Si crea così anche uno sdoppiamento nel binomio vittima/carnefice, dove una prima coppia è definita dalla violenza fisica, c'è un uccisore e un ucciso, mentre la seconda fonda la sua efficacia sul potere simbolico dell'atrocità. Quando il racconto degli eventi avviene attraverso lo schermo, questo sdoppiamento risulta facilitato: il carnefice diventa insieme regista e incarnazione della paura (basti pensare alle immagini di Osama Bin Laden, o alle tute arancio dell'*ISIS*) e lavora sul piano simbolico, la cui vittima è il destinatario a cui le immagini dell'orrore e dei suoi mandanti giungono, ossessive, con lo scopo di modificarne le abitudini. Come afferma Antonio Scurati:

In questa società, con lo sviluppo delle comunicazioni di massa, si accentua, sino a divenire fondamentale, il ruolo che l'esperienza mediata ha nell'influenzare l'autoidentità e l'organizzazione di fondo dei rapporti interpersonali [...] Ciò significa che i mass media divengono i principali agenti del processo di socializzazione, attraverso i quali l'individuo predispone alla vita associata interiorizzando le norme, i ruoli, i codici che la regolano, i valori che la fondano, e definendo dunque un'immagine di sé (Scurati, *Televisioni di guerra* 92).

Appare immediatamente chiaro il potenziale di uno strumento agito e fruito in maniera così totalizzante. Il testimone dell'evento assume un comportamento nella società mediato e modificato nel quotidiano, venendo influenzato nel modo di percepirsi e di percepire gli altri. Il clima di trauma



latente, inteso come senso di vulnerabilità nato dall'inquietudine che un evento traumatico ha generato, fa sì che la sola proliferazione mediatica del terrore generi il paradosso ancora una volta descritto da Giglioli nella sua analisi della società contemporanea iper-traumatizzata, di cui egli vede oramai la vittima come soggetto rappresentativo. Per lo studioso, infatti, "la vittima è l'eroe del nostro tempo" poiché, nel sentirsi ovunque potenzialmente in pericolo a causa della familiarità con gli eventi traumatici, la sola paura di sperimentare una perdita "attiva un potente generatore di identità [...] Non siamo ciò che facciamo, ma ciò che abbiamo subito, ciò che ci hanno tolto" (Giglioli, *Critica della vittima* 9), come l'idea di sicurezza. Il senso di precarietà che segna la contemporaneità rischia così di coinvolgere anche i meccanismi di autodefinizione del sé, che si costruisce quindi per sottrazione e per induzione. Nel caso in cui la perdita sia collettiva, di conseguenza anche l'identità di interi gruppi culturali, religiosi, etnici, rischia di caratterizzarsi proprio sulle basi del senso di perdita che funge da collante. Nel testo *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag si chiede come la nascita di intere comunità traumatizzate possa essere frutto anche semplicemente dall'essere testimoni attraverso la registrazione di un evento traumatico, non necessariamente subito in prima persona:

WHO ARE THE "WE" at whom such shock-pictures are aimed? That "we" would include not just the sympathizers of a smallish nation or stateless people fighting for its life, but-a far larger constituency- those only nominally concerned about some nasty war taking place in another country. The photographs are a means of making "real" (or "more real") matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore (4).

Il trauma mediato che si nutre della proliferazione delle immagini genera quindi nuove collettività che, da una parte, minano quelle culturali preesistenti, dall'altra, ne rafforzano le opposizioni interne attraverso un lavoro sui simboli. Le realtà cosmopolite più complesse sono sicuramente mutate nei loro equilibri proprio grazie a una dinamica di definizione e autodefinizione attraverso il contatto con il diverso, l'altro da sé, in quel gioco identitario considerato necessario anche da Judith Butler nell'appagamento del desiderio di appartenenza (*Precarious Life*). Butler, infatti, prevede che la pratica di autodefinizione possa passare attraverso un atto di violenza tra le parti:

The *I* who cannot come into being without a *you* is also fundamentally dependent on a set of norms of recognition that originated neither with the *I* or the *you*. What is prematurely, or belatedly, called the *I* is, at the outset, enthralled, even if it is to a violence, an abandonment, a mechanism (45).

E lo stesso Derrida, in *Spettri di Marx*, afferma:

Ma imparare a vivere da sé soli, insegnarsi a vivere da sé non è, per un vivente, l'impossibile? Non lo vieta la logica stessa? Vivere per definizione non lo si impara né lo si insegna. Non da sé, dalla vita attraverso la vita. Solamente dall'altro e attraverso la morte (cit. in Giglioli, *Critica della vittima* 40).

In questo passo, Derrida sottolinea come sia l'incontro con l'altro da sé e con l'esperienza della perdita a segnare l'Io nei suoi processi di formazione e autodefinizione. Ciò che aiuta la costruzione dell'identità, che sia essa individuale o collettiva, è strettamente connesso al rapporto e al dialogo con ciò che la mette in discussione. In questo modo si capisce come, anche nel rapporto vittima/carnefice del terrorismo, il gioco di identificazioni sia assolutamente funzionale alla costruzione inquietante necessaria alla propagazione traumatica e quanto un clima di inquietudine costante sia controproducente rispetto ai meccanismi di elaborazione dell'Io nella sua realtà. L'atto di violenza non agisce come una cesura, anche temporale, ma piuttosto rimane una eco di sottofondo quotidiano che scandisce i tempi e le forme che le società contemporanee stanno assumendo. L'undici settembre è stato descritto da Salman Rushdie come "a monstrous act of imagination" (99), che ha minato con la sua portata il concetto stesso di realtà e irrealtà, visto il suo impatto simbolico: secondo Rushdie, da allora, l'irreale sembra aver squarciato il muro del possibile. In tal senso, l'eccezionalità dell'atto terroristico gioca con le categorie del reale e dell'immaginario, sovvertendole, per alimentare lo spaesamento delle vittime. Nel tentativo di raccontare l'accaduto, è proprio questo spaesamento a costituire materiale privilegiato per nuove narrazioni/rappresentazioni della società che si dividono tra strumenti di elaborazione, mezzi di esorcizzazione della paura e amplificatori del senso traumatico onnipresente, cavalcando la risonanza emotiva di questo tema. La precarietà, termine così caro alla contemporaneità, è uno stato emotivo che ormai coinvolge anche la sicurezza, in un clima avvertito come sempre a rischio di nuove atrocità, ricco di individui traumatizzati pu se

dell'evento traumatico essi hanno avuto solo un'esperienza mediata, o più precisamente mediatica. In base a questa tensione traumatica onnipresente, anche nella sua rielaborazione letteraria, il racconto del reale si nutre delle ossessioni dei testimoni, a loro volta ormai altrettanto vittime designate degli eventi; talora, nel tentativo di combattere o allontanare le paure, o, peggio, di sfruttarle, la letteratura stessa può finire per anticiparle, come nel caso di *Incendiary*.

### *Londra come traumascape nel linguaggio di Incendiary*

Scritto nel 2004, il romanzo *Incendiary* del giornalista inglese Chris Cleave rappresenta un vero e proprio caso editoriale: Cleave immagina una Londra scossa da un attentato terroristico molto violento, tragedia che sarebbe accaduta realmente poco dopo la stesura del romanzo. Caso volle, infatti, che la pubblicazione di *Incendiary* fosse prevista nel giorno dell'attentato a Londra del 2005, macabra coincidenza che dà la misura di quanto il piano del reale e quello immaginario si sovrappongano nei tentativi di narrativizzare l'orrore contemporaneo. A dieci anni esatti dagli atti terroristici di Londra del 2005, la Gran Bretagna – il mondo occidentale tutto – vive con gli attentati in Tunisia del 2015 una nuova ondata di paura, riportando, dopo gli attacchi già subiti in casa il 7 luglio della scorsa decade, il maggior numero di vittime e dispersi inglesi coinvolti. Quando furono colpite simultaneamente più linee dei trasporti pubblici nella capitale inglese, il clima di terrore incombeva già sulle grandi città occidentali, visto il precedente europeo di Madrid nel 2004 e quello tristemente spettacolare di New York dell'11 settembre. Solo l'anno successivo, nel 2006, è stato poi sventato il piano che avrebbe previsto l'esplosione di diversi aerei in partenza dal Regno Unito con direzione USA: da Londra, Glasgow e Manchester i terroristi avevano pianificato una tragedia che prevedeva l'utilizzo delle bombe liquide che tanto hanno condizionato le procedure di sicurezza aeroportuali a cui si è sottoposti da quel momento. La Gran Bretagna, e in particolare la sua capitale, non sono estranee, quindi, oggi come ieri, a questo tipo di paure, ma l'ispirazione di Cleave è addirittura precedente agli attacchi a King's Cross, Aldgate, Edgware Road e Tavistock Square o agli eventi tunisini. Londra è già nel 2004 tristemente contaminata dalle ansie per il terrorismo, infatti, in un'intervista sul quotidiano *La Repubblica*, Chris Cleave dichiara apertamente:

Eravamo nel marzo del 2004 ed ero ancora sconvolto dall'attentato alle Torri Gemelle [...] mio figlio Louis aveva sei mesi e l'idea che avrebbe potuto crescere in un mondo così barbaro e violento non mi abbandonava un minuto [...] l'11 marzo 2004 Louis morì il suo primo passo e i terroristi uccisero 191 persone a Madrid [...] Ogni giorno succedeva qualcosa di meraviglioso a casa mia e qualcosa di atroce fuori. È stata questa dissonanza che non mi ha più permesso di accontentarmi della serenità del mio privato. Stare zitto mi era ormai impossibile, così ho scritto la prima bozza di *Incendiary* in sole sei settimane (*Incendiary*, quarta di copertina, edizione italiana).

Se la letteratura si propone in questo caso come specchio di una società, oltre che veicolo di elaborazione di ansie del singolo scrittore, appare chiaro come il romanzo di Cleave sia un perfetto esempio di quanto il clima di terrore nutra il testo letterario e, purtroppo, talvolta viceversa. Nella sublimazione attraverso cui Cleave opera sulla paura per il proprio bambino, lo scrittore immagina una famiglia sconvolta da un attentato allo stadio dell'*Arsenal* a opera di alcuni kamikaze che si fanno esplodere durante una partita contro il *Chelsea*. La protagonista della vicenda è una giovane madre irrequieta e insoddisfatta dell'andamento del suo matrimonio, molto legata al figlio di quattro anni, che però rimane coinvolto con il padre nell'attentato. Ne segue una lunga serie di eventi narrati in prima persona, sotto forma di ricordi che vengono rievocati dalla protagonista nel tentativo di cercare un senso all'orrore, che la vedono passare da fasi di depressione acuta a tentativi di riprendere in mano la propria vita, a ulteriori fasi in cui sembra non ci sia posto che per rancore, vendetta e violenza. Nella vicenda si affacciano altri personaggi che vivono ognuno a loro modo il rapporto con l'esistenza post-attentato. Il senso di colpa agisce come forza che intreccia le storie della protagonista e quelle collaterali al filone narrativo principale: lo scenario desolante è aggravato dall'incomunicabilità tra i sopravvissuti, dall'opportunismo dei più forti e dall'incapacità dei più deboli di sopravvivere nella realtà londinese sconvolta dall'attentato. Appare nel romanzo anche il tema delle teorie complottistiche che generalmente hanno accompagnato i grandi attentati dell'ultimo secolo, quelle ipotesi che vedono gli stati colpiti come complici, conniventi o addirittura mandanti degli attentati stessi. La protagonista della storia scopre, infatti, come i servizi segreti britannici fossero al corrente di ciò che stava per accadere allo stadio dove Cleave immagina la tragedia, ma che non abbiano fermato l'orrore per non rivelare

di aver intercettato con successo le cellule terroristiche operanti in Gran Bretagna, ammissione che avrebbe compromesso la possibilità di una retata di più significativo impatto. Anche questo filone complottistico dà al lettore la misura di quanto l'infinità di racconti, veritieri o meno, su eventi del genere abbia nutrito un fitto apparato di narrazioni sul tema, che sono andate a convergere anche nel testo letterario grazie alla loro stessa natura proliferante. La società massificata, infatti, riconosce il trauma come elemento aggregante, poiché nel contemporaneo tanto più è forte il senso o la prospettiva di possesso tanto più aumenta il senso di perdita. La Tragedia in chiave traumatica e tutte le storie che vi ruotano intorno diventano così il *leitmotiv* anche nella narrazione più commerciale, una cifra stilistica vera e propria della contemporaneità.

Cleave pone, all'inizio e in chiusura del romanzo, un'epigrafe sul *Great Fire* londinese del 1666 per creare subito un ponte simbolico con l'attentato che immagina. Londra appare da subito come teatro di "a most terrible fire [which] broke out, [and] which not only wasted the adjacent parts, but also places very remote, with incredible noise and fury" (1), un *traumascape* che ha già conosciuto momenti bui nella sua storia. Le esplosioni nella capitale inglese si sovrappongono così facilmente alle descrizioni inventate da Cleave, con nubi di fumo e scenari apocalittici che sconvolgono la città, palcoscenico di violenza e paura nel romanzo, così come nella realtà. Immediatamente dopo il richiamo alla Londra moderna in fiamme si apre una narrazione in prima persona, suddivisa in macrosezioni che si susseguono in base alle stagioni in cui si svolgono i fatti, partendo dalla primavera, fino all'inverno, con la vittima intenta a chiedere spiegazioni dell'incomprensibile, del non senso del terrore al carnefice.

Il testo si presenta in forma epistolare come una lunga lettera a Osama Bin Laden, in quel gioco speculare e di sdoppiamenti tra vittima e carnefice a cui si faceva riferimento in precedenza, per cui la vittima indiretta cerca come interlocutore il mandante dell'orrore:

Dear Osama, they want you dead or alive so the terror will stop [...] I want to be the last mother in the world who ever has to write you a letter like this. Whoever has to write to you Osama about her dead boy [...] I'm going to write to you about the emptiness that was left when you took my boy away (*Incendiary* 4).

La missiva, che ricomponе la vicenda a posteriori, restituisce al lettore uno spaccato di vita familiare precedente, contemporaneo e successivo

all'attacco, nei quali la commistione tra il linguaggio intimistico e quello mediatico irrompe visivamente con un'alternanza tipografica di frasi maiuscole e minuscole. Alla scrittura maiuscola sono affidate le frasi dai toni più sensazionalistici, quasi a mostrare quanto, nel linguaggio frammentario dell'esperienza traumatica, si sia insinuato quello deciso e irruento dei mezzi di comunicazione di massa, voci attraverso cui le notizie del terrore si diffondono. Proprio tramite la televisione, infatti, la madre, in compagnia del proprio amante, assiste all'attentato in diretta:

Then the windows of the flat started to rattle. There was a low boom and then a sharp bang and the windows shook harder. After the first boom was over it echoed and rumbled all up and down the street. It went on for the longest time this thunder. The kids stopped their bikes and looked up into the blue sky. They couldn't work it out. I couldn't work it out myself. I only find out later that the telly pictures travelled faster than sound [...] The picture had gone almost dark it was like night had fallen on the stadium. The crowd was bursting onto the pitch. They were running in all direction. It was a total panic under this rain of blood and chunks.[...] Then all stopped. Sky put on their test card. It was just a black background and the Sky logo and a message that said? WHY NOT UPGRADE TO SKY DIGITAL? (46)

L'immaginario che Cleave crea è tristemente verosimile e familiare per chiunque abbia assistito all'interruzione della programmazione televisiva per notizie su attentati terroristici. Il mezzo di trasmissione e di racconto, in questo caso la televisione, diventa un elemento della narrazione, è parte integrante dell'immaginario a cui Cleave attinge. Le frasi o le singole parole a cui viene riservato il maiuscolo nel testo sembrano sostenere e compensare un linguaggio altresì frammentato, legato alla tipica afasia post-traumatica. Nella drammatica riproduzione del tentativo di una madre sconvolta di parlare della perdita del proprio bambino si alternano ricordi privati e slogan pubblicitari, restituendo al lettore un senso di schizofrenia e confusione dolorosa. Mondo televisivo e mondo reale, così, si modellano reciprocamente e anche il linguaggio, nella sua riproduzione letteraria, ne risente. L'ingerenza linguistica televisiva nell'evocazione di memorie viene descritta da Antonio Scurati come un fenomeno legato alla figura del "Telespettatore totale", nata dalla percezione del mondo mediata dal linguaggio televisivo:

[...] l'ampiezza degli effetti della "grammaticalizzazione della quotidianità" si estende ben oltre la sfera della situazione comunicativa massificata, fino a investire

l'intero ambito dei rapporti sociali. Il comportamento comunicativo quotidiano una volta ricalcato nei suoi tratti essenziali dalla simulazione televisiva, e dunque rimodellato, incide sulla capacità del telespettatore di interagire comunicativamente in situazioni non mediate, rispetto alle quali diventerà canonica (Scurati, *Televisioni di guerra* 84).

Per rifarsi alla categoria creata da Arjun Appadurai, il *mediascape* contemporaneo vede al suo interno la diffusione e la creazione di un nuovo linguaggio traumatico. Sovrapposizioni, ibridazioni, contaminazioni sono il prodotto e il motore di questo nuovo codice, che porta in sé la contraddizione di cui parla Roger Luckhurst nel suo *The Trauma Question*: un linguaggio che ha come scopo l'indagine sul trauma, la sua descrizione funzionale all'elaborazione, ma che allo stesso tempo è diventato uno strumento che lo può generare, perpetuare, rievocare (80).

La scrittura post-traumatica è stata identificata da alcune correnti psicoanalitiche come una possibile strategia per avviare un processo di elaborazione e di riappropriazione del vissuto, sconfiggendo l'alienazione che lo shock comporta. Utilizzare la scrittura come strategia assume nel romanzo di Cleave una doppia valenza: quella nella realtà di uno scrittore che cerca di esorcizzare l'ansia all'interno di un tempo storico scandito dagli attentati terroristici, creandosi un doppio letterario per lavorare sulle ansie legate al mondo reale come luogo per veder crescere il proprio figlio; dall'altra, la finzione di una donna che racconta come le venga suggerito di scrivere per affrontare verbalmente il vuoto spazio-temporale lasciatole dalla perdita. La madre narra nelle sue lettere dei molteplici vuoti che l'attentato ha generato, quello fisico: "I'm going to write you so you can look into my empty life and see what human boy really is from the shape of the hole he leaves behind" (*Incendiary* 4) e quello temporale: "you've blown a hole straight through our calendar. I felt like I'd fallen through the hole" (*Incendiary* 58). Il bisogno di raccontare il dolore legato a questi vuoti è ovviamente un mezzo per gestirli, per allontanarli, o per colmarli di parole, come se facendo così si aprisse uno spazio d'azione nell'imprevedibilità traumatica. Come ricorda Stefano Ferrari:

La sofferenza e il dolore infatti rivissuti nel gioco e nell'arte non hanno solo una concreta e sperimentata funzione di difesa, secondo la logica della proiezione e esternalizzazione del conflitto, ma anche più propriamente creativa: l'uomo ha bisogno di soffrire, di patire, di morire, seppure al riparo della finzione, per crescere, per provare appunto un'esperienza in più, per appagare quel bisogno prometeico di

vivere mille e una vita cui si accennava, per andare insomma al di là dei limiti che la vita reale ci impone, come suggerisce Freud, sottolineando proprio questa funzione creativa dell'identificazione (63, 64).

L'evoluzione, come la successiva involuzione e strumentalizzazione, delle pratiche che favoriscono l'elaborazione traumatica ha radici antiche che affondano nella letteratura, prima ancora che nelle conquiste degli studi sulla mente e sull'inconscio individuale e collettivo. Ciò che pratiche come la psicoanalisi hanno fornito è un vocabolario per descrivere la sintomatologia legata a queste esperienze e la descrizione di codici comportamentali a cui la letteratura ha attinto a piene mani. Non a caso, anche nel romanzo di Cleave ritorna il tema dell'incubo, elemento chiave per l'analisi psicoanalitica e *topos* traumatico. La protagonista è costantemente vittima di allucinazioni notturne, ma anche di visioni diurne, in cui rivive incessantemente la perdita del proprio bambino. Complici delle ossessioni di cui la donna è vittima sono le continue riproposizioni dell'evento traumatico a opera dei media e dei giornali. Riproposizioni che assumono le peculiarità dell'incubo nel loro rievocare i simboli legati all'attentato e che dimostrano come alcune modalità di narrazione del trauma possano diventare controproducenti e al servizio del terrore, amplificando il raggio d'azione delle fantasie mortifere e colonizzando la quotidianità. Si ritorna dunque al paradosso di Luckhurst:

The relationship between trauma as a devastating disruption and the subsequent attempts to translate or assimilate this disturbance is a fundamental tension between interruption and flow, blockage and movement. Trauma, in effect, issues a challenge to the capacity of narrative knowledge. In its shock impact trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma (79).

In uno scenario contemporaneo in cui la costruzione dell'identità individuale e collettiva sembra doversi confrontare costantemente anche con le categorie di vittima e carnefice, bisogna così analizzare in che modo la narrazione impossibile del trauma finisca per essere condizionata da ansie collettive e quanto invece possa aiutare a ripensare al modo in cui noi percepiamo noi stessi utilizzando la narrazione come strategia. Tuttavia un elemento ricorrente nelle fasi post-traumatiche complica di molto l'operazione di ri-narrazione: il senso di colpa dei sopravvissuti.



## *Perdonare e perdonarsi*

“MUMMY MUMMY WHY DON’T YOU HELP ME? I put my arms over my ears and screamed into the smoke and dark” (*Incendiary* 182). Ricorrenti nella narrazione di *Incendiary* e nelle narrazioni sul trauma in generale sono gli elementi che rimandano al senso di colpa del sopravvissuto. La persona che sopravvive all’amato scomparso è spesso vittima di un meccanismo di auto-disprezzo e di quel desiderio di morte che Freud descrive come un delirio morale in cui il sopravvissuto incappa, sentendosi privato del diritto di esistere e bloccato nel potersi ricostruire un’identità al di là del trauma (131). La mente genera così fantasmi che infestano i ricordi, il presente e ogni possibilità di futuro, intrappolata nell’evento catastrofico o in un limbo in cui domina il senso di colpa. A seguito di tutto ciò, si genera una terza coppia vittima/carnefice, in cui è l’Io stesso che, nella sua messa in crisi, si auto-condanna. La psiche si ritorce contro se stessa, rendendo necessaria ancora un’altra fase da superare per aprire alla possibilità di perdono e di elaborazione. Ciò complica il processo di separazione dall’oggetto perso e la capacità di affrontare e comprendere le cause di tale perdita: qualora ci siano colpe da attribuire e perdonare, la difficoltà è nell’individuare chi sia l’effettivo nemico, visto il sopraggiungere della necessità di perdonare prima se stessi per essere sopravvissuti alla perdita. Nella possibilità di aprirsi al perdono, la protagonista di *Incendiary* sembra fallire, per due motivi, uno legato alla vicenda, l’altro all’immaginario a cui fa riferimento. Nel romanzo, come accennato, la donna viene a conoscenza di come i servizi segreti fossero al corrente di ciò che stava per accadere allo stadio dell’*Arsenal*. Attraverso un piano messo a punto con altri personaggi, la protagonista ha quasi la possibilità di denunciare la scoperta, ma viene tradita all’ultimo momento da una giornalista in carriera e con pochi scrupoli, che, dopo aver venduto il proprio silenzio in cambio di una posizione di rilievo nel proprio giornale, sceglie, dopo aver aiutato a costruirlo, di far saltare il piano per la denuncia della verità. In seguito al fallimento, sembra fallita anche l’ultima possibilità di riscatto per la protagonista che sperava così di poter vendicare almeno in parte la morte del figlio. La donna decide, infine, di chiudersi nella propria desolazione, accompagnata dalla costante presenza fantasmatica del bambino, unica compagnia con cui interagisce, simbolo della rassegnazione con cui subisce gli effetti del trauma. Nelle ultime pagine, la giornalista, non pentita, scrive esplicitamente alla protagonista

in una lettera nella lettera: “I hope you will find it in your warm heart to understand and forgive me one day” (*Incendiary* 255), ma il lettore deduce dalla risposta della madre, riportata sempre nel flusso di pensieri rivolti a Bin Laden, che non c’è spazio per il perdono. Un perdono che riguarda non solo il terrorista stesso o la giornalista, ma anche, principalmente, se stessa, per aver fallito l’unico tentativo di riappropriarsi del proprio diritto alla vita, rassegnandosi a una sopravvivenza melanconica. Termine, quest’ultimo, che fa riferimento alla concezione freudiana di lutto non elaborato, a causa di un attaccamento, nello specifico del romanzo, a un ideale familiare e affettivo sepolto, a un passato impossibile da riabilitare, o da riportare in vita. Nel caso in cui avvenga l’identificazione dell’Io con l’oggetto amato scomparso tipica della melanconia, percepibile nel romanzo per il fatto che la stessa protagonista continui a considerarsi affiancata dal proprio bambino a mesi dalla perdita, pur consapevole che si tratta di una visione, Freud parla di una doppia perdita che coinvolge l’identità stessa di chi ha subito il lutto: uno smarrimento dell’Io e un conseguente “conflitto tra l’Io e la persona amata in una scissione tra l’attività critica dell’Io e l’Io alterato dall’identificazione” (134). Freud distingue il lutto come *status* in cui il mondo è diventato povero e vuoto, dalla melanconia in cui è l’Io stesso ciò che si impoverisce. Il processo che porta l’Io a trasformare l’oggetto che scompare in parte di sé per non perderlo compromette, infatti, qualsiasi tratto identitario che prescinda dal soggetto in relazione all’oggetto. Secondo Freud, per questo motivo gli stati melanconici possono portare a una sorta di pulsione di morte pura: l’Io può essere fatto a pezzi dal super-Io e dai suoi rimproveri che impediscono di lasciar andare l’oggetto amato. Lo psicoanalista definisce il tormento del malinconico come una deliberata scelta masochista di crogiolarsi nel ricordo, così da tenersi aggrappato a ciò che ha perso. Freud scrive:

Nella melanconia il tormentarsi, cosa questa indubbiamente piacevole, significa, proprio come il corrispondente fenomeno della nevrosi ossessiva, una soddisfazione delle tendenze del sadismo e dell’odio che sono collegate a un oggetto e che sono state rivolte sul soggetto stesso nel modo già detto (136)

La regressione narcisistica che segue l’incorporazione nel soggetto dell’oggetto perduto porta la persona a vivere come se fosse lei stessa l’oggetto e a creare con questo un rapporto ambivalente di amore e odio. La pulsione all’odio è generata dall’Io che viene ingabbiato dall’impossibilità

di liberarsi dal legame e spinge il soggetto ad attaccare l'oggetto interiorizzato, che nello specifico di *Incendiary* corrisponde allo sgridare il bambino immaginario per i suoi costanti capricci. L'autoaccusa tipica della depressione deriva così da un eccesso di pulsioni cannibalesche nel soggetto che ne favoriscono la malattia.

Luckhurst afferma che "Trauma has become a paradigm because it has turned into a repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood that have saturated Western cultural life" (80). Il romanzo di Cleave rientra nel genere di storie a cui si riferisce il teorico, facendone così un esempio di *Trauma novel* tipico della *wound culture* contemporanea. Il problema, o la prospettiva, del perdono, rientra tra gli enigmi che la letteratura stessa cerca di svelare, non sempre riuscendoci fino in fondo, ma aprendo riflessioni in merito ai percorsi che l'Io come vittima può esplorare e contemplare. Nello specifico del terrorismo, però, questi percorsi sono braccati dall'attacco all'idea lineare di elaborazione, poiché la pratica del terrore mira a generare uno stato perpetuo di precarietà emotiva. Obiettivo primario del carnefice è proprio lo spaesamento malinconico e ossessionato dalle immagini della perdita, colpendo la realtà e i simboli costitutivi in occidente della potenza economica (le *Twin Towers*), della libertà di movimento (metropolitane, treni, aerei), della libertà di espressione (*Charlie Hebdo*, il *Krudttønden Café* di Copenaghen, la manifestazione pacifista ad Ankara), del diritto al benessere (gli alberghi tunisini), della cultura stessa così come concepita dagli occidentali, in quanto memoria storica (gli attacchi ai siti archeologici) e infine, alla potenza che c'è dietro al concetto di perdono. Elaborare il lutto non è possibile, perché il lutto rimane ovunque e le sue tracce favoriscono la latenza della tensione post-traumatica. L'unica cosa che sembra rimanere possibile è, come in chiusura del romanzo, la speranza di allontanare o risanare il terrore stesso:

Love is not surrender Osama love is furious and brave and loud you can hear it in the noise my boy is making right now while he plays. RRR! RRR! He says I wish you could hear him Osama that noise is the fiercest and loudest sound on earth it will echo to the end of time it is more defending than bombs. Listen to that noise Osama it is time for you to stop blowing the world apart. Come to me Osama. Come to me and we will blow the world back together WITH INCREDIBLE NOISE AND FURY(*Incendiary* 271).

Per quanto sia un amore compromesso dall'assenza e dalla morbosità con cui la si affronta, questo sentimento di cui parla la protagonista sembra l'unica arma possibile per proteggersi dalla sofferenza che prova. Umanizzare il carnefice, raccontargli di come l'amore sia un'arma potente per combattere gli effetti del terrore, riporta anche l'immagine di Bin Laden dal piano simbolico di incarnazione del male, a quello più concreto di un uomo che, solitario tra i nascondigli dell'Afghanistan con il suo Kalashnikov, agisce così perché non si è concesso di conoscere cosa sia il bene. L'immaginario catastrofico lascia il posto a quello per cui non è il perdono nei confronti del carnefice a dare una nuova possibilità alla vittima, bensì una specie di rovesciamento per cui la vittima accusa il carnefice di essere a sua volta vittima di se stesso. Si tratta quindi più di pietà che di perdono, anche perché appare impossibile perdonare qualcosa da cui si è ossessionati, a causa delle rievocazioni costanti della tragedia. Cleave, infatti, inserisce nel romanzo un simbolo provocatorio per descrivere le trovate propagandistiche che garantiscono la persistenza insormontabile del trauma, piuttosto che combatterla: nell'immediato post-attentato il governo inglese decide, come omaggio alle famiglie delle vittime, di riempire i cieli della capitale con palloni aerostatici ognuno raffigurante il volto di una persona scomparsa nell'attentato, così che i sopravvissuti possano cercare il proprio caro tra i tanti palloni sospesi a mezz'aria. Questa immagine, che la protagonista descrive come un tentativo di riempire di odio gli occhi dei londinesi, rafforza l'idea di quanto le immagini possano da una parte aiutare a ricordare, dall'altra intrappolare nella memoria traumatica. A causa di questo genere di rievocazioni, il processo del perdono fallisce poiché il rancore, la paura, il trauma non possono mai essere veramente superati o lasciati andare. Non per questo è impossibile trovare la forza di comprendere e ridimensionare gli scenari del terrore, ma la strategia da adottare suggerita dallo scrittore sembra essere quella di riappropriarsi di un'identità nutrita dalla forza della presenza di un legame, o anche semplicemente del suo ricordo, piuttosto che soccombere inermi all'assenza.



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# Remember, Recover: Trauma and Transgenerational Negotiations with the Indian Partition in *This Side, That Side* and the *1947 Partition Archive*

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The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (Caruth, *Trauma* 5)

The impossibility of completely understanding a traumatic event makes the victim vulnerable to being possessed by it. The lived experience infuses the present with the past because it has not been fully experienced at the time of occurrence. This quality stems from the dialectic nature of trauma: grappling to come to terms with what had happened, the event has to be re-storied by the victim who becomes a living vessel of that history. The need to narrate trauma comes as a step towards the acceptance of the reality of that traumatic event, if not towards a possible healing of wounds. Since it can only be understood belatedly, the voicing of wounds is an incomplete task. The need to tell and retell is to keep the memory alive, to let the next generation know of the experience, and for the victims to connect through their testimonies of witnessing, sharing that burden.

In 1947, the political partition of the Indian subcontinent truncated and divided the country into two parts – Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. In the span of a few months around a million people died, ten million mass migrated across the border, thousands died from

contagious disease and malnutrition; and about 75,000 women were raped and abducted. Widespread riots and bloodshed marked both sides of the border. The continuing impact of this violence on the people of India has been studied in works such as *Borders & Boundaries* by Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin and, *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia. Both these seminal texts uncover female voices around the Partition by recording witness accounts of women in an attempt to negate amnesia around their suffering. In *The Footprints of Partition: Narrative of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians* (2015), Anam Zakaria examines the transgenerational handing down of painful memories of the Partition by Pakistanis and Indians and in *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home*, Alok Bhalla interviews six novelists from India and Pakistan to invoke their personal experiences of the years around 1947. Artistic representations of trauma of the Indian Partition range from short stories to cinema – each proving how we “are implicated in each other’s trauma” (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 24). Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* is a historical novel set against the backdrop of the violence around the event while Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* looks at the Partition from the perspective of the Parsi diaspora settled in India. These are just some of the works that highlight the bitter legacy of the Indian Partition.

The website *1947 Partition Archive* attempts to capture how stories of the Indian Partition continue in 2015. Video interviews of those who lived through the experience not only tell the tales of individual trauma but also work at preserving its memory for those who did not experience it first-hand. The second work in consideration is an anthology of graphic narratives curated by Vishwajyoti Ghosh – *This Side, That Side – Restorying Partition* – that looks at second-generation accounts of the trauma of the Partition. It brings together storytellers, artists, illustrators from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – ordinary people, who “may not have witnessed Partition, but who continue till date, to negotiate its legacy” (“Blurb”). If the *Archive* deals with memories, the latter is an attempt to remember those memories. The former is based on first-generation accounts and the latter explores the transgenerational impact of trauma. Together both in a way represent the present Indian state – where two or three generations are trying to deal with the memories of the Indian Partition of 1947.

Attempts to understand the Indian Partition continue till date not only because it continues to echo, but also because of the very nature of trauma itself. In the case of events that wound – physically, but more importantly



psychologically – trauma lies not in the shock of the occurrence of the event but in its reception:

The pathology cannot be defined either by the event itself – which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally – nor can it be defined in terms of a *distortion* of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it. The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4-5; emphasis in original)

The traumatic event continues to haunt those affected by it and urges them to go back to the source to make meaning of the present. This to-and-fro between the past and the present happens because of unresolved grief, incomplete narratives, and the absence of closure that cannot be achieved because of the inability to fully understand the traumatic event in the first place. Going back to history by engaging in a narration of traumatic memories is an endeavour to try to comprehend the source of these. Cathy Caruth argues, “that the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another” (*Trauma* 12). This listening is what the *Archive* promotes by giving people access to oral histories and converting survivors to citizen historiographers. The telling and the listening are possible belatedly when the wounds have scars but will not fester if scratched. This works with the latency that trauma comes with. Oral histories that are a part of the *Archive* are by people who witnessed the Partition when they were children and are now recalling their experiences after a substantial passage of time. The attempt is to move from surviving the event to, years later, explaining how it was experienced.

In her essay, “An Archive with a Difference: Partition Letters”, Urvashi Butalia highlights why there has been a long silence around the experiences of those who lived through the Indian Partition and why there is a return to it after a gap:

Until recently, we have known little about what the experience of Partition meant for those who lived through it, how they put their lives back together again, how they coped with the loss, the trauma, the grief. This silence is about what I call the ‘underside’ of the history of Partition, that is, its human dimensions, its many hidden histories, is not a silence of simple historiographical neglect. Rather, it is,

to my mind, a trauma of such deep dimensions, that it has needed nearly half a century for Indians to acquire some distance, and begin the process of coming to terms with it. (209)

Acquiring distance from the traumatic event allows the witness or the victim to build a narrative of the event. The organization of this coherent narrative of trauma takes time and can happen after having survived its immediate impact. The narration of trauma is done when “the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality” (van der Kolk, van der Hart 176). The victim lives in two worlds – one of everyday reality and one of trauma: a successful narration of the traumatic past must integrate the two.

“I Too Have Seen Lahore!” by Salman Rashid and Mohit Suneja in *This Side, That Side*, captures the process of going back to the past after gaining distance. It recounts the experience of a couple from Lahore, Pakistan, who come to Jalandhar, India, hoping to find some details about their pre-Partition past. As the two search for information about their ancestral house in Pakistan, an excited man named Darshan Singh comes up to them and exclaims – “I too have seen Lahore! I once went to the zoo there with my father and brothers” (209). When the couple learn that their house had been pulled down long back, they return to Darshan Singh to hear his story of the Partition. He recounts his travel from Pasrur to Dera Nanak on a train that “was crammed with people, with little room for anyone else to get in” (212) – a journey that made his eight year old self a spectator of the “tragic harvest of partition” (217). His story becomes a narrative of witnessing and of carrying the burden of memories for years:

Sixty-two years and four months had passed before I met Darshan Singh. But the harrowing journey in August 1947 did not leave his mind. Surely, he would have preserved those memories by telling his stories to his children, but deep inside, Darshan Singh’s connection with Klasswala is a tenuous one and exists only in his mind. I realised how he must want to speak to a Pakistani to ask of the land that he was forced to abandon as a child. Now he could even tell me of the Lahore he knew; now we could bond. (218)

Both the *Archive* and the anthology take the history of a collective to the particular histories of individuals that form this very collective. If

a traumatic event like the Partition leads to a divide, then the stories of its traumatic impact lead to a coming together where “[...] history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (*Unclaimed Experience* 24). Stories by Indians and Pakistanis share common space on the *Archive* and in the anthology. This signals a coming together of survivors through the telling of trauma of a shared past. This coming together does not idealistically negate differences, but transgresses them by highlighting the likeness of these traumatic tales. The similarity remains despite the changing narrative of history at the borders. The *Archive* has an interactive online map of stories, with pegs on places where the survivors are now located (“Story Map”). The vast number of these pegs literally hides the Indo-Pakistan border. The etching of the border has caused scars that are the same on either side. The anthology too brings together artists from across dividing lines – Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi artists and storytellers collaborated to produce *This Side, That Side*. If national identities are based on the formation of an ‘Other’, then the self and the ‘Other’ are mirrored in similarity of wounds. The anthology ends with a section titled “Making Faces” where the reader can flip through the trifurcated divisions of pages and swap the forehead, the eyes or the lips to make many South Asian faces – a Muslim, a Hindu, a man, or a woman. “Making Faces” is an invitation to the Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi reader to acknowledge the thread of commonality between people who survived the Indian Partition.

The Indo-Pakistan border divided the people of the Indian subcontinent, but they share the trauma of witnessing it being drawn. This adds to the complexity of the relationship between people of India and Pakistan. The illustrated poem *Border* by Bangladeshi poet Kaiser Haq plays with this complexity:

[...] and the border:  
perfect knife that slices through the earth without the earth’s knowing, severs and joins at the same instant, runs inconspicuously through modest households, creating wry humour – whole families eat under one flag, shit under another, humming a different national tune. (46-48)

At the larger level of the collective, social psychologist, Arthur G. Neal clarifies why national traumatic events require a repetitive engagement by each generation:

The narratives of these traumatic events can never be told once and for all. As historical circumstances change, the stories must be told and retold by each succeeding generation. The retelling of stories is in part based upon the excavation of new data about them with the passing of time. But, more important, stories take on new meanings for subsequent generations as they rework their social heritage and confront new set of challenges. (9)

One of these new set of challenges is for the second generation to deal with the past without having direct memories of their own yet continuing to feel its impact. The memory is triggered in everyday situations: a conversation with a grandparent, the news, the continuing Indo-Pakistan disputes. Without experiencing it first-hand, the second generation tries to make sense of a narrative that precedes their birth. Negotiating the event and dealing with its continuity is a part of the larger motive to understand one's social heritage. This is where recalling memories and passing them on through storytelling plays a role. The genesis of the *Archive* lies in such an attempt by Guneeta Singh Bhalla, who grew up listening to terrifying stories of the Partition and the loss of those of stories with the death of her grandmother led to a project that is "committed to preserving this chapter of our collective history" ("About Us"). Crucial here are two terms: 'preserving' and 'collective' – both that signal that there is a danger of erasure or loss is not a threat for the individual whose story is at stake, but for the collective. One generation carries these stories and the second wants to return to these to get a better understanding of the event that continues to haunt. The threat looms both at the level of the individual and the collective. "The Red Ledger" by Ankur Ahuja in *This Side, That Side* stresses the importance of preserving tales of the past:

A lot of these stories died with my grandfather, and the rest wandered around in those red ledgers filled with grandiose black squiggles in Urdu, that none of us ever learnt to read. After he died, all his red ledgers were sold to the kabadi. All that remains of him is a certificate from the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation that confirmed his status – a refugee. (175)

The *Archive* does this by capturing these stories before more such narratives are lost in the ashes of history. The orality of such a telling of traumatic histories allows for gaps and silences during narration; it gives

the subject freedom to narrate his story in his own words and allows others to connect with the survivor directly. While the latter is important in the direct connection that it offers, the former is important because the silences between the lines convey the difficulty in recalling memories and the continuing emotional impact of the traumatic event. The teller wavers between the burden of knowing that the event is past and not knowing how to deal with it. Hence, trauma narratives engage in a double telling – telling the story of an event that is known yet remains unknown, and oscillating between a crisis for life and a crisis for death.

“Water Stories”, by Bangalore-based writer Arundhati Ghosh and comics creator Appupen in *This Side, That Side*, deals with the passing down of stories by a father to his daughter – “In all her father’s stories about the land he came from, there was water” (130). The father goes back to memories of his childhood – playing in the river, feeding fish while coming back from school, watching his mother and aunts worship the waters of the river Padma. The memories take on a darker tone as he recalls his mother drowning herself in the same river. The river becomes a vengeful figure, devouring those who tried to leave the land and migrate to the other side after the Partition. He makes sense of his loss as ‘a curse of the river Padma’ as he narrates his past to his daughter. She then, symbolizes the second generation inheriting these stories:

My mother did not die of any illness, you know.

What?

“The Padma swallowed her. It ate her up. My beautiful mother. She went into the river one afternoon and never came back. I think the Padma knew we were leaving for another land. She stole my mother.”

[...]

He kept going back to the past and returning to the present, mixing up her mother with his mother. She [the daughter] did not sleep that night. His rants were beginning to affect her. She touched the barrenness inside her. Was it the river who made her barren, like many other women? She knew nothing would ever grow there. It would not support life bearing the curse of their banished ancestors? Was it still angry at those who left? She felt an intense, painful longing deep inside her. A longing for something she was not destined to have.

Many years later, after her father’s death, she went looking for the river in the other land. And slowly, as she became the river. They saw the large yellow moon rise in her dark, dark eyes. (132-135)

The passing down of unanswered questions and gnawing grief leaves the second generation with their own burden of indirect witnessing. They remain haunted by the traumatic stories of the first generation and attempt to revisit the past to try to answer the questions that they have imbibed during the ‘listening of another’. This, mingled with their own personal interactions with continuing impact of the Partition, leads them to narrate their stories and negotiations for the next generation. The echoes continue for years, across generations.

The engagement of the second generation with these stories was the basis of *This Side, That Side* that in its blurb conveys that “[m]any of the stories in *This Side, That Side*, grew out of conversations – in several cases, across borders – between graphic artists and storytellers”. The fuel behind this negotiation is a curiosity – of the attempt to understand not what happened, but how it touched the everyday and altered it for those who experienced it. The curiosity also lies in an attempt to understand what stories are told on the other side: “From the tin trunk of memories, *This Side, That Side* hopes to open the cabinets of curiosities that exist on all sides, with markers that must be recapped after use. This is not a closure, but one of many beginnings” (12).

One of many beginnings that the anthology marks is for the second generation to begin expressing their negotiations with first-generation stories of the Indian Partition. The choice of using a genre like comic strips and graphic narratives to do so is not to negate the seriousness of the event, nor to ridicule the experiences of the first generation, but to present the changing way in which the Indian Partition is being examined. It opens with an illustrated narrative of the process of India’s division into three:

[...] It was a merely technical problem. Should the baby [India] be parted horizontally or vertically? Hmm. Hmm. Hmmm. But the King was not just cool, he was wise too. We told you that at the beginning, didn’t we? He was really, very utterly wise. (“Why not both horizontally and vertically, fellows?”). And that is how, as we know from our old-old stories, the newborn baby was divided into three parts, and everyone (except the baby) lived unhappily ever after. (27-29)

Employing a language of wit and humour to understand the Partition is to refresh the telling of these ‘old-old stories’. The traumatic event has to be re-visited through the memories of the first-generation and it continues to be re-presented by the latter generations that look at newer mediums of

representation. The repetition done (through literature and films) by the subsequent generations comes with newer ways of analysing the traumatic event. In *Beyond Individual and Collective Trauma*, psychoanalyst Clara Mucci asserts there is a difference in the representation of first-generation and second-generation traumas. While the former deals with the reality of the experience, it translates into fantasmatic terms for the latter:

A very interesting and clinical point regarding the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next could be rephrased as follows: while the first generation suffered the real “trauma”, for the second generation the impact of the trauma was translated into fantasmatic terms that can still have a pathological effect. Since symbolization was impossible in the first generation, this burdensome task must be acted out by the second generation in other forms of illness. (178)

In the case of a return to the past by the second generation, the event does not have to be experienced in reality but can be revisited via memories and stories of others. The return is exemplified not just in literature, but also through recent commercial Bollywood movies. *Bhaag Milka Bhaag* (2013) and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015) – two of the biggest blockbusters of Indian cinema in the last few years, dealt with the memories of the Partition in different ways. *Bhaag Milka Bhaag*, a biopic on an Indian Olympian athlete – Milkha Singh, fluctuates between the past and the present as his childhood memories of witnessing his parent’s slaughter during the days of the Partition are triggered by flashbacks and dreams. The title of the movie literally translates to ‘run Milkha run’ – the dying words of his father as he urged a young Milkha to run away from the violence of the riots that gripped his village in 1947. While running the last leg of the race, Milkha Singh’s past is triggered when his coach tries to motivate him by shouting “run Milkha run” – words that remind him of his traumatic past. Vivid memories of the violence return, his performance suffers, and he drops down to winning the fourth position in the Olympic race. In a different take on the legacy of the Partition, the movie *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* is the story of a Hindu man who takes upon himself the task of returning a six-year-old Muslim girl back to her parents in Pakistan after she is mistakenly left behind in India. The film gives a strong message of the importance of cross-border peace between India and Pakistan and the need to bridge the mental divide created by the drawing of the Indo-Pak border. The tensions between the two countries are reminiscent of the continuing impact of the

Partition. The variation in mediums and modes of going back highlights the fact that the process of coming to terms with the Indian Partition is an ongoing, and perhaps never-ending, phenomenon for the collective.

If the memory of the Indian Partition is traumatic, then why do the first and second-generation survivors return to it? What function do mediums like the *Archive* or *This Side, That Side* that trigger these memories, fulfil? Coming to terms with the Partition, as Butalia argued, has just begun (“Archive with a Difference” 209). Its traumatic legacy will continue to be expressed through eyewitness accounts and creative media like films and fiction. The human side of the Partition of India will continue to be recovered and expressed through these channels. In order to heal wounds left by the Partition, stories of its continuing effect on the lives of many need to be heard at the individual and social level. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman presents a model for recovering from trauma wherein the second stage of remembrance and mourning is based on the importance of narrating memories of loss followed by a grieving process:

In the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor’s life story. (175)

The *Archive* becomes a platform that encourages this reconstruction of memory. The telling of experiences is an affirmation of the commencement of the second stage of healing and a step towards integrity of the self. Joseph Breuer’s treatment of Anna O. by using the cathartic method of the ‘talking cure’ lay the ground for Freud and Breuer to conclude that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (244). The passing on of trauma from one generation to the other, where the latter imbibes an affluence to it can perhaps be extended to a broader national level in case of the Indian Partition where the latter generations have to discuss the impact of these reminiscences upon them. Oral histories therefore initiate a transgenerational healing process where the ones who lived through it indulge in a cathartic talking and the others participate in a cathartic listening and understanding. It requires an empathetic undertaking on the part of the listener that becomes a bridge between the primary witness and the secondary witnesses. However, this empathy is more than reaching out to others and understanding their trauma. In *Empathy in the Treatment*



of *Trauma and PTSD*, Wilson and Thomas assert that “empathic ability, including empathic attunement, is a *requirement* for post-traumatic or traumatology psychotherapy” (emphasis in original 10). They define empathic attunement as the “capacity to resonate efficiently and accurately to another’s state of being” (10). Used in psychotherapy to help patients recover from traumatic experiences, empathic attunement allows one person (the therapist) to resonate with the experience of another (the client/patient) in order to help them overcome trauma. The synchronization of the two encourages a successful narration of painful memories and is a step toward possible recovery. Empathic attunement can be extended to the act of reading, watching or listening to real/fictional accounts of collective trauma where the traumatic past is shared between those whose story is being told and those listening to it. For example, listening to survivor stories of 1947 on the *Archive* can help other survivors of the Partition to come to terms with their traumatic experience. Their stories will find further resonance with others who lived through the event. The cycle continues across generations: first-generation survivors narrate their trauma; second-generation inherit these stories and add their negotiations with the past to their narration; so on and so forth. In this, the healing takes a psychosocial dimension where it entails social participation and becomes more than the story of one. In the case of the *Archive*, it hints at the readiness to start this process and that coming to terms with the Indian Partition has truly just begun. The anthology, on the other hand, illustrates how these stories resurface from memories for children of survivors.

There is an effort to share the knowledge of witnessing the Partition as it affected those who have remained silenced until now. However, on another level, going back is an attempt to understand the pre-Partition state of things in India. Summoning nostalgia before the drawing of borders, the ‘past’ is beckoned to understand not just the event, but also the everyday before the event. The creation of the other side leads to a curiosity about ‘those times’ when there was no such distinction. Therefore, oral histories that recount life before the Partition are a channel to get information about the time that can never return. The *Archive* encourages an interviewee to share details of their pre-Partition life as it “allows the listener to build a context for Partition and to better understand how Partition affected you, your family and your community and ways of life” (“The Questions”). The witness and the listener partake in a knowledge sharing of life before the Partition. This knowledge is precious because the border can never

be erased and the return to pre-Partition India can only ever ‘take place’ through testimonies of first-generation witnesses. In addition, the need to go back further than the traumatic event is to pick up the threads of the subject’s lost pieces of their narrative memory and weave them again.

For the second generation, there is a working through trauma because of an “empathic unsettlement”. Dominic LaCapra, in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, defines it as a virtual experience where one puts oneself in the position of another without discounting the difference between yourself and the other (78). Therefore, as argued earlier, listening to the wounds of others can evoke empathy, but it should not lead to an erasure of differences – of experiences and identities. The line between sympathy and empathy is marked with the distinction at the level of identification with the victims:

[... T]he notion of empathic unsettlement can help point the way to a fruitful middle ground between a conventional engaging narrative which allows readers to understand the represented other, and disrupting techniques which make clear that understanding the other can never be complete. Moreover, the distinction between sympathy and empathy is crucial when it comes to determining an ethical response to the suffering literary other. Sympathy can be equated to ‘feeling sorry for you’, while empathy corresponds to ‘feeling your sorrow’ (Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, 2003, 156). (Koopman 309).

Empathy creates an emotional connection between the one who is narrating trauma and the one listening to its ‘story’, if the latter shares the same traumatic past. For survivors of the Partition, listening to oral testimonies on the *Archive* can stimulate them to begin the narrating process of their own stories. This connection that empathy creates does not dilute the individuality of experience. The stories of survival of the Indian Partition are similar, but not the same across the border or across generations. Each generation negotiates with the trauma of the event in their own way, and this further differs from one person to another. Both sides of the Indo-Pak divide continue to feel the impact of the Partition, can share stories of its impact upon their lives, but something new will continue to be unearthed about the way in which it continues to haunt.

The trauma of the Partition has to be dealt with still and will perhaps, continue to find articulation via different mediums – cinema, graphic narratives, oral histories, literature. Memories are yet to be unearthed and

some stories remain untold. The *Archive* plans to record 10,000 stories by 2017 by embarking on a global level search for silent tales of witnessing and surviving the Indian Partition. As people on both sides of the Indo-Pak border continue to negotiate with the event and its memories, the telling and healing will continue. Artistic and literary expressions will keep making a return to the past of the Indian Partition as it continues to affect the present of many Indians and Pakistanis. Remembering the traumatic past is to recover it from a possible erasure and to help survivors recover from it.

The crucial question is whether such a transgenerational telling can make possible a move towards forgiveness. And when fraught with international political ramifications, can survivor stories, especially ones that narrate the bloody loss of a people, not become triggers for pointing fingers and furthering friction between ‘this side and that side’ of the border? Forgetting the event and its impact is negated in the very act of publically sharing the traumatic experience. The *Archive* and the anthology are media that go one-step further than a one-to-one sharing of experiences between people. However, are these the first step toward ‘forgiving’ and bandaging wounds?

If every generation returns to painful memories and expresses it in its own unique way, then forgiveness also operates at the same transgenerational level. Forgiveness is often seen as a closure and an end in itself. Narrations of stories of a traumatic event continue for two main reasons: each generation goes through a process of understanding, narrating and trying to forgive and; even if forgiveness is reached, these operate as ‘never-again’ reminders. Therefore, forgiveness works within one generation and across generations. It has both a generational quality and a transgenerational one, as Derrida notes in an interview in the context of Shoah:

So one may imagine that, while for a generation that witnessed or participated closely in this trauma forgiveness should be impossible, for the following generation, forgiveness remaining still impossible, modes of reconciliation, of re-appropriation, of mourning become somewhat easier. These generational differences, naturally, are marked in public discourse and in philosophical discourse. (Ben-Naftali 7)

These generational differences are also marked in literature and creative narratives. The attempts at forgiveness are cyclical – this wheel turns the cycle of transgenerational negotiations with trauma. The evasive

nature of forgiveness opens doors to first and second-generation creative accounts of their attempts to deal with it: therein lies the paradox at the heart of forgiveness – forgiving the unforgivable. Especially in the context of political traumas, each generation works with two contradictory threads – trying to make visible the blood spots on the slates of the mind and trying to find forgiveness. The stories will be narrated by different generations via different innovations in the way in which these are told and retold to public consciousness. The attempts at forgiveness act as a catalyst to transgenerational narrations of collective trauma.

The question that arises is what constitutes the nature of forgiveness? For Derrida, “[f]orgiveness must be a gracious gift, without exchange and without condition” (44). If it is conditional, then it is not forgiveness but a transaction that introduces a hierarchy of power between the wrongdoer and the forgiver. Similarly, Julia Kristeva uses the French word ‘pardon’ (*par* meaning ‘through’ and *don* ‘gift’) to conceptualize forgiveness as a non-judgemental gift and an act that interprets meaning of suffering (qtd. in Kelly, Keltner 67). Fiction, films, oral-testimonies on traumas of events like the Indian Partition help the collective move beyond identifying who is to blame for the violence to understanding the suffering of those who lived through it. In the specific context of the Indian Partition, it is the violence and the bloodshed that need to be forgiven rather than the people who perpetuated it; the unconditional gift is to be bestowed upon the traumatic time rather than upon particular individuals. For those who witnessed the death of their family and near ones, the witness also needs to forgive him-/herself for having survived the event. S/he needs to overcome this survivor’s guilt in order to forgive oneself and move towards recovering from trauma of the past.

The idea of forgiveness is deeply rooted in the grieving and mourning process:

At the most basic level, forgiveness is on a continuum with grief. The way I understand it now is that when you’re offended or hurt or violated, the natural response is to grieve. All of those problems can be seen as a loss – whether we lose affection or a human being or a dream – and when we lose something, human beings have a natural reintegration process, which we call grief. Then forgiveness is the resolution of grief. But the challenges we have with grief are twofold: Some people never grieve, and some people grieve for too long. (Luskin n. p.)

In the context of the Indian Partition, the loss could be of land, identity, loved ones or of a sense of a secure national belonging. Transgenerational accounts of trauma operate with both the extremes of not grieving at all and grieving for too long: in the light of the former, these work as triggers that nudge the victims to recall their hurt as they partake in a shared remembering process and, in the case of the latter, initiate a collective working through trauma via the realization of the need to reach a resolution. The final act of forgiving does not entail a necessary forgetting but draws on human resilience for recovery. This resilience defines human strength and reveals the power of connectedness in the context of collective trauma, loss and mourning (Mucci 196). Forgiveness therefore is a reestablishment of a sense of community and a sense of connectedness within it, a process that helps the subject go beyond trauma to re-establish a hope in the future and in humanity (Mucci 202).

Oral testimonies of first generation survivors on cyber-real platforms like the *Archive*, and/or expressions of latter generations' inherited trauma through literature like *This Side, That Side* perform these very tasks. The unforgiving memory of the Indian Partition and its impact on a people continue to echo via different platforms and the process of dealing with the paradox of forgiveness enables a moving beyond its trauma. Even though the tragic past cannot be forgiven, its memory can be channelized to reconnect with others through transgenerational narrations of having survived it. This restores the faith in human resilience and allows a psychosocial recovery from the trauma of the Indian Partition through such rememberings.



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# Trauma in Palestinian Women's Autobiographies: Concrete Histories of Personal Loss and National Disintegration

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I would accept the overall impression that *Orientalism* was written out of an extremely concrete history of personal loss and national disintegration – not only a few years before I wrote *Orientalism* – Golda Meir made her notorious and deeply orientalist comment about there being no Palestinian people. (Said, *Orientalism* 338)

## *Introduction*

Histories of horror and war have informed and shaped trauma studies. The Holocaust has become the signifier for the ultimate human evil in Western culture: the ungraspable nature of the event and its impact on Western collective memory have instigated researchers and triggered experts' interest. The magnitude of evil and the excesses of pain that struck European Jews during World War II imbued with it a deep sense of horror, guilt, and shame across Europe. Many post-war Westerners and intellectuals perceived the Holocaust and the atrocities of war as a stark indication of their moral and ethical failure, and dramatically saw themselves as accomplices, perpetrators, and collaborators, even by their silence.

Trauma studies are deeply rooted in the historical legacy of war and its bearings on Holocaust victims. This field evolved around Holocaust survivors and the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. In their *Testimony* (1992), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub

demonstrate how speaking about, listening to, witnessing and telling trauma stories about the self, though private, bear witness to a much wider reality; to something “larger than life”. Testimonial writing, such as fiction, poetry, letters, memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, diaries, amongst others, is “to speak for others, and to others” and to break the silence of one’s horrifying story of pain and trauma. In fusing psychiatry and literary theories, *Testimony* foregrounds literature as a witness to trauma, in what “has become a crucial mode of our relation to events of our times” (5). Women, writes Felman, “cannot simply command autobiography” (*What Does a Woman Want?* 15). In her view, insofar as the female condition is essentially traumatic, women’s life narratives “cannot hold together as a whole” and remain evasive and uncontainable (15). Felman sees women’s autobiographies as testimonies to life and death. Being an essentially female condition, trauma shapes their writings. To write about one’s life and reconstruct the past attest to stories of survival and resistance: “Feminine autobiography cannot be a confession. It can only be a testimony: to survival. And like other testimonies to survival, its struggle is to testify at once to life and to the death – the dying – the survival has entailed” (16). Trauma and literature – entwined in women’s life writings – come into being through language: they are discursive in nature.

As early as 1893, Freud noted the problematic nature of studying the human psyche and the intricacies of such endeavour. He pinpointed the evasive nature of the subject due to the smudged borders between the literary and the scientific, on the one hand, and the shifting grounds between the subject and object, on the other:

It still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own (*Studies on Hysteria* 231).

Stories pertain to the past and recalling them relies on the process of remembering. In his case studies, Freud wrote narratives about the suffering of his patients; he became a narrator/biographer as he constructed past wounds in an attempt to unburden and cure his patients who were traumatised victims of war and couldn’t easily disassociate themselves from the atrocities witnessed. Fixation on past events come in different forms and shapes, including nightmares, screaming, and hallucinations.

Freud realised, when considering the symptoms of traumatised soldiers in World War I, the daunting task of dealing with war victims.

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) analogises the child's traumatic loss of his mother with the suffering of traumatised soldiers of the war. He recognises that the fixations of memory and the repetitions of painful experiences, their enaction and re-enaction, are attempts to master the traumatic event: "We are therefore left in doubt as to whether the impulse to work over in mind some overpowering experience so as to make oneself master of it can find expression as a primary event, and independently of the pleasure principle" (16). In *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013), Caruth also argues that the child in the playground struggles to recreate the past "At the sight of its disappearance" (ix). In this article, I will try to demonstrate how writing memoirs for Palestinian women is an act of survival and "a claim to life in the face of this disappearing world" (xii). Palestinian women writers' life narratives test the limits of trauma theories and autobiographies. I shall be considering *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (2002), *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015) by Ghada Karmi, *My People Shall Live* by Leila Khaled, *My Home, My Prison* (1984) by Raymonda Tawil, *This Side of Peace: A Personal Account* (1995) by Hanen Ashrawi, *Nadia Captive of Hope: A Memoir of an Arab Woman* (1999) by Fay Kanafani, *Teta, Mother, and Me: Three Generations of Arab Women* (2006) by Jean Said Makdisi, and *A World I Loved: The Story of an Arab Woman* (2009) by Wadad Makdisi, to mention only a few, in conjunction with trauma as it implicates history and memory in the process of writing and representing experiences of war, loss, and exile. I contend that the trauma of not belonging after 1948 is the ultimate articulation of belonging to Palestine in Palestinian women's life narratives. I will be extending trauma theories to explore the Nakba of 1948 and its impact on Palestinian women's life-narratives.

### *The Nakba (1948) as Unprecedented Traumatic Event*

In her article "On the Exclusion of the Palestinian Nakba from the 'Trauma Genre'" (2013), Rosemary Sayigh argues that trauma studies, as initiated by Felman, Laub and Caruth, is far from being universal and inclusive, insofar as "cultural frames of reference" set boundaries and in doing so trauma studies as a cultural production "delimit[s] what it recognizes as suffering" (52). Not including Palestine in trauma theories despite the

expansion of the field to incorporate along with the Holocaust a myriad of causes ranging from the partition of India to victims of Aids and sexual abuse is ideologically and politically motivated (55). Sayigh maintains the urgency of inflecting Israeli colonial presence in Palestine to decode the loss and mourning as an undercurrent in Palestinian art and life; to fall short of mentioning the root cause that lies behind such pain and agony: the Nakba that happened in 1948 and is continuing into the present (55-6) is a gross distortion that dismisses the most defining aspect of Palestinian life, art, and identity. This watershed moment is not detected and considered by trauma theorists because of Western myopia as Judith Butler argues in *Frames of War* (2009): “Forms of racism instituted and active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable” (24). In engaging trauma theories to read Palestinian women’s life-narratives, this article tries to demonstrate the venues trauma theories offer, notwithstanding their “myopia” (Sayigh 57), their bringing new insights into the reading and understanding of Palestinian women’s narratives on the Nakba.

The Nakba marked the partition of Palestine and its subsequent disappearance from the world map. In *Return* (2015), Gahda Karmi defines it as “a seminal event in every Palestinian’s life, the root cause of all the suffering that followed” (213). Remembering the Nakba has hitherto been both problematic and controversial due to feeling of guilt, defeat, shame, and betrayal, especially amongst Palestinians who lived the event. Contrary to the Holocaust, the Nakba has never become “history”; in other words, it has never been stalled in the past due to its continuity into the present, hence stems one of the challenges accompanying trauma studies, when extended to the Palestinian ongoing Nakba. Moreover, the event has never been fully commemorated, documented, and accounted for primarily because its perpetrators were never held accountable for ethnically cleansing and dispossessing Palestinians. In *Catastrophe Remembered* (2005), Nur Masalha explores the Nakba and its impact on Palestinian refugees who live in the vicinity of the moving borders of Israel and affirms the importance of oral history, memory, and namely the oral testimonies of Nakba victims to document and write the victims’ version of history against the Israeli one. Trauma experiences of loss and dispossession are imbricated in and shaped by power relations over narrating and inscribing one’s stories and truth. Masalha argues that “the Nakba and ongoing

Palestinian suffering are surely a reminder of the reality of the suffering of the Jews in Europe” (3), but the Nakba stories are far from being heard despite the Palestinians’ deploring conditions, that is to say Palestinians are still herded in refugee camps, immured in the open prison of Gaza, held without trial in Israeli prisons, dispersed in Israel, and dismissed as present absentees within what was their land. The one million Palestinians living as exiles in Israel are referred to as the present absentees within the Apartheid state of Israel: “[O]nly one word came to mind: Apartheid” (*In Search of Fatima* 441). The historian Salman Abu Sitta eloquently defines the Nakba in *The Palestinian Nakba 1948*:

The Palestinian Nakba is unsurpassed in history. For a country to be occupied by a foreign minority, emptied almost entirely of its people, its physical and cultural landmarks obliterated, its destruction hailed as a miraculous act of God and a victory for freedom and civilised values, all done according to a premeditated plan, meticulously executed, financially and politically supported from abroad, and still maintained today, is no doubt unique (5).

### *Remembering the Nakba in Palestinian Women’s Life Narratives*

Life narratives of Middle Eastern women writers are sites of struggle and resistance. Be it against the hegemony of the West, the misogyny of the East, or both, their stories offer new ways of viewing the world and representing the self as a contested ground where discourses of trauma and suffering are dramatised. For Palestinian women, the stakes are even higher because of the triple contingency of gender, exile, and colonisation. They offer their scripts as acts of survival against erasure and claims of the non-existence of Palestine and Palestinian. I would like to argue here that *In Search of Fatima* authorises a narrative of resistance and survival against Israeli aggression and Western bias. The representations of Palestinian lives, torn and traumatised, disturb the narrative and anachronistically bring it back to 1948 Palestine. In his influential *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986), Said defines the Palestinian writing style by quoting the iconic Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish’s verse “Where should we go after the last frontiers./ where should birds fly after the last sky?” (2). Taken from “Earth Presses against Us” (*Fewer Roses* 14), this verse conjures up incompleteness and emptiness after the Nakba as central in the poem

and suggestive of violence insofar as images of limb dismemberment and mutilation are employed to stand for Palestinians' dispossession, defeat and forced exile: "Earth is pressing against us, trapping us in the final passage./To pass through, we pull off our limbs" (14). The Palestinian artistic style is both aesthetic and political as it narrates loss and resistance as a personal and collective traumatic experience. The "we" in the poem is a reminder of the shared and lived pain and suffering that Palestinians endure. The Nakba informed and shaped the Palestinian artistic style as tinged with incompleteness, uncertainty, fluidity, and belonging through non belonging. In *The Last Sky*, Edward Said highlights the "the elusive, resistant, reality it [Palestinian literature] tries so often to represent", and argues that "particularly in fiction, the struggle to achieve form expresses the writer's efforts to construct a coherent scene, a narrative that might overcome the almost metaphysical impossibility of representing the present" (38). Palestinian life narratives intersperse the stories of what Said calls "the personal loss" with those of other Palestinians and draw on the personal as representative of and different from other Palestinian experiences. The loss that inhabits Palestinian female memoirs and the struggle to make sense of the present is, in my understanding, inherently related to the present nature of the "'al nakba al-mustamirrah' translated into English as 'the ongoing Nakba'" (Sayigh 56).

*In Search of Fatima* dramatises, from the eyes of a small girl, the turbulent years that have led to the mass exodus of many Palestinians and their exile to foreign lands and temporary refugees' camps. In 1948, Ghada Karmi's family left for Syria and then moved to London where they joined the father who was working for the BBC. At the heart of her narrative is Palestine and Palestinian loss. The dream-based world of the memoirs' setting is grounded in the history and geography of a land present only in its absence, whereby writing becomes a form of remedy, resistance, and survival, and the narrative discourse in Palestinian women's memoirs resonates with the writers' plight as Palestinian: in this context, the political is indeed personal, and Leila Khaled writes in her autobiography "[It] is not politics [but] it is a matter of life and death" (20). *In Search of Fatima* was written by a woman who lived the 1948 and was forced into exile. That momentous event is final in its physicality and enduring in its emotional repercussions. Palestine is referred to as an untimely buried body whose death is made more tragic by not mourning it; in other words, the Palestinian Nakba is a story of loss that has yet to be bewailed and

told: “We never set eyes on Fatima or our dog or the city we had known ever again. Like a body prematurely buried, unmourned, without coffin or ceremony, our hasty, untidy exit from Jerusalem was no way to have said goodbye to our home, our country and all that we knew and loved” (123). Ghada’s family left the house, Fatima, the maid, and Rex, the family dog. Each one of those left behind have stronger ties and claims to the land than Ghada and her social class. The house, in Qatamon-Jerusalem, stands for Jerusalem, and by implication Palestine with its past history, Fatima the peasant, emblematises resistance as the archetypal mother of the Fedayeen, and the dog as the ultimate symbol of loyalty and faithfulness. The three are deserted and left “defenceless to the hordes” (210) and to a fate of lived dispossession, impoverishment, and exile in what was their home. The child Ghada knows, the moment she has left her house, that there would be no going back; she has seen that in the tears of Fatima, the sad eyes of Rex, and the closing gates of the house. People who left thinking they will return are guilty and “woefully wrong” (123).

Childhood memories during that *annus horribilis* are vividly remembered, graphically relayed, and painstakingly documented. The memoir charts the loss of Karmi’s home and the disintegration of her country. What came to be known as the Nakba runs like a sinister stream across *In Search of Fatma* and gathers force at different turning points in the life of its narrator: It haunts, torments, and traumatises her as a burden of guilt and pain. The Nakba, - is a cataclysmic event that still reads like an open wound; - it scared her being and shattered her world. What is striking in her text is her description of her helplessness as a child and her feeling of loss that she cannot express in her writing. The memoir comes close in form and content to an oral testimony where the speaker is going through a cathartic session. The simplicity of the employed diction, and unparalleled sentence-structure warrant the acute clarity and painful vividness of the itinerary of loss that colour the narrative self as the narrator digs into her buried, forgotten childhood and unearths it in the narrative with a profoundly elegiac tone. Those scenes of childhood loss and remembrance ceaselessly permeate her account in an astonishing circularity: “With utter clarity, the little girl saw in that moment that he knew [Rex] what she knew, that they would never meet again” (2). The very image of the dog, Fatima, and the house in Jerusalem never subsides and keeps surging almost always: “And so it was that we too lost Fatma, not knowing how to pluck her from the human whirlpool that had swallowed her after our departure. As for Rex,

whom we last saw that April morning in 1948, no news of him reached us ever again” (127).

In this respect, Ghada Karmi’s work showcases that memoir-writing for Palestinian women is a site where discourses of trauma and self-representation merge. 1948 is the date of Karmi’s eviction from her home in Palestine and is a recurrent theme in the narrative. The memories of Rex, the house, and more than anything else Fatima are intensified by recalling the killing, and the bombing that hastened the family’s flight (210). Karmi’s narrative fails to contain the sporadic resurfacing of her time in Jerusalem that continuously surge from the recesses of the psyche whereby the flow of the text’s events is submerged, and disrupted by them. The collapse of her world made her realise that her life in exile with all its components, including the dog her brother, Ziad, acquired in London cannot substitute the loss of Rex (44-45). There is a constant movement between the past and the present, between Palestine and England in so far as past memories and the present overlap and merge in the narrative as one. Because her childhood memories are so overwhelmingly present, the narrative is buttressed by uncontrollable bursts that materialise in long and detailed repetitive passages from the pre-Nakba Palestine, and nostalgia. One of the most striking passages of *In Search of Fatma* is about memory, recovery, trauma and the process of remembering Rex, the house, and Fatima, that are her only means to recovery:

This [flight] played directly into my own loss of memory. In some subtle and insensible way, I find that I had wiped out all remembrance of Jerusalem. If I ever thought about it, it was to realise with some shock that I could no longer recall the way our house had looked, or Rex, or even the features of Fatima’s face. Those essential memories of childhood had simply melted away, leaving only shadows and elusive fragments of feeling (210).

In *Trauma and Recovery* (2008), Judith Herman states that “an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering history” (2), an act which implies re-living and re-experiencing the past; in other words, reconstructing it through memory. This can be compared to a third person narrator in a contemporary work of fiction, in which the narrator’s knowledge is limited, flawed, and even misleading. Trauma stories, like postmodern literature, are fragmented, grotesque, and fluidly ungraspable: the reader/critic may bring meaning to the text in the same way the listener/



psychiatrist can help the traumatised anchor their memories in some form of reality and veracity.

The autobiographical act's allegiance to history and memory, on the one hand, and its conflation with trauma, on the other, require further elucidation. Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (2001) foregrounds the place of trauma in contemporary memoirs and explores the representations of the self in the context of representing trauma. The joint project of representing the self and representing trauma through "limit cases" (19) transforms both autobiographies and trauma studies. "Limit cases" operate when self-representations and the representation of trauma coincide and are answers to the inherent paradox of failed memory and reliable testimony (20-21) as they engage "autobiography's central concerns and a refusal of autobiography's form and the judgements it imports" (19). I suggest that Palestinian women's autobiographies not only test the limits of both the theories of trauma studies and self-representation but also serve as historical and personal records of national implications. They document past events and commemorate the Nakba as part and parcel of their history and identity as Palestinians against erasure.

The thrust of Gilmore's argument is how trauma and self-representation require and expand the limits of autobiography and how the representations of trauma hinge on the representations of the self. The centrality of trauma in contemporary Palestinian memoirs offers new insights into the Palestinian plight and takes Western readers, to whom the works are primarily directed, to new and uncharted territories. Gilmore convincingly states that "the compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others" (12) is necessary in what she terms "limit cases" texts. The discourse of truth about a real life is a synergy of sources and positionings where charges of lying cannot undermine the narrative for reasons related to the way history, politics, ideology, and the nature of the traumatic event are defined and articulated. The autobiographical act's allegiance to history and memory results in the fusion of fiction and facts in the representation of the self as part of a community. The frustration within the narrative discourse in *In Search of Fatima* with the English public bias to Israel and lack of sympathy towards Palestinians is the result of how history is conceptualised and written as Conway convincingly shows in her reading of history as a natural corollary of locations and standpoints: "if you want to tell the history of the world in 1492, we westerners talk about Columbus, but if you're from the Arab world a very different series of events is important"

(57). The glaring atrocities committed by both the Hagenah led by Moshi Dayan (88) and the Irgun and Stern Gang led by Menachem Begin in Deir Yassin and other villages and cities are catalogued in memoirs dealing with the Nakba, such as *My Home, My Prison* by Raymonda Tawil and *Nadia Captive of Hope* by Fay Kanafani, to mention only a few. Karmi reminds the readers of Begin's unabashed statement about the massacres of Deir Yassin and how "it was worth half a dozen army battalions in the war against the Palestinian Arab" (126). Both leaders were listed as terrorists during the British mandate, only to serve later as Israeli prime ministers, and their terrorist groups formed the army of Israel. Thus far the ongoing Nakba and the past Nakba are shrouded in denial and undermined by issues related to power and power relations that determine whose stories are heard and whose narratives prevail. The Israeli stories are endorsed and shielded within the prevailing Western colonial discourse which led to the creation and support of Israel in the heart of the Arab world as a fake democracy.

*My People Shall Live: Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (1973) by Leila Khaled, *My Home, My Prison* (1984) by Raymonda Tawil, *This Side of Peace: Personal Account* by Hanen Ashrawi (1995), *Nadia Captive of Hope: Memoir of an Arab Woman* (1999) by Fay Kanafani, *Teta, Mother, and Me: Three Generations of Arab Women* (2006) by Jean Said Makdisi, *A World I Loved: The Story of an Arab Woman* (2009) by Wadad Makdisi, amongst others, were penned by Palestinian women, and portray the loss of Palestine in 1948 and the repercussions of that loss on people's everyday lives and psyche. The burgeoning of Palestinian memoirs in English shows the urgency of speaking directly to the Anglophone world and the need to inscribe their own historical truth. The memoirs are buttressed by long passages about the refugees' camps and the historical formation of the state of Israel. They painstakingly document the involvement of the Hagenah and Irgun in acts of terror against the Palestinians. These memoirs are testimonies against terror and current claims of terrorism against Palestinians who are resisting occupation and underscore the authors' determination to survive as a collective group against erasure. In *Resistance Literature* (1987), Barbara Harlow argues that memoirs emanating from experiences of exile, colonialism and so cultural differences challenge the genre of autobiography and its generic boundaries. Exiles, immigrants, colonised, and neo-colonised subjects deploy "autobiographical practices that go against the grain" and in so doing the "I" they create becomes a place of creative and, by implication, political intervention" (xv). They

see in this genre a productive and empowering process to enter language and resist negation. Their life narratives invite Western readers to view a “different world” and represent a serious challenge “to both western generic conventions and literary theories” (xvi). The marginalised subject sees in this genre a project of resistance and a space for presenting the history of their tragedy of loss. The Nakba as a traumatic event, pivotal in the authorisation of the text, acquires new overtones because of its ripple effect on the confused self, and the disintegrated country.

*Memory and Trauma Writing: “Permission to Narrate”*

Writing, as a form of self-preservation against loss and emptiness, is not novel: it has its therapeutic effect on both the writer and the reader because they are both implicated in what Felman and Laub call “a crisis in history translated into a crisis of literature insofar as literature becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history, which precisely cannot be articulated in the given category of history” (xviii). Literature becomes in this respect a negotiating space between history, memory, and fiction as a trauma witness. Literary discourse is not tested against history, but it is a generator of history and truth about trauma and pain. In “‘My Beautiful House’ and Other Fabrications by Edward Said” (1999), Justus Weiner, a US-born Zionist in residence at the Jerusalem Centre for Public Studies, first published his attacks, on the *Commentary* on the eve of the publication of Said’s *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999), on grounds related to Said’s birthplace, schooling, family and friends, and many of the minute details Said included in his memoirs. *Commentary*, a right-wing journal, published back in the eighties “The Professor of Terror” (1989) by Edward Alexander and a couple of slandering articles on Edward Said and his works. The articles are attempts to discredit Said as a high-profile Palestinian political figure and outstanding critic. Belonging to Palestine as dramatized in his life-narrative is unashamedly dismissed by Weiner as untrue, namely his roots in Jerusalem. Weiner, who spent three years checking and verifying records, interviewing more than twenty people, investigating the school records and birth certificates, came up with the conclusion that Said constructed a myth around his origins and belonging.<sup>1</sup> In autobiographical genres, charges of fake accounts about the past as opposed to authentic/real ones are irrelevant insofar as memories, trauma,

and writing are concerned. Traumatic events and memories of the past intersect with history, testimony, and fiction, according to the historian Dominick LaCapra:

Testimony makes claims of truth about experience or at least one's memory of it, more tenuously, about events (although obviously one hopes that someone who claims to be a survivor did experience the events in reality). Still, the most difficult and moving moments of testimony involve not claims of truth but experiential 'evidence' – the apparent reliving of the past, as a witness, means going back to an unbearable scene, being overwhelmed by emotion and for a time unable to speak (131).

The writing of past events is prone to memory-loss and faking/lying or forgetting/remembering as an integral part of representing traumatic events which are, in their turn, an extension of representing the self. Past events marked by deep wounds hinge on people's memories, so details related to places, street names, exact days and dates are easily wiped out and hardly retrieved. On her visit to what had once been her home, Karmi "was bitterly disappointed to find that [she] remembered so little" (443) because of "A baffling amnesia has enveloped that time [her childhood years in Qatamon-Jerusalem]" (115). The nature of Israel as a settler colonial power on the land of Palestine relentlessly engages, almost on a daily basis, in erasing Palestinian history by demolishing towns, wiping villages, deporting people, and destroying communities by severing them from their culture and heritage on the one hand, and erecting Jewish edifices to legitimise the presence of European emigrants, on the other hand. Thus charges of fake accounts are possibilities, especially when made by Zionists and right wing American and European Jews who don't belong to the land and are, by virtue of their religion, given Israeli nationalities to sustain the demographic supremacy of Jews in Israel whilst killing, expelling and terrorising Palestinians in their own houses and lands. Exigencies of accuracy and truth telling about details such as names and dates are secondary, if not of no relevance. Gahda Karmi never mentions the exact day of her departure from Palestine, she only recalls April 1948, and similarly could not locate her house when she goes there. Longing for Palestine and origins cannot be fake because the act of longing doesn't happen in vacuum; it operates within an emotive set of connections to a land, a religion, a family, and a community that used to exist and ceased because of colonialism. In both Said's and Karmi's memoirs remembering

is synonymous with identity and belonging to Palestine. The memoirs written by Palestinian who experienced the Nakba are testimonies against silence and negation. Perhaps the attacks levelled against Said are futile in their endeavour to erase Palestine and wipe the continuous Nakba as a living testimony on past and present Palestinians' suffering.

Notwithstanding the fact that Said was not lying, what Weiser missed is the ongoing tragedy of the Palestinian people, the realities of refugee camps, and the disintegration of their country. The place of trauma in contemporary memoirs and the recognition of trauma's centrality render the debate around truth and lie not only irrelevant, but dismissive of the essence of people's experiences and enduring pain. The issue of whether Said is telling the truth, which I think he does, is aimed to undermine the Nakba and the Palestinian plight. The authenticity of the Nakba as an ongoing tragedy is a clear reminder of what Weiser is trying to falsify and fails because Said's works are seminal in advocating the Palestinian cause and taking it to a worldwide stage. What holds always true is the cataclysmic loss of one's country and its disintegration. Many works from Holocaust literature are tested not against the details of everyday life in the concentration camps but the anguish and pain of the living witnesses who came from the brink of death to tell their stories. Witnessing history in the making by sharing each other's trauma as stated above is what literature is grappling with in our postmodern world.

### *Re-writing the History of Palestine from a Palestinian Standpoint*

Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima* is a rewriting of the history of Palestine from the standpoint of an Arab Palestinian woman, and thus offers a counter narrative that dislodges the certitude of Israeli official historical accounts on Palestine that resonates in the USA and in many Western countries' public opinion and mainstream media. She informs the readers that the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, was "built on the flattened and now unrecognisable land of the Palestinian village of Lifta" (440) and by implication exposes the tragic irony of such a democratic emblem: Israel is often referred to as the only democracy in the Middle East in the official political discourse of Western leaders, namely in the USA, is a colonial power with a history of dispossession and ethnic cleansing. The passage that comes next is tragically touching because it shows the

hypocrisy of Western colonial powers and how they scapegoated Palestine to compensate the Jews, the victims of European wars and anti-Semitism, for the crimes committed against them:

[T]he Holocaust museum nearby was built on confiscated Arab land. Inside, there was a brilliant and affecting exhibition of tragic European-Jewish history, skilfully interwoven with the creation of modern Israel; seemingly logical progression from the gas chambers to Palestine, not omitting pictures of the Mufti of Jerusalem negotiating with the Nazi (440)

In pondering the history of Palestine alongside her own life, Karmi's narrative can be read in conjunction with history, memory, and dislocation as an exile in Britain. The personal and political are interconnected and resonate in her narrative; they pressure her to tell and struggle to remember. The real conditions of colonialism and Zionism make her personal account a political intervention and an act of resistance. The Nakba is ingrained in her memories in concrete way: "When I close my eyes and think of that time in Jerusalem, I can feel the still summer afternoons [...] one could almost touch the warmth stillness" (52)

The major turning points in Karmi's life coincide with the history of Palestine despite its disappearance from the world map. The opening passage is emotionally moving and disturbingly tragic, it depicts the family's departure from their home in Qatamon, a Palestinian residential area in Jerusalem. Ghada's life in that house before that watershed moment, the Nakba, is synonymous with peace, love, warmth, and belonging or a dreamt of version of the original paradise. The nostalgic and idyllic depiction of her childhood is set against the realities of exile in 1950s London. The trope of cold in the memoir is an important symbol and an index of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), an acronym defined by Leys as "a disorder of memory" whereby the mind "is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed" (2). The narrator's banishment, and dislocation, in other words, her exile was heaped on the pain of past experiences and emotional numbing. In this respect, "loss and national disintegration" is exasperated by her displacement in a glacially foreign country. When she marries an English doctor, she tries to reconcile herself with England: "In marrying John I had sought to belong to England" (377). But soon after the outbreak of war between the Arabs and Israel, she realizes that the events

in the Middle East will always shape her life. Her husband's support of the state of Israel led to her divorce "in the summer of 1968": her life "had been nothing but a sham" (377), and "The sense of belonging I had nurtured was only a pretence that I could no longer support" (377). Alienation in a country she has tried hard to be part of is her destiny as an exile: the cold weather and the triumphalist attitude of many Jews in England after 1967 made her reconsider her own life.

The defeat of Al Hazima is a turning point in her life, the life of many Palestinians, Arabs, and Israelis. It has impacted modern Arabic literature in both form and content. Robert Young's keynote speech at a conference hosted by Qatar University in May 2014, foregrounds the 1967 Six-Day War and its reverberations on the Palestinian psyche: he refers to Palestinian male writers and heavily relies on the theories of Said and his own intentions to finish the unfinished work of Said. Young argues that the force of decay and national disintegrations are conveyed anachronistically to the current Palestinian reality in Palestinian art in the works of many Palestinian male authors, such as Mahmoud Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani, and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra where images of running men or grieving women amidst destruction, dilapidation, and decay are replete. Palestinian women's memoirs are more open about feelings of guilt than their male counterparts: they celebrate, as in *In Search of Fatima*, those who remain on the land and focus more on children and women than on physical strength and falling concrete blocks as forces of resistance or Somood. What is worth noting is the significance of childhood in the process of writing memoirs. Karmi and many other Palestinian women writers touch on the ambivalence of their parents towards Palestine and their helplessness as young girls.

### *Memory, Mourning, and Writing*

*In Search of Fatma* incorporates the representations of trauma as it grapples with issues related to self-discovery, mourning and writing. The belatedness of grieving and mourning complicated the representations of loss and posit a challenge to memory, language, and the traumatic experience as a textual production. To write about pain is, in a sense, cathartic and palliative. Using Caruth's theories on the "unspeakability" and "unrepresentability" of trauma can bring further elucidation to my reading of book as a testimony to and understanding of the Nakba as a belatedly unassimilated event because

of its brevity and too devastating an impact. Caruth's definition of trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event" (4) brings new insights into my understanding of Karmi's text. The pathology consists "solely in the structure of the experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (*Trauma* 4-5). Equally, Karmi's departure from Palestine and its repercussions on the whole family have not been fully assimilated. The text unbalanced short, long and fragmented sentences convey a sense of absurdity, and echoes the "unrepresentability" of the experience. For example, the prologue, narrated in the third person, evidences the narrator's painful attempt to distance herself from the child Ghada and thus results in a narrative schism that reflects the aftereffects of Karmi's wound, and underscores the "unrepresentability" of the Nekba: "[A] mighty crash that shook the house. Something – a bomb - a mortar, a weapons' store? – exploded with a deafening bang. The little girl could feel it right inside her head" (1). Leaving Palestine, a major event in the book, is snapshotted and remains present because of its brevity and pathos:

Every nerve and Fibre of her being raged against her fate, the cruelty of leaving that she was powerless to avert, she put her palms up against the gate and Rex started barking and pushing at it, thinking she was coming in. Her mother dragged her away into the back seat of the taxi onto Fatima's lap (2).

The disruption within the narrative and its episodic structure connote the lasting disjunctive nature of the moment. The passages about her departure from Palestine are repetitive and dexterously reflect the semi-articulatory of the childlike helplessness to relay the event and express her own feelings. Karmi and her family cannot remember the exact dates and time, they only recall the period predating their flight when they are not able to sleep because of heavy shelling: "Sometimes we find it hard to sleep at night for the whistling of bullets and the thunder of shells...to me this was terrifying and bewildering, so far removed from anything I recognised as normality that I think I became a little shell-shocked" (111). Those who left that day thought they would go back home when things better, a matter of few weeks. But the weeks grow into months, the months into years and Palestine becomes, as time passes, a fleeting memory and



a permanent wound for all (210). For Karmi, the painful moments come to her in dreams, nightmares, guilt, and other symptoms of PTSD: the haunting details of her final departure from her home in Jerusalem has an overwhelming impact on her life and the life of her family.

*In Search of Fatima* starts in Jerusalem in April 1948, and ends in Al Aqsa Mosque in August 1991 with the call to prayer. Chapter fourteen chronicles her disheartening visit to Israel and reads like a belated elegy to the country she left fifty years ago. Karmi perceives Israel as a burial site that bears witness to the history of the pre-Nakba Palestine. In *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013), Caruth argues that history is not available for immediate conscious access: “it emerges [...] as the performance of its own erasure” (xi). The chapter is divided into fourteen entries corresponding to her stops in Israel from the airport of Ben Gurion to the Al Aqsa Mosque. The modern state of Israel, only fifty year old at the time of her visit, is depicted as an excavating site where Palestinian ruins lay beneath and testify to the personal and collective loss of the Palestinian people: exile, and Arab Israeli “second class” citizens. Many of them are Israel’s cheap labour force who live in a separate world within the same country: “Jaffa had been Palestine’s foremost city, to which Tel Aviv had been no more than an annex. Now it was depressed, dilapidated slum. Its streets and buildings were in disrepair, its Palestinian inhabitants reduced to poverty. Here and there fine Arab houses were still in evidence” (427). Seen from her perspective, Palestine is indeed buried under the ashes of the modern state of Israel, but to her, Israel is only the surface that covers the essence of the land and its enduring history. Her memory harbours between remembering and erasure, and it becomes clear that the metaphor of the archaeological dig on the vanishing site, as suggested by Caruth, is the narrator’s only means to retrieve her buried childhood memories: “The Hilton Hotel overlooking the sea is built on the site of a huge Muslim cemetery, which was bulldozed flat [...] The centre of Tel Aviv was a slice of Europe” (427).

Karmi goes to Israel on a short visit in 1991 but doesn’t accept it as a reality. She records and effaces Israel by remembering the atrocities that happened to the Palestinian villages, towns, communities that used to live there, and namely the country forced to disappear from the map. It is fascinating to see the metonym of the city of ashes and historical Palestine. In *Literature in the Ashes of History*, Caruth pays special attention to Freud’s analysis of Wilhelm Jensen’s Novella, *Gradiva: A Pompeian*

*Fantasy* (1900)<sup>2</sup> and reads the return of the novella’s protagonist, a young archaeologist, to the burial site of ancient Pompeii looking for Gradiva as a “return to the sight of catastrophe to grasp an origin that marks the beginnings of his urgent desire to remember” (xi). Similarly, Karmi’s account of her trip to Israel reads like a burial commemoration of the dead and usurped land with its haunting ruins and shabby villages: “a ghostly reminder of a presence not quite buried” (436) and realises, nonetheless, and for good, that she does not belong there; something has been lost and can never be retrieved. Her ties were cut ages before when her parents took her to London. Her urge to return is met by her realisation of the impossibility of returning and of the utter reality of departing. It is worth signalling that the repetition of dreams, nightmares, and all symptoms of PTSD are part of Karmi’s artistic representation of herself, both individually and collectively intended. The process of self-introspection as an inherent component of self-reflective writing is key to both trauma and writing as a healing process: Caruth convincingly demonstrates how literature remains the ultimate witness to trauma and its rippling effects.

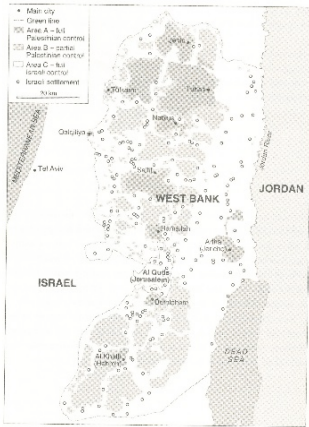
Writing forestalls death; Karmi’s attempts to document past life are sustained by her use of photographs, and the three major maps of Palestine. The different maps of Palestine narrate in their own turn, and in line with the narrative discourse, the shrinking and disappearance of Palestine: they span the fifty-year birthday of Israel and the erasure of Palestine.



*Palestine during the British Mandate, at the time of my birth*



*Palestine in 1948, at the time we left the country*



*The West Bank in the 1990s, at the time of my visit there*

The map of Palestine at her birth in 1939 shows Palestine with its big towns and villages and the tiny colony of Tel Aviv founded by Jewish immigrants (35). Karmi then includes the map of Palestine in 1949 (165) after the partition of the land and the creation of Israel: this already marks the collective exodus of many Palestinians. At the closure of the book, when she decides to visit Israel, a much-denied country despite its visible existence, there is no Palestine on the map she includes. The West Bank is punctured in such a way

that makes the possibility of a two-state solution not only impossible, but a misleading saga. In *The Zionist Bible* (2013), Masalha refers to Palestine as the “sacred landscape” that has sustained so many scars because of its fragmentation due to colonial intervention aiming at legitimising Israel and erasing Palestine hence: “The face of the ‘holy landscape’ is so scarred by modern archaeological excavation, ethnic displacement and wars of conquest” that testify to “European cultural power and legitimation and as a site of visual appropriation and a focus for the formation of Israeli national identity as well as a process of political silencing of the Palestinian” (7).

Writing about the past of one’s life “does not act as a single account” but “belongs to a whole story” that is still taking shape. Joyce Carol Oates sees memoirs as the most seductive and dangerous of literary genres: “The memoir is a repository of truths, as each discrete truth is uttered, but the memoir cannot be the repository of Truth which is the very breadth of the sky, too vast to be perceived in a single gaze” (300). Oates capitalises the Truth to show that it cannot be contained in one memoir and that it is still part of the process of adding accounts to a story in the making. Karmi emphasises her own loss but counts on those living in the land to keep fighting and resisting. The truth about Palestinians and the authority of the authors’ testimony to facts of history binds the personal and the socio-political (Beverly 27). Feminine autobiography “can only be a testimony to survival. And like other testimonies to survival, its struggle

is to testify at once to life and to “the death – the dying – the survival has entailed” (Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?* 16). Writing, as testimony, is a process rather than an evidence of a completed work. It is bound up with survival and bears witness to history as “precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 24). The aftermath impact of losing one’s country and wrestling with language to convey how the event is lived through the eyes of vulnerable children authenticate and sustain Palestinian women’s accounts: the Nakba has an apocalyptic effect on their lives; it has marked the death of their childhood and the shuttering of their world. A “life testimony”, writes Felman “is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can penetrate us like an actual life” (*What Does a Woman Want?* 2). In this sense, reconstructing the past in memoirs is not a straightforward process.

### *Conclusion*

In my reading, Karmi’s memoir challenges the genre of autobiography and its generic boundaries. The marginalised subject sees in this genre a project of resistance and a space for presenting the history of their tragedy of loss: the narrative oscillates between the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ as representations of Palestinians. Because of experiences of war, exile, and displacement, her claims to the land and the suffering of its people is as strong as those uttered inside Palestine. Despite the illusiveness of language and its inadequacy to convey trauma, Caruth foregrounds that it is a “very daunting task to find a language that conveys fully and persuasively what one has seen” (2). Both literature and trauma elude conventional representations because of their uniqueness and belatedness, but unlike other forms of injuries, trauma is characterised by its profound and inarticulate pain. The deeper the wound, the more challenging its representability and by implication its cure becomes. Paradoxically, “the more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail” (Herman 8). Trauma’s victims are prone to different kinds of emotions, memory failure, and lack of words to narrate their stories. More than all that, “The study of psychological trauma must constantly contend with this tendency to discredit the victim or to render her invisible” (Herman 8). Yet Caruth’s understanding of

the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim of trauma blurs boundaries between the victim and perpetrator. Her reading of Tancred and Clorinda in *Gerusalemme Liberata* is quite disturbing in the way she identifies trauma with the perpetrator, Tancred, who unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda twice, first in the duel and second in his slashing of the big tree in the crusaders' forest. However, her contribution in challenging the binary between the victim and perpetrator and the "unwitting re-enactment of the event as an inadvertent and unwished for the repetition of the traumatic experience" (*Unclaimed 2*) are undeniably incisive interventions in trauma theories.

Eliding the victim and the perpetrator in Caruth's reading of the parable is convincingly, if not harshly, critiqued by Ruth Leys in *Trauma: A Genealogy*: "it is not Tancred but Clorinda who is the undisputable victim of a wounding" (297). Amy Novak adds the gender and racial layers that Caruth obscures in her reading and contends that "the voice that cries out is not a universal nor is it a generic female voice: it is the female voice of black Africa" ("Who Speaks? Who Listens?" 32). Michael Rothberg takes all three critics to task when he demonstrates that trauma is not only the prerogative of the victims:

the categories of victim and perpetrator derive from either a legal or a moral discourse, but the concept of trauma emerges from a diagnostic realm that lies beyond guilt and innocence or good and evil [...] Precisely because it has the potential to cloud ethical and political judgements, trauma should not be a category that confirms moral values – as Leys and Norvak, but not Caruth, seem to imply (90).

In my understanding of the victim/perpetrator paradigm within the colonial context, I find Fanon's chapter "Colonial War and Mental Disorder" in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) of significance. Fanon, a psychiatrist by profession, saw through his enduring psychiatric sessions at Blida Hospital, in Algeria, how Colonialism induces both victim and perpetrator to violence and so suffering. Cases number four and five in *The Wretched* dramatise the suffering of a French inspector and a police officer from mental disorder in colonised Algeria because of torturing and killing Algerian freedom fighters and innocent civilians suspected of helping the FNA (Algerian National Front). The inspector's case is very serious and his torturing expands to his own children and wife (194-99) and shows how trauma can severely harm the perpetrator as it harms the

victims of trauma. This does in no way undermine or mitigate colonial violence, but indicates how violence in all its aspects has a whirlpool effect that eventually consumes both the victim and the perpetrator. Perceiving perpetrators as victims does not make them less guilty, as Lacapra states in *Writing History* (7), but expands the field of trauma studies and in so doing contextualises and historicises trauma as it effects people under colonialism, in refugee camps, or war zones outside Western Europe. To go back to my text, the woman narrator, in the memoir, is a victim of Israeli colonial presence who were themselves the victims of the Holocaust. In describing in detail her status in England as a Palestinian refugee, her struggle to learn the language, to preserve her religion as a Muslim, and to connect to her country of origin can be seen as different from and similar to many persecuted Jews in Europe in the past.

Dwelling at a crossroads between a multiplicity of disciplines, Felman and Laub incorporate the literary and psychiatric and thus demonstrate literature's centrality to trauma theories. Felman states that "testimony is the literary – or discursive – mode par excellence of our times, and our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony" (*Testimony* 5). This literary mode is potentially an unending attempt at exploring trauma and its impact on the human mind. The interplay of language and memory in the process of writing remains unexplored. Yet "Literature and art as a precocious mode of witnessing – of accessing reality – when all other modes of knowledge are precluded" (xx). In this respect, *In Search of Fatima* was written at the conjunction with history, memory, and dislocation. The personal and political are interconnected and resonated in the narrative; they pressure the narrator/protagonist to tell and struggle to remember. In my view, the entire contemporary Palestinian artistic production is shrouded by the trauma of exile, of the loss of Palestine; and the unfolding tragedy of the Palestinian people in and outside the occupied land. In this sense, Palestinian art can be compared to a funeral procession that veers towards resurrection at the very gates of death. To take one example, the autobiographical act has served as an emotive platform for Karmi to tell her "Palestinian Story" as both a collective plight and a personal loss. This article has tried to argue the significance of literature in bearing witness to trauma and engaged the theories of trauma and autobiographies to read Palestinian women's autobiographies. In a comparative vein, this work has tried to demonstrate the relevance of contemporary literature in attesting to human suffering and alleviating pain by listening/reading/witnessing and so

healing. Edward Said's writings on orientalism and Palestine have served to frame the overall discussion of the article. The trauma of exile, dispersion, and "national disintegration" are narrated by many Palestinian writers and poets from inside of outside Palestine, namely Mahmoud Darwish, Ghada Karmi, Ghassan Kanafani, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Sahar Khalifeh, and Fadwa Tuqan as a shared experience by many Palestinian artists both in Palestine and in exile. Palestinian identities are defined as in a permanent state of suffering, guilt and pain. Karmi's narrative conflates muteness and invisibility with death and trauma, and writing and healing with resistance and survival. *In Search of Fatma* reveals, in part, Palestinians' complicity, and political and social fraction in Palestine during 1948. Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod correctly argue for the urgency of re-examining some disturbingly dark spots and blotted corners in the process of remembering and writing the Nakba:

If we acknowledge the ways memory is shaped by present politics, the nationalist narrative that make the past seem more whole and identities more fixed and comfortable that they were, by nostalgia for an idealized and pastoral past, by deliberate silencing of uncomfortable events (like rapes) that did happen, or by reluctance to bring forth Palestinian complicity, culpability, and collaboration, do we thereby undermine the force of memory as a political tool? If we acknowledge that individual memory is just as partial, inconsistent, and subject to the ravages of time and age, do we undermine the capacity to speak truth to power? Or to become the basis for claims to justice? We do not think so (22-23).



- 1 For further discussion on the vicious attacks on Said, and by implication Palestine and Palestinians in mainstream media in the USA see, for example, Barat More-Gilbert's *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture Politics and Self-Representation* (2009) and Cynthia Franklin's *Academic Lives: Memoir, Cultural Theory, and the Universities Today* (2009), see Edward Said's rebuttal in "Defamation, Zionist Style" (1999).
- 2 The novella is about Norbert Hanold's fascination with the figure of a woman he has seen for the first time in a bas-relief in a museum in Rome. He has named her Gradiva and has become convinced that it must be found in Pompeii, the city he studied as an archeologist. In his dream he is transported to Pompeii during the eruption of Vesuvius in 97 BC where he sees Gradiva walking towards the temple of Apollo. Convinced with her real existence, he leaves Germany to Pompeii and starts looking for her in the ruins. One day he sees Gradiva and when following her, he discovers that she is Zoe Bertgang, his childhood friend.





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# Hyper-Despotism of the Bullet: Post-Bardo Tunisia and its (Unforgiving) Memorial Communiqué

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“Je n’attends pas la mort  
La mort l’imaginaire  
J’attends le cri et la colère  
De cent mille oiseaux de mon peuple traqué  
De cent mille oiseaux  
De cent mille frères d’amour garottés”  
(Ghachem, *Cent Mille Oiseaux*)<sup>1</sup>

“Muse, let the memories spill through me.”  
(Virgil, *Aeneid*)<sup>2</sup>

*L’Avenue Bourguiba*, Tunis, the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 2015: I find myself strolling down the tree-lined parade, deep in conversation with my friend Mœz Majed, one of the country’s finest writers and editor of the bestselling *Opinions* magazine.<sup>3</sup> It has been a long and troubled exchange, so much so we barely realise we are now walking past the building that houses Tunisia’s Ministry of the Interior, its *Dakhleyya*, which also served as a torture outfit meant to silence political dissidents during the ben Ali years, prior to 2011. This very spot, Mœz points out, is where he stood three years ago, as tens of thousands of Tunisians from all walks of life gathered in front of the dreaded building with a single message for the incumbent President: *Dégagée! Irhal! Leave!*<sup>4</sup> This afternoon, the *Dakhleyya* is festooned with hundreds of Tunisian flags, in celebration of the country’s national day (the 20<sup>th</sup> of March), which also commemorates the anniversary of Tunisia’s independence from France. Fluttering in an unruffled bliss, the tiny flags make for a bizarre contrast with the

heavy security outfit that, as we draw closer, we realise encircles the building. It becomes almost impossible to sit down for a *kahoua* anywhere around without endless coils of barbed wire hampering one's line of sight. I try to snap a picture of the festooned building, but an armed officer rushes over and stops me: *il est interdit, monsieur*.

I am here as a guest of *Tounes wal Kitab* (Tunisia and the Book), an association established in 2012, a year after the Jasmine uprisings, to promote writing and reading culture in Tunisia, across all genres.<sup>5</sup> Together with poets from Belgium, Morocco, Tunisia and France, I have been invited to read my poetry at the third edition of *Poètes en Fête*, an annual soirée of poetry recitals held at the Ennejma Ezzahra, Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger's stunning neo-Andalusi palace at Sidi Bou Saïd. This is a busy week for Tunisia. Besides *Poètes en Fête*, the country is also hosting, amongst other events, the World Social Forum, the *Foire Internationale du Livre de Tunis* (the Tunis International Book Fair), the Artists for Palestine initiative, and a massive anti-terrorism march which French President François Hollande is also attending. Barely a week has passed since the carnage at Tunis' Bardo National Museum, one of the deadliest jihadist attacks in the country's independent history, which claimed the lives of twenty-two people and dealt a significant blow to the country's fledgling political and economic morale.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the widespread fears triggered by the attacks, artists, writers, intellectuals and non-governmental organisations from across the world have flocked to the Tunisian capital, in evident defiance of the jihadist threat. At the *Café l'Univers*, something of a communist, intellectual and artiste hangout right on the Avenue, patrons are discussing the Bardo events over a late afternoon aperitif. In the distance, closer to the kasbah, urban hip-hop artist Zied Nigro can be heard singing his popular *Douza Douza* as locals and tourists alike mill around the market stalls. Even as people here try to get on with their lives, the atmosphere behind the national show of unity remains tense – a stifled inkling that seems to hold this fledgling, post-dictatorial polity in its nervous thrall. But unlike the 2011 euphoria, the epicentre of this strange historical intimation, this as yet unrecognisable *angst* that is slowly but surely convening, does not stem from the historic Avenue, nor from its adjacent streets of national consensus – their bookshelves rife, of late, with tales of *la révolution confisquée* and *la révolution kidnappée*.<sup>7</sup> This new beast has slouched instead towards

a historic Husseinid-era building a few kilometres outside the centre of Tunis, on the outskirts of the city, in the suburbs of a national imaginary that Tunis was beginning to don with a certain pride. And its hoof-prints are unforgiving.

### *An Exhibit, A Souvenir*<sup>8</sup>

Tunisia boasts one of the most distinct political formations along the south-eastern Mediterranean littoral. Mass communication media outlets across Europe and the United States keep doling out sound-bites and write-ups updating their audiences and viewerships on the state of play of secularism and secularist politics in Tunisia, especially in the wake of the country's recent parliamentary elections.<sup>9</sup> As Mœz points out to me, however, such terminology does not carry much clout over here – or, indeed, much direct pertinence at all to the country's far more complex political configuration. In reality, numerous liberal, social-democrat and reform-minded groups in the city and further afield are feeling the need to speak again today, with renewed vigour and enthusiasm, of what is referred to in Tunis as *pensée destourienne*, or constitutional thought. Particularly in the wake of the parliamentary plurality of the *Nidaa Tounes* party in October of 2014, this mode of political thought, urged on by its ethos of social reform and reform of the body-politic, has been increasingly touted as the country's most feasible way forward. In President Béji Caïd Essebsi's elderly but able hands, and after the flagrant social injustices, disparities, institutional turbulence and a flattened educational system left behind by ben Ali, Tunisia is trying to strengthen, once more, the destourian path espoused during the Cold War years by the country's first president, Habib Bourguiba. Despite the despotism his rule has been harshly criticised for, Bourguiba's presidency had strived to bring about – and especially so through a significant programme of social reform – a national and economic modernity adequate to Tunisia's post-independence needs.

Not least because of Essebsi's inspiration from *bourguibisme* as a political heritage, this broad alliance of liberal, reformist, left-wing, Islamic-reformist, centrist and other positions was able to gradually regain popular support over the past two years.<sup>10</sup> This “unprecedented” coming-together, to use Nicolas Beau's and Dominique Lagarde's adjective was due, in part, also to the country's long political memory: one that predates

its independence to trace auspicious scholarly and activist origins in Tunisia's reformist movement of the second part of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The succession of luminaries that shaped the movement included reformers and intellectuals such as Abdelaziz Thâalbi, Tahar Ben Achour, who worked to reform religious thought by proposing, as Majed has argued, "intentionalist" as opposed to literalist (or "rigoriste") approaches to the sacred texts, Tahar Haddad, who initiated the discourse of Muslim women's emancipation in Tunisia, and numerous others.<sup>11</sup> As this emancipatory reformism gradually came to be absorbed within the country's structures of political engagement, including numerous political parties, the outcome was an inclusive coming together of a more liberal Islamic thought with European Enlightenment values – a composite identification that, as Tunisia's recent political history has shown, has also operated in tandem with left-wing and social-democrat beliefs. This was, in other words, a fluid politics that understands Islamic identity as *in itself* a means of attaining political modernity, economic and social reform and emancipation, without, however, acceding to the restrictive demands of an entrenched Islamist politics.

*Pensée destourienne* has therefore opened up a political context wherein the reform of Islamic thought would, in Majed's words at his recent seminar in Malta, "constitute the key to a debate about Tunisia's national modernity that does not, however, reject the country's Arabo-Muslim sphere of identification. On the contrary: it takes place right *within it*, rather than in spite of it." (Majed 2015, my translation) This, in itself, is seen by many as the salient intellectual and social-political achievement of an otherwise broad-ranging destourian reformism. But such political headway in the Arab world, Mœz warns me as we walk down the *Avenue*, does not come without its own obscure disclaimers: Tunisia's recent revival of its destourian trajectory has raised the ire of several Arab regimes, but especially those who have accommodated Salafist and Wahhabist elements within their states in tandem with an unbridled hyper-capitalist outlook (Ibid.). The message to their own people of these dictatorial formations, who continue to profit today from political division, localised oppression and subservience to neo-liberalist agendas, Moëz insists, is loud, clear, and simple. It is a message of fear, a message for those who dare dream of ridding themselves of their historic masters, rulers, kings and pharaohs, and to demand a political freedom without pre-conditions: such an extent of popular ambition is morally condemnable, and by this same virtue,



punishable. Mohamed Kasmi reaffirms, in fact, Guido Steinberg's early assessment of the uprisings, namely, that for the Gulf States these popular ambitions "constitute a menace. They are afraid the same condition could be forged in their own houses" (Kasmi 126). Their implicit message to the world's other economic powers is that in the Arab context, only a dictatorial set-up can offer the right transnational and cross-border business arrangements and conditions. Within this macro-regional *status quo*, post-*Nahda* Tunisia had become the misfit – the "Tunisian exception", as Beau, Lagarde and Majed have termed it (2014). The exception will therefore need to be brought to its knees.<sup>12</sup> The ensuing terror had to be such that it etched the perils of "being different" in the minds of Tunisians in an irrevocable manner, regardless of their nuanced persuasions – its reach had to correspond, that is, to the diversified and popular influence of the destourian revival itself. *Ergo*, the Bardo.

This political trajectory specific to Tunisia, one that, historically, has cut transversally across both popular consciousness and intellectual debate, is key to an understanding of why the site targeted for the inscription of national trauma had to be, precisely, the Bardo National Museum.<sup>13</sup> Converted into the Museum of National Antiquities in 1885, the history of this nineteenth-century Husseinid architectural masterpiece coincides in many ways with the rise and flourishing of Tunisian social-political reformism. Its staggeringly diverse collection, as well as the humanist lineage of its sourcing and acquisition, offers a parallel cultural plane to the multi-positional history and present configuration of *pensée destourienne* itself: from Phoenician and Roman mosaics to Moorish architecture and stucco decors, from sculptures salvaged from Hippopolis and Carthage to the glazed ceramic tiles of Qallaline, from departments focused on prehistory, the Punic era, Numidian civilisation, the underwater treasures of Mahdia, late antiquity and the Islamic Golden Age, to the iconic (and unique) mosaic that portrays Virgil composing the *Aeneid*, flanked by the muses of poetry and drama.<sup>14</sup> In terms of both its historic collection and the recently-renovated space that houses it, therefore, the Bardo functions as a pulse to the country's own aspiring historical consciousness: the museum is a protean *limen*, a contingent space wherein the remains of Tunisia's intriguing antiquity, its imprints and legacies of successive historical subjection under both Muslim, European and other colonial forces, encounter and motivate the country's fledgling but determined effort to attain its discursive, political and social self-affirmation.

The March 18<sup>th</sup> shootings affected this poise in a profound way. As one walks into a now-sombre *Salle de Carthage* and its adjacent rooms, having first admired the mosaics on the lower floors, the pock-marks and bullet holes begin to appear (see Figures 1 and 2). They are everywhere visible, in walls, shattered vitrines and even inside a wooden *ginnarija* (balcony). They do not approach softly – unsummoned and unexpected, they come at the visitor with the unsparing force of an epistemic violence, going straight for the country’s jugular: upon encountering them one immediately senses they have succeeded in reaching through to what Eva Hoffman would term the community’s post-despotic “deep material of the self”, or, to use Jean Laplanche’s phrase, the polity’s “*intimior intimo meo*” (Hoffman 40; Laplanche 67). In other words, they threaten to touch that which is somewhat more inward to the national imaginary than its own self-negotiated inwardness – a dark night of the socius that, judging simply by the eerie silence that gripped the national museum upon its re-opening to the public, had ramified intself into the capillary psychic structures of the Tunisian population (*Ibid.*). In murdering the museum visitors, the country’s guests, the jihadist bullets dealt the first significant blow to the its burgeoning narrative of economic hope after 2011. But the museum’s new exhibits themselves – the bullet-holes – have also inscribed what is perhaps an even more insidious and unforgiving semantic shift. The Bardo could no longer simply register itself as the animate nexus of transition from the delusions of dictatorial rule and Islamist government into a more expansive and politically diversified socio-cultural arrangement. It now had to metaphorise, to adopt within its noumenal matter, a rather unexpected volta: from the quasi-uncathed promise of a neo-destourian modernity that was almost within reach, into the post-traumatic labour of having to preserve, against the worst possible odds, the country’s struggling continuum of political and social-cultural self-worth.<sup>15</sup>

By virtue of this agitatory gesture, the bullet-mark and the fractured vitrine not only seek to generate an altered state (*double entendre* intended) from “hope” to “fear”, but they themselves undergo a reverse semantic transition: they now acquire a certain status as novel national, perhaps even national-cultural, exhibits: unasked for, these obscure monads have now come to nestle in the recesses of a national imaginary in its critical age, its democratic infancy. In such a context, their presence cannot but demand a certain hermeneutics of the recent past, one that Paul Ricoeur had identified as that of the *souvenir*, or “the memory [of crisis] one has before



Figure 1



Figure 2

the mind [...]” (Ricoeur 391). The new object of national meditation, its *souvenir*, is a critical one in this context, in the sense that Tunisia’s singular constitutional accomplishments after the 2011 uprisings are patently unlike that of any other post-revolutionary Arab state. As such, the wound ensuing from Bardo, its *souvenir*, can only be recognised, in Heidegger’s phrase, as *je mein eigenes*, as “something given to you uniquely to bear and to suffer” (Jameson 21). Bullet, fracture, *souvenir*: as soon as it lodges itself firmly in the imaginary, the impact of the traumatic object is, almost inevitably, two-pronged: on the one hand, it triggers an ontological schema of memorial crisis. But by this same virtue, of its inducement of an ontological crisis precipitated by recall, the *souvenir* is also rendered incitative, in the sense that it compels its bearer to wean oneself toward an inevitable itinerary of *survivre*: one that may, perhaps, be understood as a crisis-informed attunement to “the problematical nature of the past’s manner of persevering in the present”, as invoked by Ricoeur (391).

In referencing the past’s “manner of persevering” among its community of inheritors, I am not speaking here of any commemorative approach, “lest we forget” discourse, or equivalent stances – ones that have been eminently disputed in the field of memory studies in general.<sup>16</sup> Neither do I intend, by emphasizing this discursive trajectory, to under-reference the economic nightmare that has been visited upon Tunisia in the wake of the Bardo and even worse, the June 26<sup>th</sup> massacre at Sousse. Crippling the country in this manner was, most evidently, the intention of the real aggressors, those maneuvering behind the scenes. But this terrifying fallout impels the perseverance of the past as a much more strenuous labour than the 2011 Jasmine uprisings themselves required, as they removed ben Ali to unearth the politics of social progress he had buried alive. Unlike the despotic regime itself, the *souvenir*, the terror-object, *cannot* itself be ousted, or even exorcised. It may, as such, be approached as what one may call a “hyper-despotic” corpus, a new and terrifying inscription that returns to re-occupy the delicate physiological spaces between the advent of terror and its widespread socio-psychic *longue durée*. In this rarefied capacity, the *souvenir* acts as an indispensable causal nexus: it forges the urgency of *survivre* as the salient prerogative, the contingent *imperative*, of a post-despotic politics. This, in itself, highlights the latter’s onus – its need to deliver on its ethical mandate – an inestimable one.

## *Facing the Infant Deity*

In its hyper-despotic presencing, as a remnant-object of terror that is impossible to exorcise, the *souvenir* acts, first and foremost, to perpetuate the eidetic faculty: to actualise, that is, those heightened moments of visual recall of an event that trigger what Ricoeur has invoked as *mnēmē*, or “the popping into mind of a [specific] memory” (Ricoeur 4). In this capacity, the *souvenir* can also forge a palpable nexus between the event’s singular semantic – its strategic violence – and the pragmatic path of anamnestic labour (*anamnēsis*), the painstaking work of “memory as an object of a search” – the quest towards the recovery of an imperiled political future (4). After Bardo, this anamnestic labour has now been largely foisted upon those forces working towards a destourian renewal in Tunisia: in this sense, the carnage at the national museum has plunged the country’s progressive imaginary willy-nilly into a politics of the “after the blow”, or the temporality of the *après-coup*, as Jean Laplanche would call it (Laplanche 260-65).

**Figure 3**



One could, literally, almost *touch* this nervous liminal condition, the traumatised body-politic, after the Bardo re-opened for visitors. But the tension inside one of the rooms that were strewn with the dead and the dying after the attack was almost unbearable: the so-called *Salle de la Cuirasse Campanienne* (The Campanian Breastplate Room), a small chamber right behind the museum’s famed *Salle de Carthage*. Now full of cracked and fractured vitrines, the chamber houses, amongst other exhibits, an important bronze statuette of the infant Bacchus wielding the thyrsus and the rhyton, a second-century AD sculpture recovered from Béja (Figure 3).

The entire Bardo collection could not, perhaps, have afforded us a more apt metaphor for the country's buoyant political mood subsequent to the 2014 parliamentary elections than its very own locally-retrieved Bacchus. The statuette portrays an infant deity pregnant with revelatory desires, its facial expression – a somewhat cautious one – summoning its interlocutor to come forward and help oneself from the rhyton of a fledgling, but promising, joy. The Bacchus vitrine provided a poignant semantic node: here is where a post-Jasmine politics of destourian promise – of an invitation of the diverse and the different to inter-participate outside the circuit of *rigorisme* – was replenished by what one could term, following Graham Harman, an “object-oriented” metaphysics (Harman 96). Harman's speculative thought is important because through its discursive lens, the infant Bacchus will not be easily relegated to a purely symbolic or analogic status. On the contrary, the object of history, its surviving *thing*, comes to be understood as embodying an intrinsic or noumenal *communiqué*, “something deeper than its transient, shifting façade” (148). Alphonse Lingis, a powerful influence on Harman, had spoken of the thing's ‘interior motor schema’, one that motivates the “face” that a thing projects unto the empirical world (15). “To recognize the other as other”, Lingis writes in his contemplation of the labour inherent to the thing, “is to sense the imperative weighing on his or her thought. It is to sense its imperative force [...]” (15).<sup>17</sup> And, building on Lingis' thought, Harman reaffirms that “To see the other as other [...] is to stand before an actual imperative, a sincere finality in the world that cannot be identical with the history that gave birth to it” (15). The other, Harman observes, is “an autonomous commander, by virtue of the task he confronts us with” (18). Such a task can be perceived as indispensable, insofar as it partakes of the historical object's “notional determination” itself, as Slavoj Žižek would call it, or in Jacques Lacan's terms, its *trait unaire* (Žižek viii-xi).

How can one, however, propose to locate the intrinsic and, often enough, elusive make-up of the task, or of the memory-object's “unary” determination (Žižek x)? I circled around the infant Bacchus for a very long time. The young museum guide, himself a survivor of the attack, ushered me around the adjacent spaces, pointing out to me the exact locations of the victims' last moments: “here is where the Belgian woman fell [...] another man died right here [...]”. When I finally faced the deity, I could not help thinking that, underneath the “enigmatic” *communiqué* of that face turned toward me, the intrinsic task, the noumenal “imperative weighing on its

thought”, could not but be overcast by its recent, melancholy bequeathal (Laplanche 258-260). Upon looking closely at my photograph of the Bacchus, one will notice that two impacts, and not one, have in fact been sustained. The fracture caused by the bullet on the glass pane is the most visible one. But right behind it, if one looks just above the bullet’s spherical burst, one will also observe another, smaller trauma, a white-coloured abrasion or “superficial wound” to the Bacchus’ right thigh, caused by the same bullet. If one follows on from Harman’s and Lingis’ purview, that liminal nano-second, that time differential in between the penetration of the vitrine and the impact to the thigh, becomes a productive one in the pursuit of the imperative or task intrinsic to the (historical) object. For *time* itself, Harman argues in a central essay of his, emanates from the intentional object, and as such can be understood as arising from the inherent tension perceptible in-between “an intentional object and its accidents [...]” Harman 165). The “emanation of accidents from an intentional object”, “the difference between objects and accidents”, Harman points out, “gives us time” (161-163).

To choose to follow the signs that have appeared at the Bardo is to recognise this new-found tension they invoke in relation to the historical objects that have sustained their impact: one that will need to be apprehended both as a memorial cicatrice *and* as an anxiety of post-traumatic progress. In this embattled climate, the ensuing tension between the historical object and its received accidents comes to be read as a dialectical one, one whose enigmatic message unfolds, in our case, in-between the bursting of the vitrine and the bruising of the infant Bacchus. The first impact, in this sense, invokes the psychic condition outlined by Giorgio Agamben in an excursus on Hegel and the subjectivity of crisis, wherein he emphasises Hegel’s own conception of “pure culture” as a “consciousness of laceration” (“la coscienza della lacerazione”) (Agamben 40, my translation). Following Agamben’s thought, and in the wake of the terror, “The only way [the subject] has to possess itself is in fact that of taking upon itself, integrally, the state of contradiction and, negating itself, [finding] itself again in the lap of extreme laceration” (42, my translation). Agamben’s insight here is crucial. The state of contradiction facing this fledgling democracy, jeopardised by both internal religious rigorism and external despotic constituencies, will need to be embraced as a “consciousness of laceration” (40): one that, exactly like the initial burst in the Bacchus vitrine, does not expire right there, but becomes conducive to – indeed, spurs ahead, a deeper horizon of aspiration.



Herein lies the dialectical character of the Bardo injury: the initial laceration necessarily leads on to its ancillary, but nevertheless crucial, impact. Just as the Bacchus' thigh feels the heat of the bruise, so does the national imaginary come to be compelled into a new political vigilance, into the urgency of effecting the transition from Agamben's consciousness of laceration into what Benita Parry has termed "the consciousness of historical continuity", or "the continuity of historical consciousness" (Parry 184, 185). The object-accident tensions of the Bardo, their *time*, calls for a rapid taking-into-account of this urgent traversation. The initial bullet-mark, the *souvenir*, becomes, henceforth, the matrix of a pressing contingency, the approaching task of a national imaginary now operating in-between the fate of laceration and the imperative of continuity. The jihadist bullet at the Bardo is not relatable, for instance, to Julien Sorel's first bullet fired at Madame de Rênal inside the church of Verrières, in Stendhal's novel *Le Rouge et le Noir*. Stendhal's first bullet was destined to oblivion or immateriality, as Umberto Eco has shown, or perhaps towards piquing his readers' avid curiosity (Eco, 83-85). But the Bardo bullet wanted its journey to be shadowed by all: in its double-step trajectory from vitrine to object, it has lumped the infant deity with an unprecedented task. One can, perhaps, begin to outline the contours of this task, one can begin to gauge its delicate *raison d'être*, in the question chillingly posited by Laplanche in this manner: "What does the dead person want? What does he want of me? What did he want to say to me?" (Laplanche 254-255, my italics).

To take the dead person's injunction seriously implies, therefore, a certain being-receptive to the hyper-despotism of the bullet: not only, this time round, as an agent of laceration, but *also* as an invitation to service the task's relentless deciphering. As Laplanche has shown in his thought on the *après-coup*, this question resists a pure hermeneutics of the past, precisely because it is its enigmatic claim that will continue to propel the agency of the unjustly deceased to the forefront of historical awareness. The task that predicates the question itself thus beckons to us from the future, since it also "contains rather in an immanent fashion something that comes before [...] the past already has something deposited in it that demands to be deciphered, which is the message of the other person" (Laplanche 254-255).<sup>18</sup> In the wake of the Bardo, that past and that *communiqué* have now become immanent to the wounded Bacchus, to its unfathomably future-oriented gaze. The bullet-mark has replenished the *latency* of that gaze; it has complicated the manner in which, to quote Žižek again, the statue now



“contracts actuality to possibility, in the precise Platonic sense in which the notion (idea) of a thing always has a deontological dimension to it, designating what the thing should become in order to be fully what it is” (Žižek xi). In all hope, this deontological gaze will strengthen Essebsi’s and his colleagues’ resolve to combat fear through, rather than in spite of, the resources and good will of their *assemblée pluraliste* itself (See Beau and Lagarde 41).

*Who, therefore, Will Dare Forgetfulness?*

The dialectic of this political desire, of the being-caught in between the irrevocability of a memorial cicatrice and the impatience of an expectant body-politic, is captured in subtle terms in Majed’s own creative output, particularly his long meditation titled *Chants de l’autre rive*, a *poème* that has established itself as a major literary *oeuvre* of post-ben-Ali Tunisia (2013). In turns proleptic and anxious, audacious and guarded, Majed’s poetic homage to a Tunisia in the whirlwind of political change allegorises the newly-emergent polity as “a dream of sailors embattled by fear” (Majed 4: 7). The poem weaves a metaphoric schema that can be read alongside the political choices faced by post-2011 Tunisia. It suggests an ambivalent and enigmatic scenario, wherein the *hiatus* that opened up after ben Ali’s demise may be perceived as both an enabling moment, a steep learning curve, and a veritable trans-Mediterranean *periplous*. These new possibilities will, however, be relentlessly threatened by reactionary forces and paralytic political developments. Majed writes:

“Ah ! What pain, beyond imagining!  
What impenetrable silences!  
What great expectations, impervious to oblivion!

Ah ! What have you seized from the splendid waves of your time? [...]

O first rains after summer!  
Was it nothing, therefore, but clay,  
This skin I’d thought mine?

O pepper and oracles, raining on a people in labour!  
All-out wrath,

And the frightening panic.  
In the old days, the fear ... tomorrow, childhood. [...]

Was it a failure  
To hasten the fall of a lifeless tree trunk?

Today, many others  
Again will agree to stupor and death.  
They will march, indifferent to the rough tyranny,  
And at nightfall  
They'll go back to their homes, duty complete.

Pride ...  
Flame of pure Barus camphor.  
Flavour of empires consumed by great release.

O Dido ! My mother, my sister, my child!  
I'd imagine you cried, seeing us dying. [...]

Who, therefore, will dare forgetfulness?

Who, therefore, could give me the grace  
To drink the silence of an eternity in alabaster?"

(Majed 1-4, my translation)

Majed's poem here alternates between hope and doubt: the hopes, perhaps, of post-regime euphoria and the burgeoning doubts in the country's prospective cultivation of an adequate *politique destourienne*, which it believes in, to its desired fruition. This is a tension that the poem takes to the verge of an aporetic delimitation: Majed's work is haunted – and haunts – the discursive pathways of national memory as these began to morph in the wake of Tunisia's new political circumstances, ones that kept evolving at breathtaking speed after 2011: from the election of the Islamist *Nahda* party in October of that year, to the country's constitutional debacle, to the promising parliamentary plurality of Essebsi's *Nidaa Tounes* in December 2014, to the Bardo and Sousse. This train of events did not only herald a new order of parliamentary representation within Tunisia. It also wound its way outside of its borders, to the power-wielding corridors of the watching Arab regimes, to find its terrifying *denouement* in the chambers

of the Bardo. Hence the anxiously prophetic tenor in Majed's writing. On the one hand, this poem is profoundly aware of its allegiance to a certain "order of imitation" of history, an order that is inexorably haunted, as Ricoeur indicates, by the "object-side" of memory itself: "what is there to say", Ricoeur demands, "of the enigma of an image, of an *eikōn* [...] that offers itself as the present of an absent thing stamped with the seal of the anterior?" (Ricoeur xvi).

Ricoeur's enigma of the *eikōn*, of the object of one's interrogation that is retained before the mind, places Majed's text within the dialectic of memory and history as an irreducible quandary: one wherein "the representation of the past is found to be exposed to the dangers of forgetting, but is also entrusted to its protection" (Ricoeur xvii). "Was it a failure | To hasten the fall of a lifeless tree trunk?", the poem ruminates, in a possible veiled reference to the unforeseen speed with which the Tunisian dictator was ousted (Majed 3: 3-4, my translation). But the poem provokes further questions in this respect. "Ah! What have you seized from the splendid waves of your time?" (1: 13, my translation), "Who, therefore, will dare forgetfulness? | Who, therefore, could give me the grace | To drink the silence of an eternity in alabaster?" (4: 8-10, my translation). These questions invoke a crucial vector of the Ricoeurian economy of recall, namely what he refers to, following Plato's *Sophist*, as *phantasma* or "fantastic art", a mode of eidetic access based on an imagined and projected "simulacrum or appearance [...]" (Ricoeur 11). In this sense, Majed's questions steer the post-uprising poem towards the realm of the speculative, the confrontation of an unmapped political trajectory and its uncharted waters that opened up after a quarter of a century during which the praxis of cultural amnesia had gradually consolidated itself. In relation to this amnesic time, Majed's interrogatory schema places its mechanisms at the service of the *revenant*, of the *phantasma*. The poem is, in its own being as object and as aesthetic, one forceful upshot of a long acultural causality (ben Ali's twenty-four-year-long dictatorship) that has served to foment in its wake a specific phenomenon, of which the poem itself partakes: what Andreas Huyssen would otherwise term the "hypertrophy of memory" in present-day Tunisian writing (Huyssen 3).

On the other hand, the poem is also a cautiously faithful one, a meta-political meditation that readily connects to what Ricoeur would invoke as the tradition of *tekhne eikastike*, or "the art of likeness-making" or of a "faithful and proportionate resemblance" to historical precedent (Ricoeur

11). Hence, for instance, its allusion to Dido, the Phoenician princess and founder of ancient Carthage. The poem's invocation here suggests a strategic sense of allegiance to the country's "fabled" past – an allegiance, however, that seeks to extract its salient historical signifier (Dido) from the latter's mythic invocations and summoning it instead as a cross-temporal witness to the country's current *rite de passage*: "O Dido! My mother, my sister, my child! I'd imagine you cried, seeing us dying" (Majed 3: 13, my translation). There is, in these verses, a proleptic sensitivity to the price in blood that a post-regime Tunisia would also have to pay and which, besides the revolution's 357 *shuhada*, included the deaths not only of Mohammad Bouazizi, but also of politicians and activists like Mohamed Brahmi, Choukri Belaïd and Lutfi Nagdh, as well as the Bardo and the Sousse victims.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, the poem itself concurs with the stance of the infant Bacchus: the rhyton of the political future, the promise of "an eternity in alabaster", cannot but be wielded with a sullen and cautious gaze, a manner commensurate to the painful bequeathal of a damaged consciousness (Majed 4: 10).

"Ah! What pain, beyond imagining! | What impenetrable silences!" (1: 10-11, my translation). Deep within the poem's veiled historical undertones, one can sense the onus of a certain *verisme*, of the quest for a politics of sincerity in the representation of the post-despotic condition that gave occasion to the *poème* itself. This *verisme* can only be obtained, however, if the hermeneutic of history is carried out in tandem with a "mnemonics of crisis", with those *revenant* schemas of recall that both emanate from and return to haunt the laying out of historical representation.<sup>20</sup> In this rarefied sense, both *tekhne eikastike* and *phantasma* interact on the interior of that historical nexus which, in the last instance, determines the task of the poem itself. "[W]hat history is concerned with", Ricoeur had argued, paraphrasing one of the *Annales* school's central concerns, "is not only the living of the past, behind today's dead, but the actor of history gone by, once one undertakes to 'take the actors themselves seriously'" (384).<sup>21</sup> True to this ethic, the poem's "mnemonics of crisis" is implicitly premising on Walter Benjamin's own insight, namely, that "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin 257).<sup>22</sup> From Benjamin to Ricoeur, from Laplanche to Majed, the tenor discloses the same underlying ethos, and its accompanying *angst*. "What does the dead person want? What does he want of me? What did he want to say to me?" (Laplanche 254-255).

It is with their mantric gestures towards this question that the poem's "impenetrable silences" invite, perhaps even demand, by virtue of their reticence, the forging of a certain bond. Like the tiny *Salle de la Cuirasse Campanienne*, the ethical space opened up by this question *must* be recognised as a mere preamble, as an ante-chamber to that "absent thing stamped with the seal of the anterior" identified by Ricoeur (xvi). The question must, for the sake of its own survival, be received as "the distinctive feature of memory, namely, the anteriority of 'marks', *sēmeía*, in which the affections of the body and the soul to which memory is attached are signified" (Ricoeur 12).<sup>23</sup> In this role, it can then both predate and suffuse the decision on any future political action. Ricoeur's choice of the term "seal" here is by no means haphazard: its unique bond, the endowing of the question with the status of the *sēmēion* constitutes, perhaps, the supreme affirmation that post-Jasmine Tunisia will have received from the Bardo. As the demised actor of the past is allowed into those structures of political memory that remain intimate to the country's present-day socius with its diversified political desires, Tunisia's destourian promise, its "flame of pure Barus camphor" (Majed 1: 1), will own once more what it takes to survive.



- 1 Moncef Ghachem, *Cent Mille Oiseaux (Extrait)* in *Poètes en Fête – 3 ème Edition* (Tunis: Tounes wal Kitab, 2015), 58-67.
- 2 Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by Frederick Ahl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Book 1, verse 9.
- 3 In these three introductory paragraphs I am using parts of my feature article for *The Sunday Times* newspaper (Sunday, April 26 2015), titled ‘Modernity and the Museum: after Bardo’, and following on from my earlier first-person-account features on my literary-performance forays at Leipzig (2009), Ubud (2011) and others. My latest feature article gives an account of my experience in Tunisia in the immediate aftermath of the Bardo attacks. Available Online: <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150426/arts-entertainment/modernity-and-the-museum-after-bardo.565790>> For more information on *Opinions* magazine see the *Opinions* Facebook portal at: <<https://www.facebook.com/Opinions.magazine>> [accessed August 6 2015]
- 4 Timothy Brennan invokes this same, crucial moment of the Tunisian revolt in his excellent essay ‘Letters from Tunisia – Darwish and the Palestinian State of Mind’, in ‘Postcolonial Springs’, *Countertext 1.1* Special Issue April 2015 (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 20-37.
- 5 For more information see the Tounes wal Kitab Facebook portal at: <<https://www.facebook.com/TounesWalKitab>> [accessed July 1 2015]. See also *Poètes en Fête. Troisième Edition* (Tunis: Tounes wal Kitab, 2015).
- 6 The attack on the Bardo National Museum occurred on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2015. The death-toll statistic is based on the *In Memoriam* plaque placed by the Bardo National Museum authorities at the Museum entrance subsequent to the tragic events. The devastating June attack in Sousse was, of course, yet to happen.
- 7 These are the respective titles of two authoritative and insightful analyses of post-2011 Tunisia: Pierre Puchot’s *La Révolution Confisquée* (Actes Sud: Sindbad, 2012) and Mustapha Kraïem’s *La Révolution Kidnappée* (Tunis: Fondation Farhat Hached, 2014).
- 8 I am indebted to Moëz Majed for the factual and historiographic information presented in this section, and based on Majed’s incisive seminar at the

- University of Malta titled “Révolution du Jasmin: Printemps arabe ou juste une exception Tunisienne?” (Msida: University of Malta, August 25 2015).
- 9 For a detailed and informative report on Tunisia’s latest parliamentary elections, held on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2014, see the report of the joint observation mission to the Tunisian parliamentary elections of the Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD) and the International Institute for Peace, Justice and Human Rights (IIPJHR). Online Available: <http://www.gnrđ.net/GNRD%20%26%20IIPJHR%20JOINT%20MISSION%20TO%20TUNISIAN%20PARLIAMENTARY%20ELECTIONS%202014%20REPOR.pdf> [Accessed September 20 2015].
  - 10 See, in particular, Nicolas Beau’s and Dominique Lagarde’s *L’Exception Tunisienne – Chronique d’une transition démocratique mouvementée* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014: 41-56, 41, and Mohamed Salah Kasmi’s *Tunisie. L’Islam Locale face à l’Islam importé* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2014): 27-46, 57-61.
  - 11 Kasmi also singles out, amongst the major exponents of Tunisia’s modernist reformism, Kheireddine Pasha, Ibn Abi Dhiáf, Mohamed Snoussi, and Salem Bouhajib (p. 125). Early twentieth-century Tunisia also saw the rise of syndicalism and the establishment of trade unions, with conspicuous pioneers in the sector being Mohamed Ali El Hammi (founder of CGTT, 1925) and Farhat Hached (founder of UGTT, 1944-46).
  - 12 While my conversations with Moëz Majed, as well as his lecture ‘Révolution du Jasmin: Printemps arabe ou juste une exception Tunisienne?’ have been crucial towards honing various political conclusions, it is indeed impossible to attribute the views presented in this section’s first paragraphs to any single political analyst or scholar. Chapter VII of Mohamed Salah Kasmi’s *Tunisie. L’Islam locale face à l’Islam importé* broaches precisely the subject of an “imported Islam” of Wahhabist inspiration into Tunisia and its financing by privately-owned Saudi funds. Adam Hanieh’s book *Lineages of Revolt* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013) sheds an authoritative light on the Gulf states and neoliberalist dynamics with a concern for the broader Middle East. Samir Amghar has an incredibly detailed and comprehensive study of present-day Salafist politics and its numerous denominations, alliances and associations in his authoritative *Le Salafisme d’Aujourd’hui – Mouvements sectaires en Occident* (Paris: Michalon Éditions, 2011). In its informed analysis, Amghar’s study exposes the severe shortcomings of those who would speak of Islamist politics without alluding to the latter’s multiple and differentiated identifications. The interviews with Abdelmajid Charfi in *Révolution, Modernité, Islam* (Tunis: Sud Éditions 2012) as well as Rejeb Haji’s *De la Révolution* (Chroniques 2011-2014) offer insights onto this scenario that are, in turn, intriguing, disturbing and thought-provoking.

- Likewise Kraïem and Puchot. Vijay Prashad's *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012) discusses the same issues in relation to the post-uprising scenario in Libya. Caroline Rooney's essay 'Sufi Springs. Air on an Oud String' (*Countertext* 1.1 April 2011 "Postcolonial Springs" Special Issue, Edinburgh University Press, pp. 39-58) discusses Salafism and Wahhabism in the context of the Egyptian revolt, criticising "an Islamism that combines puritanical religious piety with capitalism." (53).
- 13 The online portal of the Bardo National Museum can be found at: <http://www.bardomuseum.tn/> [accessed September 22 2015]. Subsequent to the Bardo massacre, President Essebsi pointed to the *Okba ibn Nafaâ* militia, often described as an offshoot of Al-Qaida in the Maghreb, as responsible for the attack. See <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/tunisia-in-bardos-aftermath/389039/> [accessed September 20 2015].
  - 14 Information regarding the Bardo collection and history of the premises is readily available throughout the museum itself, on various indicative leaflets and detailed brochures, as well as at the museum's very helpful front desk.
  - 15 I am of course not directly referring here to Tunisia's specific Neo-Destour Party, but to the re-awakening of a broader social-political philosophy. The June attacks at Sousse of course exacerbated the situation.
  - 16 See, for instance, Pierre Nora's and Jeffrey Olick's vast and noted *oeuvre* on memorial reception.
  - 17 Ibid. In the same essay, Harman begins to elaborate his own argument further by building on Lingis. I have decided to cite them together here because of the inter-related and complementary nature of their thought in this instance.
  - 18 I use Laplanche's founding question on the dead person's exhortation, as well as Laplanche's argument on its resistance of a pure hermeneutics of the past, in other studies of mine that focus on a number of different Mediterranean-literary contexts.
  - 19 Statistic given by Mohamed Kasmi, p. 126.
  - 20 Ricoeur refers to a "mnemonics of dispossession" in relation to crisis. See Ricoeur 391.
  - 21 Ricoeur 384. I use this quote from Ricoeur in other studies of mine that focus on the Mediterranean-literary context.
  - 22 Walter Benjamin, Harry Zohn trans., Hannah Arendt ed., *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007 [1968]), p. 257. I use this quote from Benjamin in other studies of mine focused on the Mediterranean-literary context.
  - 23 Ricoeur, p. 12. I find the potential for critical association between Ricoeur's *semeia*, Quentin Meillassoux's work on human finitude and Fredric Jameson's discussion of what he terms the historical "preterite" in his *The Antinomies of Realism* to be productive of many further associative possibilities.





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## Abstracts

**Elena AGAZZI, *Die Täter-Opfer-Debatte und die Schuldfrage: Eine (nicht nur) literarische Bilanz nach der Wende***

The present contribution is mainly aimed at retracing some pivotal elements of the debate on “German collective guilt” in the last two decades of Germany’s cultural history. The search for truth about the past has complex implications; yet it is thanks to historians and writers, such as Wehler and Frei, on the one hand, and Sebald, Kempowski, Walser and Grass, on the other, that the problem of “collective sufferings” could be brought into sharper focus, including the loss of civilians due to air bombings against German cities. Dagmar Barnouw, an eyewitness to the bombings of Dresden, has therefore called for a “renegotiation” of collective guilt, critically facing what she has defined the supra-historical status of Auschwitz crimes. The semantic field articulated by terms such as “Last”, “Scham”, “Schande” as synonyms for “Schuld” testifies to strong emotional distress on the part of the subject, but also to an ongoing attempt to consciously or unconsciously overcome the obsession with memory, setting the future free from the past. Forms of real guilt removal or guilt usage for propaganda purposes between East and West Germany in the aftermath of WW2 are taken into account in the second part of the essay. And this not only to show the twofold stance of moral issues at stake, but also to identify the milestones of historical reconstructions in cinema, literature and theatre at the time when the trauma of the war was still recent.

**Leila AOUADI, *Trauma in Palestinian Women's Autobiographies: Concrete Histories of Personal Loss and National Disintegration***

This article argues the significance of literature in bearing witness to trauma. It engages the theories of trauma and autobiographies to read Palestinian women's autobiographies. In a comparative vein, this work demonstrates the relevance of contemporary literature in attesting to human suffering and alleviating the pain by listening/reading and so healing. Edward Said's writings on orientalism and Palestine have served to frame the overall discussion of the article. The trauma of exile, dispersion, and "national disintegration" are narrated as a shared experience by many Palestinian diaspora. I shall be considering *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (2002) in conjunction with trauma as it implicates history and memory in the process of writing and representing experiences of war, loss, and exile. I contend that the trauma of not belonging after 1948 is the ultimate articulation of belonging to Palestine in Palestinian women's life narratives.

**Rosario ARIAS, *Telling Otherwise: Collective and Personal Remembering and Forgetting in Kate Atkinson's Life after Life***

This paper aims at exploring collective and personal remembering, as well as the notion of forgetting as a kind of "rebeginning" or finding the future by forgetting the past" (Galloway 3) in Kate Atkinson Costa prize-winning *Life after Life* (2013). In Atkinson's novel Ursula Todd is born on February 11 1910, dies and is born again and again to undo the traumatic events that caused her previous death(s). The narrator's retelling of Ursula's life takes the reader through the two wars, and to different incarnations of Ursula's life, which finally set things right for her and for her beloved ones. Following Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) and Marc Augé's *Oblivion* (2004), where they treat forgetting as being a positive figure, or "the reserve of forgetting" in Ricoeur's terms, I will discuss the interlocked processes of remembering and forgetting, not only applied to individuals (like Ursula in *Life after Life*), but also to the community. Communal memory is particularly mobilised in the act of telling otherwise: "[t]hrough narrating one's identity otherwise, a community can work through its past, have an acceptable understanding of itself, and to justice to others" (Leichter 124). Therefore, this paper will also look into the ways in which Atkinson's novel engages with the concept of collective memory that, operating within an intersubjective model, underlines networks of individual and communal relations.



**Norbert BUGEJA, *Hyper-Despotism of the Bullet: Post-Bardo Tunisia and its (Unforgiving) Memorial Communiqué***

This paper is occasioned by my personal experience of the Bardo National Museum in Tunis immediately after the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015 attacks that claimed twenty-four lives, dealt a blow to the burgeoning political morale of post-revolutionary Tunisia, and etched an unprecedented mark in the memory of Tunisians of all persuasions. The bullet holes and fractured vitrines in and around the famed *Salle de Carthage*, where this country's fabled antiquity meets its effort to bring about a cultural and political modernity, invite reflection on what Fredric Jameson has termed the 'irrevocable' function of historical trauma – and especially its modes of inheritability and transmission in a socius that is itself at a delicate crossroads of political transition. In such a fraught context, Lyotard's 'immemoriality' must be read in light of what Jean Laplanche characterises as the 'enigma' that structures the retrospective quest: the 'enigmatic' retains itself as such since it always already embodies the noumenal essence of historical violence as a ceaseless question: "What does the dead person want? What does he want of me? What did he want to say to me?" (Laplanche). Reflecting on the fractured vitrine (and bullet-dented statue) of the infant Bacchus at the Bardo, and drawing on W. Benjamin's and P. Ricoeur's thought, this paper recalls the notion that time itself, as the fabric of retrospective or memorial passage, necessarily registers as the tension that obtains between an object and its accidents (G. Harman). This tension is what occasions the moment at which the ethical imperative of cultural rhetoricity – including the literary itself – becomes that of returning the representational principle to the materiality of history. Finally, I read Tunisian poet Moncef Ghachem's poem *Cent Mille Oiseaux* ("A Hundred Thousand Birds") in this light – as a poem whose "internal motor schema" (A. Lingis) is intended to subvert the poem's own overt rhetoricity, hence making possible the installation of the communal memorial trauma as its ontological kernel.

**Antonella CATONE, "*Bist du Jugoslawe oder was? Ich bin das Oder Was*": *Topographie der Traumata in Vladimir Vertlibs Zwischenstationen***

War, migration and violence are all traumatic events that can trigger mental or physical trauma, especially in childhood and adolescence. There are many ways to overcome trauma. When writing down personal traumas some German authors have tried to bring their emotional and physical wounds on to paper as a method of coping with them. This way of "healing" was also

chosen by the Austrian writer of Russian Jewish origin, Vladimir Vertlib, who tells of the odyssey of a Soviet-Jewish immigrant family on their way to the West in his book *Zwischenstationen*. This paper discusses concepts of trauma research in literature, then moves to a broad outline of trauma in relation to contemporary German migration literature considered and their portrayal of cities as places of memory. The paper later focuses on the topics and motives readers find in Vertlib's novels in order to demonstrate the relevance of his work for the portrayal of trauma, its relation with the city as a place of traumatic processes, and the healing power of writing for collective memory.

**Giuliana IANACCARO, *Whose Trauma? Discursive Practices in Saartjie Baartman's Literary Afterlives***

After a brief contextualization of the figure of Saartjie Baartman – the Khoisan woman displayed in London and Paris at the beginning of the nineteenth century as the “Hottentot Venus” – this contribution addresses the issue of contemporary discursive practices making use of Baartman's icon. Starting from Thabo Mbeki's speech at the ‘funeral’ of Saartjie Baartman as an introduction, the article focuses on the analysis of two very different novels, Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000) and Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus. A Novel* (2003). Their very dissimilarity can tell us much on the discursive practices concerning Baartman's figure; yet, the two works permit comparison because they share the same wish to shed light on the relationship between past and present by means of an overall structural complexity. Both novels make use of the postmodern features of a multi-voiced and multi-layered narration, and avoid granting authority to a single version of history. Moreover, both *David's Story* and *Hottentot Venus* engage in a narrative relating to individual and collective trauma; that is why the article briefly introduces the ongoing discussion focused on the application of Western trauma theories to the South African historical and political situation. The literary investigation provided here takes into consideration the aesthetic aspect of both books; I contend that Chase-Riboud's narrative is unsatisfactory *as a novel*, and that its literary weakness diminishes the strength of its socio-political stances.

**Federica LA MANNA, *Unverzeihlicher Antikonformismus: Die Schriften Hans Paasches in der Ära des deutschen Kolonialismus***

In an entry of his 1916 journal, Hans Paasche (1881-1920) wrote a long reflection on *metánoia*, a concept indicating a radical shift in thinking. In fact, the whole life of Hans Paasche itself could be read as such a radical conversion. He was all that follows: officer in the repression of the Maji-Maji riots in the German colonies of Ostafrika, skilled hunter, volunteer in the Great War, and then vigorous pacifist, relentless opponent of alcohol abuse and fervent vegetarian, ironic writer and passionate political reformer. In a context in which attempts at change were seen as traitorous, his life shows that self-acknowledgement may lead to marginalisation and to murder. The absence of forgiveness and understanding in his case still continues and his work and thought have been almost totally removed from any public and literary discourse in Germany. This paper intends to analyze his thought through his works, mainly *Die Forschungsreise des Afrikaners Lunkanga Mukara ins innerste Deutschland*, highlighting how, in his later years, Paasche felt the need to communicate his traumatic experiences with the intent of avoiding their repetition.

**Aureliana NATALE, *Lettera al carnefice: trauma e perdono in Incendiary di C. Cleave***

Trauma Studies have been marked by an intensified traffic between disciplinary, artistic and media languages. Cultural theory, sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, psychology, on the one hand, and literature, drama, the visual, land and body arts, as well as cinema, television and even the net, on the other hand, have each contributed to render the concept of post-traumatic experience not only familiar but altogether extremely popular (Buelens, Durrant, Eaglestone 3). Traumatic forms of narrativization can be considered a sort of thematic *topos* central to our cultural and psychological imaginary and its contribution to a new process of identity formation (Luckhurst 209). The aim of my paper is to try to understand how traumatic images and their proliferation through media have haunted, and inspired, the literary production post-9/11 and in particular the novel *Incendiary* (2005) by the British journalist Chris Cleave. *Incendiary* was written just a few months before the terroristic attack in London, on July the 7<sup>th</sup> 2005, and, to some extent, it seemed to foresee it. The incipit of the novel “Dear Osama, they want you dead or alive so the terror will stop”

introduces the reader into a story of loss, terror, trauma and addiction in which one of the most significant absence the protagonist has to face is the impossible chance of mourning her loss through forgiving.

**Eva PICH-PONCE, *Rhétoriques du trauma: le souvenir et l'oubli dans Le ciel de Bay City de Catherine Mavrikaki***

Contemporary subjects must construct their own identities while inheriting and assimilating their ancestors' past. The tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have shown humanity what the end of the world could look like. Therefore, the heir lives permanently in a complex position, obsessed with the past and afraid of a future that may be characterised by ecologic and nuclear disasters. In her novels, Catherine Mavrikakis highlights the paradoxes that surround the notion of memory. Her characters are torn between remembrance as a duty towards past generations, and oblivion, which they find necessary to build their future. This study aims to analyse the importance of memory and trauma in Mavrikakis' novel *Le Ciel de Bay City* (2008). It will particularly consider the dialectics between memory and oblivion, resentment and remorse, inheritance and survival.

**Ritika SINGH, *Remember, Recover: Trauma and Transgenerational Negotiations with the Indian Partition in This Side, That Side and the 1947 Partition Archive***

The hauntings of the Indian Partition continue to be expressed via newer mediums as two or three generations negotiate its impact. This paper looks at role and function of the *1947 Partition Archive* that records oral testimonies of first-generation witnesses. It also examines an anthology of graphic narratives – *This Side, That Side* – that illustrates second-generation accounts of trying to understand the Partition, as it is passed down through stories and memories. Through an analysis of both, trans-generational negotiations with traumatic memories of the Indian Partition can be studied along with examining how newer channels open newer opportunities of representing its trauma. I argue that such mediums not only fulfil a therapeutic need but also highlight the trans-generational quality of forgiveness in light of collective traumas.

**Nicoletta VALLORANI, *Ashes. Words and Images in the Forms of Remembrance***

The issue of representing war has often been critically tackled by reflecting on the increasing exploitation of images often coexisting with their ambiguous quality (Franzini 2001, Mirzoeff 2005). In 1938, Woolf has no doubt about the interpretation of photographs as “a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye. But the eye is connected with the brain; the brain with the nervous system”. Yet, things have been changing from World War II to today and Woolf’s supposed total reliability of the visual documents of war has been gradually undermined, while the spectacular aspect of war has been given priority in the congregation of discursive tensions marking any recent representation, reflection and form of remembrance on world conflicts. My work here focusses on Tony Harrison’s film poem *The Shadow of Hiroshima* (1995), and tries to reflect on how the poetic word combines with the filmic image in trying to produce a convincing commemoration of one of the worst war tragedies of our Western history.

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