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The narrative of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia between history sociology and literature

Relatrice
Prof. ssa Annalisa Frisina

Laureanda
Di Giorgio Emilia
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Index

Chapter three

"Noi siamo un paese senza memoria. Il che equivale a dire senza storia. L'Italia rimuove il suo passato prossimo, lo perde nell'oblio dell'etere televisivo, ne tiene solo i ricordi, i frammenti che potrebbero farle comodo per le sue contorsioni, per le sue conversioni. Ma l'Italia è un paese circolare, gattopardesco, in cui tutto cambia per restare come è. In cui tutto scorre per non passare davvero. Se l'Italia avesse cura della sua storia, della sua memoria, si accorgerebbe che i regimi non nascono dal nulla, sono il portato di veleni antichi, di metastasi invincibili, imparerebbe che questo Paese è speciale nel vivere alla grande, ma con le pezze al culo, che i suoi vizi sono ciclici, si ripetono incarnati da uomini diversi con lo stesso cinismo, la medesima indifferenza per l'etica, con l'identica allergia alla coerenza, a una tensione morale".

Pier Paolo Pasolini da "Scritti corsari", Milano, Garzanti, 2001

Introduction

The topic of Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa has been characterized by Italian society's failure to process the trauma inflicted. The misrepresentation of historical events has aided in the transmission of collective memories marked by discontinuities in recollections, often giving rise to xenophobic attitudes that are regrettably still prevalent in the minds of many Italians. This form of memory is starting to be first of all dusted off and secondly to be evaluated from many points of view in recent years owing to the research effort of countless scholars, sociologists, historians, writers, and artists of various kinds.

This paper, titled The narrative of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia between history, sociology and literature, deals with the narrative of Italian colonialism, with a focus on Ethiopia, during the Fascist occupation of 35-41. The contribution is divided into three chapters and consists of a theoretical framework that refers to three different disciplinary areas. The narrative of the colonial experience was the primary strategy that led to Italians' amicable self-representations, as the thesis's title suggests. As a result, the narrative will have a distinct place and a different meaning in each of the work's three components.

In the first chapter, a historical excursus reports the primordial expansionist projects of nineteenth-century empires by analyzing the phases and ambitions of the Italians. The chapter continues by making a time leap to the era of Fascist expansion and Mussolini's plan to occupy East Africa with the conquest of the so-called first-born colony, Eritrea. From this point on, the focus is on Ethiopian soil, highlighting the political and cultural context of Ethiopia at the time of the fascists' arrival. The place in the sun so coveted by Mussolini will represent for the Italians a territory not always easy to relate to. Under the administrat ion of Viceroy in charge Rodolfo Graziani, the colonies will reach a point of intolerance that will result in the nefarious massacre of Ethiopians in the city of Addis Ababa. The analysis of the Italian colonies in the A.O.I. proceeds with an in-depth study of the Italian educational system and the consequent study of colonial

patronage on the part of the Italian invader toward the colonized. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the dual perspective of the condition of women, comparing the condition of Ethiopian women and that of Italian women ready to embark for the faraway continent of Africa.

The second chapter moves within the research area of the sociology of memory. The Italian colonial experience has represented for the Italian people a part of the country's history that is difficult to metabolize and deal with. In particular, the memory of colonialism is linked to an uncomfortable past for Italians that has been not a few times the subject of amnesia and reconstruction of events by fascism itself and the subsequent Republic. The clichés and lies, built after World War II through the process of removing one's own faults and demonizing the other, helped build the collective imagination of "Italians good people," Italians who were victims of the follies of a dictator. Memory studies in the sociological field find fertile ground in the modern era in the almost obsessive attitude of preservation of our modern society's history, teeming with tools for recording and archiving memory. In this chapter, therefore, the focus is placed on the concept of memory as a social construct and beyond, building on the different types of memory proposed by the pioneers of the field. The topic of commemoration is first investigated using the theories of sociologist Paolo Jedlowski, who examines the concept of memory based on the experience of modernity in 20th-century society. Commemoration runs the risk of becoming a meaningless ritual or a paradox if it does not take place in a well-known context. The study then go on to examine the ideas of social, collective, self-critical, and historical memory. The field of collective memory is thoroughly examined using the works of the philosopher Walter Benjamin, the Durkheim school, and the sociologist of memory Maurice Halbwachs in order to acquire a complete knowledge of how sociologists have addressed and continue to address this issue. After looking at memory from a theoretical perspective, the examination focuses on the methods cultures use to remember, the social setting in which remembering takes place, and the processes of ritual practice transmission over generations. Every human community believes that in order to preserve its cultural heritage, it must be transmitted. For this to happen, the act of memory transmission

must become an intentional act. For this reason, the concept of collective memory becomes a set of social representations concerning the past, which each group produces, institutionalizes and passes on to its members. However, a society's past and the stories that are passed down about it are never separate from the power systems that rule such societies, and as a result, neither is a people's memory. If collective memory' primary purpose is to validate a society's ideas, as Halbwachs claims, the elites competing to rule it will fight harder to control and shape those beliefs to suit their own purposes as the complexity of the society increases. In fact, commemorative activities serve as the means by which institutions and elites manage society. In this setting, the stereotype of the amiable Italian and the idea that "Italians good people" developed by historian Angelo del Boca are embedded. The paragraph that follows examines the distinction between the bad Germans and the good Italians, a distinction that Italian historiography has consistently emphasized in order to defend itself and justify the atrocities committed by Italians by calculating the jovial notion of "other people did much worse."

The colonial issue is covered in the third and last section of this essay, which is focused on literature. The literary field under consideration is postcolonial studies, or the broad spectrum of social, political, and cultural developments following the end of European colonialism in the middle of the 20th century. The field of postcolonial studies has blossomed in Italy thanks to the efforts of academics and intellectuals working outside of the academy, albeit later than in other nations. This field examines how colonized cultures were structurally influenced and altered by Western civilisation, and how these effects consequently impacted the artistic output of individuals involved. Among the pioneers of this strand we find the Palestinian scholar of English literature Edward Said with his masterpiece Orientalism; he, for the first time, addresses a critique of Eurocentrism believing it to be the cause of the creation of an Eastern imaginary stereotyped to the intent of Western culture itself, particularly insisting on the created image of the Middle East. As for the case of postcolonial Italian literature, it is characterized by having a shorter history, linked to historical contingencies that meant that Italy's colonial past began to resurface later than that of other empires. The Italian delay must therefore be related to reasons internal to the culture and its elaboration of

the past, thus related to the removal and non-elaboration of colonialism. For the reasons explained so far, this literary strand found its flowering in the late 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with the migratory flows from North African and Eastern European countries. As early as the first half of the 1990s, a number of texts written by female authors from former Italian colonies such as Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia began to appear. Authors in this genre include Somali Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's *Far from Mogadishu* (1994), Igiaba Scego's *Rhoda* (2004) and Ethiopian Gabriella Ghermandi's acclaimed *Queen of Flowers and Pearls* published in 2007, just to name a few famous writers in the genre. After briefly outlining the reasons for Italy's lag in the production and study of postcolonial literature, the chapter examines the work of Ethiopian writer Maaza Mengiste, whose family emigrated to America after the coup d'état against Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. The writer, who has lived between Lagos, Nigeria, Nairobi, Kenya and the United States, studied in New York City where she currently lives and works as a creative writing teacher. After publishing her acclaimed first novel Beneath the Lion's Gaze in 2009, she returns to the experience of the fascist occupation in Ethiopia with the 2019 publication of her second novel *The Shadow King*. With the analysis of Mengiste's novel, we intend to reverse the perspective used so far. The point of view adopted in the novel is that of the Ethiopian protagonists, who find themselves facing invasion by Italian forces. The story, set in Ethiopia, unfolds within a forty-year time frame. From the prologue, which begins in 1974, we go back to 1935 when the invasion of Mussolini's troops begins. The Shadow King is characterized as a work with a distinctive narrative structure; structured in five parts, it tells the story of Ethiopian women who were a key element in the victory against fascist oppression. Oppression is presented in the novel in different levels. The women, primarily the young protagonist Hirut, are plagued by double oppression, as Africans and women. The women's resistance becomes, therefore, a collective resistance that succeeds in making the protagonists oppose the invasion of the colonizers, for example through the ploy found by Hirut in having a young musician impersonate Emperor Haile Selassie. Once again, resistance also returns as a major theme in terms of physical opposition: resistance by Hirut to Kidane, the man who abuses her, thus giving her the strength to face battle. The

Shadow King, represents a response to the lack of memory regarding colonialism in Italy. The memory of her people and the suffering she witnessed in the war will help the protagonist face life, while at the same time, however, bringing her up against the demons of her past. The arts, such as music or photography, take on the role of vehicles of memory within the novel. The power dynamics related to the use of photography, highlight the oppressions women suffer. The image of the African woman, sensual, available, and aphrodisiac, is instrumentalized at first by Mussolini's regime to attract young Italians to enlist. This is also done through music, through the marches that accompanied soldiers in the war, composed by some of the most famous singers of the time. One example among many is the famous song Faccetta nera, whose lyrics feature racist images with which African women are described. Memory moves within The Shadow King, through different channels. Mengiste reverses the gaze on Italian colonialism by relating each character to the memory of that colonialism. The pain and suffering endured are depicted in the photographs contained in the metal box that travel with the protagonist Hirut and accompany her for forty years. The cyclical structure of the novel, which opens and closes with the scene of Hirut intent on returning the box to Hector, allows the reader to also take a journey through the history and memory of the Ethiopian people. The story then is not unique; it is a story composed of the thousands of broken voices of characters who do not forget the wounds of the past but do not give up their desire for a better future. The vision is no longer totalizing, it escapes from the patterns of historical narration, it is dipped into different and sometimes unfamiliar points of view, such as that of the Ethiopian women, frontline protagonists of the resistance against the Italian invasion.

CHAPTER ONE

1. *The nineteenth century: the expansionist dream of empires*

The nineteenth century represented a century of profound change for Europe, a positive period that saw the birth and growth of industrialization, liberalism and other major innovations. Trade between empires promoted the exchange of goods from Western countries, importing exotic goods to Europe that had never been seen before. Improvements in navigation particularly with steamboats made it possible to shorten distances and make journeys between places extremely far apart. The idea of the Overseas, as historian Nicola Labanca explains, became an increasingly frequent idea in the minds of Europeans. Expanding borders led early navigators and traders to push further and further east, and as a result continents such as Asia or Africa became the coveted destinations of various Nations. In 1884, the prestigious Times magazine dubbed this phenomenon with the expression *scramble for Africa*. In this "race" Italy did not fail to participate. The country, which had only been unified for a few decades, was a country whose past was marked by the experience of important maritime republics and trade exchanges. Italy's interest in expanding its territory arose considerably later than other European powers. Despite having just emerged from the unification process and still plagued by economic and social problems, late 19th-century Italy did not miss the opportunity to participate in the scramble for Africa, in which it saw a possible relief from internal problems and an opportunity to sit alongside imperialist governments. The choice turns out, however, to be reckless and rash, with serious repercussions. Indeed, the Italian colonial experience knows a limited duration, running out in about sixty years. The difficulties of governing the colonial territories because of the resistance of the indigenous people - far from waiting for liberating or civilizing forces -, complicated by the distortions of racist ideology, cause the criminal and violent actions of the rulers that one will later try to obscure in the name of a good-natured and salvific colonialism for Africans. Nicola Labanca in his historical analysis of the phenomenon of Italian colonialism, identifies in the Italians' aspiration, a desire to have their own Overseas.

> Molti italiani subirono il fascino dell'ignoto, che era poi il fascino dell'Oriente, misterioso e dell'Africa ancora sconosciuta: si trattava di un'atmosfera culturale che stava attraversando l'Europa in quei decenni, e che non aveva di per sé valenze solo di dominio e di imperio.[1]

In this context, England remained the country with the highest percentage of colonies. The starting imbalance among the European powers, was an imbalance in terms of wealth, extent and ability to conquer territories. Even at the time of its descent, Italy was a country at a primordial stage as far as industrialization was concerned and had large but poor and poorly industrialized cities. With this in mind, the choice of Italian governments to embark on expansionist ventures was almost a risky one. Italian conquests remained a modest empire, compared to the territories of other countries such as England, France, or Germany. Despite this, for Italian public opinion, the country was at the same level of other European forces. Favorì l'Italia, il fatto che l'imperialismo, proprio in quanto «età», epoca, fu un sistema, un insieme in cui le varie parti si integravano e si sorreggevano a vicenda.

> Per gli extraeuropei gli italiani erano solo, a prima vista, «altri» bianchi: anche se poi la loro forza economica e militare si dimostrò assai diversa e minore di quella degli inglesi o dei francesi. Per le cancellerie europee, una volta che ebbe fatto la scelta imperialista, l'Italia era un' «altra», anche se la più debole, concorrente e come tale poteva ambire ad entrare nelle varie combinazioni diplomatiche che contraddistinsero l'espansione europea." (24)

There was an apparent inconsistency between what Italian imperialism had achieved in terms of territories and conquests and what was instead being reported and recounted within the country. An obvious frenzy was consolidating in the minds of Italians driven by the colonizing desire.

> Lottando per essere dei «costruttori di imperi» anche molti italiani, al pari di altri europei, si macchiarono di delitti e praticarono un razzismo che sarebbe rimasto odioso ai loro sudditi «indigeni». Ma gli abitanti del Belpaese proprio sentendo di essere «costruttori di imperi», si sentirono più italiani, e più forti e moderni. (25)

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[1] Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002, p.16.

1.2 *Italian colonial enterprise, phases, projects and ambitions*

The Italian colonial enterprise in Africa knows two main phases, the first under the liberal government (1882-1921), the second under the fascist government (1922-1943). The Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, were the two main strategic nodes for trade with the East. If the first phase is characterized, at least in the early period, by an attempt to mediate between the ideals of the Risorgimento and the desire to assert prestige at the international level, with Fascism a power policy is inaugurated and it is reflected in the reorganization of colonial society according to the legal-ideological model of direct rule. During both phases, there are several difficulties in the occupation and control of the subjugated territories. The history of Italian colonialism in Africa can be summarized in a few close dates: the "primeval colony," Eritrea, was founded in 1890, following the amalgamation of individual protectorates (1882-1890); in 1889 Italy conquered Somalia, in 1911 Libya, and finally, in 1936, Ethiopia, the last Empire of Africa, coveted by the Italians from the beginning, but able to strenuously resist attacks. Although it is customary to date the beginning of the colonial era to the late 19th century, prior to this date Italy was no stranger to the African continent. When the colonial period began in the 1880s, there were already many Italians in various cities in Egypt or Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco. Since these were not direct possessions, one can speak of communities of Italians in Africa rather than colonies. The Italians who emigrated to these areas were groups driven by a wide variety of reasons. For example several scholars, scholars in the field of African studies or orientalism.

> Di questi viaggi che anticiparono la professionalizzazione della geografia, delle scienze naturalistiche ecc., alcuni vennero organizzati nella Penisola e in ogni caso su di essi, anche se stranieri, il pubblico dei colti italiani si tenne a giorno grazie alla rete di «gazzette» e di periodici di informazione e commento. (37)

While the Italians in Africa at that time were scholarly or diplomatic travelers, the larger communities for example the Tunisian or Algerian ones, were made up of people who had emigrated in search of work. Labanca in his analysis of these communities explains precisely the social diversification that had formed in these areas.

> La comunità insediata a Tunisi, ad esempio, era composta in gran parte da lavoratori emigrati per svolgervi umili lavori, ma ospitò anche energie intellettuali che le permisero di avere una propria stampa, un proprio reticolo associativo ecc. Le comunità stanziate in Egitto erano quanto mai diversificate fra quella del Cairo e quella di Alessandria, tipica di una città di porto Mediterraneo. (34)

There were several reasons why Italians took part in the scramble for Africa. First of all, as analyzed by Labanca, expansionist motives were rooted in the European climate of the 19th century, the thirst for world knowledge, but also economic interests, public opinion, etc., fueled this climate. The much coveted Overseas, became a solid reality when in 1882 and later in 1885, Italy peacefully conquered the African ports of Assab and Massawa, thus becoming a colonial power. Despite the small size of Italian possessions in Africa, compared to those of other European powers, the transition from the age of the Risorgimento to the age of imperialism overwhelmed everyone in the motherland. Democratic intellectuals of substance were ready to bring civilization to Africa, perfectly akin to the general climate of expansionism, militarism and racism in Europe. Italy's penetration of the Red Sea, had taken place peacefully and without encountering any particular difficulties. The Italian army, given its size, posed no great threat of an extension within the country. The port area of Massawa had seen the co-presence of several settlements over the years, with no one ever attempting to expand. The territory that would later become Eritrea was an ethnically diverse one.

When Francesco Crispi became prime minister in 1887, he aimed to bring Italy into the ranks of the great powers, so his political program aimed to increase military spending. Crispi was important in the expansionist scene in that his propaganda began to promote the idea of Africa as a fertile land to be given to poor Italian peasants, a kind of promised land. For these reasons Crispi will be remembered as the standard bearer of African imperialism. It was under this government that the idea of an even greater expansion for Italy, conquering Ethiopia, began to spread. The idea of the military men installed in Massawa, namely General Antonio Baldissera, was to enter Ethiopia through the passage of the Tigre region; a border land between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The

likely allies Italy could have found there were the army of the ras[2] Menelik, and the Italian ambassador and explorer Pietro Antonelli. Menelik's interest was to oust Ethiopian Emperor John IV. So while Baldissera pushed toward the Tigrinya line, which led to the seizure of Asmara in Ethiopia (August 4, 1889), Antonelli suggested to Crispi that an Italian protectorate be extended over all of Ethiopia. After the death of Negus[3] John IV, Antonelli managed to convince ras Menelik, who had not yet become Negus, a treaty of friendship with Italy in the village of Uccialli. In una delle sue traduzioni, nella versione italiana, la frase in cui il prossimo negus etiopico «acconsentiva» a valersi dei servigli di Roma per comunicare con le altre potenze europee (formula consueta in documenti analoghi) diventava invece l'accettazione piena e totale della subordinazione dell'Etiopia all'Italia, tramite un protettorato di questa su quella.

> Dalla politica commerciale da svolgersi a Massaua al protettorato sull'immensa Etiopia, da Mancini a Crispi le ambizioni e aspirazioni coloniali italiane erano enormemente cresciute: non altrettanto poteva dirsi dei mezzi a disposizione.[4]

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[2] In Ethiopia, a title that was given to the highest dignitaries in the country, having lordship and jurisdiction over individual provinces.

[3] Negus is an Ethiopian noble title corresponding to that of king.

[4] Labanca, op. cit., p. 73

1.2.1 *Eritrea, the first-born colony*

On January 1st 1890, the possessions in Africa were renamed the Eritrean Colony. This historic date, sanctioned the first phase (1885-1890) of what would be later called the *First African War* or *Abyssinian War*. Thereafter, what historians define as a relatively more peaceful phase than the first and third, were the years 1890 to 1894. During this period in Italy, the political situation was characterized by alternating four governments and a resulting general instability. On the other hand, ras Menelik, was beginning to disprove Italian claims of protectorate, communicating directly with European chancelleries. Once again the overestimation of Italian strength, led the Italian army to extend even further and to target the holy city of Adua. Baratieri, the newly appointed governor general, continued to nurture aspirations of conquest, despite the fact that in Italy the Giolitti government demanded that he scale back military spending.

> Mentre da parte di Addis Abeba era ormai ufficiale e noto che Menelik II aveva denunciato ogni pretesa italiana di protettorato, dalla colonia si continuava a irritare il potente vicino con spedizioni che miravano ad uno dei luoghi più sensibili della religione e della politica etiopica. In poco più di un decennio, la politica commerciale e di presenza della costa si era trasformata in una politica di penetrazione nell'interno e di confronto con un grande impero africano. (77)

The third phase of the conflict was the shortest and most disastrous one, opening on January 13th, 1895 with the invasion of the town of Coatit in the Tigre region. The date of March 1st 1896, represents the most important defeat suffered by the Italian army on the African continent. The tragic result saw the death in the field of 5,000 Italian fighters and between 1,600 and 1,900 soldiers taken prisoner by Menelik II. The battle of Adwa, as this day will be remembered in history, led to the subsequent resignation of the Crispi government and a revival of anti-colonial opposition in Italy. This date would mark a crucial moment for Italy's already weak reputation on the European scene.

> Quello che è stato definito «complesso di Adua», cioè il ritorno assillante del ricordo del 1° marzo 1896 e il timore della sconfitta sul campo, un timore che influenzò tutta la politica coloniale dell'Italia unita, aveva le proprie basi su un dato di fatto reale. Non

> meno grave di quella delle guerre risorgimentali, la memoria di Adua rimase un punto fermo per la classe dirigente italiana. (83)

After the conflict, a new phase opened for the two countries, with peace signed in Addis Ababa on October 26th, 1896. With this agreement, Italy recognized the formal existence of the Ethiopian Empire and its legitimacy as a subject of international politics. Meanwhile in Italy, various factions were taking sides for or against Italian permanence in Africa. There were those who were in favor of complete abandonment of the colonies, such as the symbolic deputy of the far left parliamentary party, Felice Cavallotti. The various clashes of opinion led to a parliamentary vote that sanctioned the continuation of the Italian colonial enterprise. At the same time, Italy made demands at the European level about a possible partition of the territories in the event that Menelik II would fail. Therefore, in 1906, Italy signed a secret agreement with England and France that enshrined the three European countries' zones of influence over Ethiopia. After this date, it would be in 1915, with the London Pact, that Italy established new agreements with the two European powers.

> In un clima internazionale profondamente modificato, rispetto al 1906, dalla morte di Menelik II, nel 1913, e dallo scoppio del primo conflitto mondiale, nel 1914, il Patto di Londra, e più precisamente l'articolo 13, riconosceva all'Italia il diritto a generici compensi territoriali coloniali, soltanto nella misura in cui Francia e Gran Bretagna avessero aumentato i loro domini coloniali, annettendo quelli tedeschi.[5]

The idea of wanting to extend an Italian protectorate over Ethiopia remained firm in some Italian political circles, and it continued as such even and especially with the advent of the government led by Benito Mussolini in the country. In 1928, the peace treaty signed with Ethiopia was not characterized by effective peaceful relations. On one hand Ethiopia's lack of trust in Italy and Italian attitudes of closure toward the population on the other, lead in 1930 to an effective liquidation of the contract.

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[5] Pes, *La costruzione dell'impero fascista. Politiche di regime per una società coloniale*, Roma, ARACNE editrice, 2010, p. 69.

1.2.2 *A closer look at Ethiopia: education during the reigns of Menelik II and Halie Selassie*

When the period of Italian colonization began, Ethiopia saw the reign of Negus Neghesti Menelik II established. Ethiopian society would see in these years, and later with the reign of Haile Selassie, a modernization and revolution in several respects.

> Entrambi considerarono fondamentale per lo sviluppo dell'Etiopia la sua modernizzazione in senso materiale, con il tentativo d'importare le più disparate innovazioni tecnologiche, e in senso culturale, attraverso l'invio all'estero di numerosi giovani etiopici, con lo scopo di dar loro un'istruzione di stampo europeo e renderli così "moderni". Una volta rientrati in patria, essi avrebbero così potuto spendere la loro modernità in Etiopia, contribuendo allo sviluppo dell'intero paese. (86)

Even before Menelik II, it was the earlier reign of Theodore II that established the first technical school with a European footprint. While this is true, Theodore II aimed at training Ethiopian youth in the area of weapons production, while Menelik embraced a broader idea of education. Moreover, until that time education had been reserved for a small circle of aristocratic people. Menelik strongly believed that only an educated country would be able to progress. In addition, aware of the unwillingness of parents to give up their children's labor assistance in favor of their education, Menelik II imposed penalties on defaulting parents. On the other hand, he pledged to build schools, train teachers and even import teachers from other regions, such as Egypt.

> L'insegnamento era gratuito, e le lezioni di matematica e scienze facevano parte del programma di studi proposto, insieme all'insegnamento dell'educazione fisica e di numerose lingue: Amaricò, Arabo, Francese, Ge'ez, Inglese e Italiano. (96)

To be able to do all this, he took care not to exclude what had hitherto been a foundational part of Ethiopian education, which was, religion. He had tried to bring the Coptic clergy closer to his politics through the construction of churches and the renovation of older ones. Menelik strongly believed that the education of the Ethiopian people had to be a combination of innovation and tradition.

L'importanza della fondazione della scuola Menelik II non risiedeva soltanto nell'aver fornito strumenti di conoscenza adatti e in linea con il periodo in cui fu istituita. Il valore dell'atto compiuto dal Negus Neghesti, è da ricollegare al pensiero moderno al quale l'istituzione della scuola Menelik II fece da apri strada in Etiopia; dal 1908 in poi sempre più notabili e uomini facoltosi e influenti iniziarono a interrogarsi sul ruolo e l'importanza dell'istruzione nello sviluppo del paese, e i politici presto iniziarono a mettere a frutto tale concetto. (98)

After the death of Menelik II, he was succeeded to the throne in 1916 by his daughter Princess Zaoditù. Although she did not enjoy popularity at court, she followed her father's lead by issuing an important edict for the education of the country. With this edict she proclaimed that it was mandatory for parents to teach their children to read and write. The process of modernizing and Europeanizing the education system continued with Zaoditu's successor, Tafari Mekonnen, the latter's cousin.

I progetti di modernizzazione del paese dovevano però interrompersi, nell'ottobre del 1935, quando l'Italia fascista iniziò la campagna etiopica, attaccando il paese dal nord attraverso il fronte eritreo, e dal sud, penetrando attraverso il confine con la Somalia. (100)

1.3 *The Fascist era: "a place in the sun" for Italy*

> La ruota del destino che muove inarrestabile verso la meta/guidata dallo spirito e dalla potenza del popolo italiano/popolo di poeti, di artisti, di eroi, di santi, di navigatori, di trasmigratori/che per quaranta anni ha pazientato con l'Etiopia/paese africano universalmente bollato come un paese senza ombra di civiltà,/ ma che ora di fronte a chi tenta di consumare la più nera delle ingiustizie: quella di toglierci un pò di posto al sole/[6]

The Fascist dream of colonizing Ethiopia, can be summed up in the words spoken by the Duce about five months after the proclamation of the Italian East African Empire. The foreign policy of the Mussolini government was marked by a policy of national power and prestige. The Duce's propagandistic tones proposed a land to be repopulated and transformed into an extension of Italy. One element of discontinuity of Mussolini's expansionist policy with the liberal one was the strong mass propaganda. The Duce's speeches, painted Italy, and its conquest of the colonies, as a great power with a great colonial past, although the reality was quite different.

> Il ministero delle Colonie fu invitato a prestare sempre maggiore attenzione all'aspetto pubblico e propagandistico della propria azione: mostre commerciali, esposizioni etnografiche, manifestazioni politiche ma anche ricreative e culturali aventi per oggetto l'Africa e il colonialismo italiano si moltiplicarono rapidamente nella seconda metà degli anni Venti. (153)

Fascist propaganda was based on idolatry and the celebration of myths. The myth of the Duce was accompanied by that of Rome. The ancient Roman empire, which had also ruled over Africa in the past, was in vogue again thanks to Fascist colonial policy.

> Questo mito dell'impero «romano» assumeva anche un carattere suo proprio, all'incrocio fra politica e religione civile. Attraverso l'«impero», il fascismo si candidava ad essere il centro irradiatole di una (nuova) civiltà universale. Certo, sino a che le colonie africane ereditate dall'Italia liberale non erano state «riconquistate», non fu questo il tasto su cui convenne battere. Ma quando a partire dagli anni Trenta, assieme al regime, anche le colonie si furono «stabilizzate» e in particolare quando con

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[6] Labanca, op. cit, p. 129.

la vendetta di Adua l'impero tornò ad aleggiare «sui colli fatali di Roma», venne naturale a Mussolini e al regime cercare di convincere gli italiani non solo a sentirsi una nazione forte ma a porsi appunto «sul piano dell'impero.» (155)

Italian fascism lacked a consistent ideological structure, except for radical nationalism and the cult of the Duce. For much of its history the regime spun from point to point like a broken compass. In 1919 and 1920 fascism was a vague leftist, republican, populist anti-party movement. Then, in 1921, it became a monarchist right-wing party. It believed in laissez-faire economics under Alberto De Stefani from 1922 to 1925, then to policies of state and control and cartelisation under subsequent economics ministers. From 1929 to 1934 corporatism was the hallmark of Fascism; in 1935 and 1936, the regime declared a corporative pause and moved to a war footing and autarky. During the late 1930s, for reasons we will attempt to determine, imperialism, colonialism and racism took over as central themes. If Hitler had won the war, Fascism would almost certainly have taken on a stronger, Nazi-like orientation.[7]

The taste for the unknown, an inescapable element of all colonialism, was linked to the idea that the "white" colonizer had a thirst for domination, for power.

La frontiera coloniale è una frontiera speciale, in cui l'«Altro» è sempre almeno un gradino più in basso del «Bianco».[8]

Overseas, which the Italians had longed for so much, remained a desire that was hardly given up. The possibility for Italian entrepreneurs to make their fortunes on the African continent, lush with nature, novelty, a sense of freedom, and beautiful available women, attracted more and more to the frontier concept. The initial program and then the actual reality in conquered Ethiopia show how much the fascist program was not made up of concreteness but rather of futile words of propaganda. Fascism had extremely ambitious programs for Ethiopia. The desire to transplant about a million Italians to the Horn of Africa makes one wonder today how pure expansionist folly such a program was.

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[7] De Grand, *Mussolini's Follies: Fascism in Its Imperial and Racist Phase, 1935-1940*, Contemporary European history, May 2004 (vol 13 No. 2), Cambridge University Press, p. 127-128.

[8] Labanca, op. cit., p. 156.

Il fascismo si era dato obiettivi ambiziosi per la colonizzazione agraria dell'impero: autosufficienza alimentare della colonia, rifornimento della madrepatria con prodotti alimentari e materie prime, nuova installazione di colture coloniali, esportazione nei confronti degli altri mercati coloniali di quell'area e ricerca di un'egemonia «regionale» ecc. (328)

Bringing civilization to Africa was the main mission of the fascists. In his speech for the proclamation of the newborn Empire, Mussolini stressed how important it was for new generations of Fascists to proudly carry high the ancient virtues of Roman civilization.

Impero fascista, perché porta i segni indistruttibili della volontà e della potenza del littorio romano, perché questa è la meta verso la quale durante quattordici anni furono sollecitate le energie prorompenti e disciplinate delle giovani, gagliarde generazioni italiane […] Impero di civiltà e umanità per tutte le popolazioni dell'Etiopia. Questo è nelle tradizioni di Roma, che, dopo aver vinto, associava i popoli al suo destino […]il popolo italiano ha creato col sangue il suo Impero. Lo feconderà col suo lavoro e lo difenderà contro chiunque con le sue armi. In questa certezza suprema, levate in alto, o legionari, le insegne, il ferro e i cuori, a salutare dopo quindici secoli, la riapparizione dell'Impero sui colli fatali di Roma.[9]

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[9] Pes, op. Cit., p. 107-108.

1.3.1 Graziani administration of the colonies, the point of no return

If the pivotal figure of Fascism in the motherland was embodied by "il cavaliere" Benito Mussolini, his worthy replacement in East Africa was Rodolfo Graziani, who ran his own military government and represented as Viceroy also the King of Italy and consequently was revered and considered a hero by the Fascists. Graziani considered himself for all intents and purposes the embodiment of a Roman emperor; he was constantly adulated by his supporters who considered him a genius.

> L'immagine di Graziani come bellissimo ed eroico imperatore romano rispecchiava fino all'ultimo dei valori fascisti e quindi i membri del partito lo ricoprirono di attributi da superuomo […]. Niente avrebbe potuto contribuire maggiormente ad aumentare la cultura dell'impunità tra le Camicie nere, che cercavano tutti di superare l'altro nel dimostrare la propria aderenza agli ideali di partito.[10]

> War on the cheap, a localised colonial war, was the initial aim of the Duce. In the beginning, Mussolini believed that rapid and easy victory could be achieved if Italy moved with enough force and with the tacit acceptance of Britain and France. The venture in Ethiopia was initially attractive precisely because it appeared to run few risks of complications with other major powers. The Italian occupation at first involved cooperation with the local elite from the administrative point of view. The social structure of the country, therefore, was to remain unchanged. It was following the assassination attempt on Rodolfo Graziani (Viceroy Governor of Italian East Africa) on Feb. 19, 1937, that relations between the countries began to break down irrevocably.[11]

If what was initially planned by the Fascist government was a protectorate over Ethiopia, what it soon turned into, looked more like direct control over the territory. Partly the flight of Halie Selassie, partly the international condemnation of Italian aggression of Ethiopia, left no choice but that of a direct occupation of the country. Even in the early days of May 1936, the directives given by the Italian governor were

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[10] Campbell, *Il massacro di Addis Abeba. Una vergogna italiana,* Milano, Mondadori, 2018, p. 71.

[11] De Grand, op. cit., p. 135.

clear, eliminate the possibility of a restoration of the ras to power. Minister of Colonies Alessandro Lessona, believed it was important that the colonists always kept in mind that the authority governing them was the Italian one, and that the village chiefs, although they retained their role, did not represent the Italian government. The fascist government demanded that Ethiopian notables sign a public act of submission to Italian authority. With this move, the Italian government aimed to demonstrate in the motherland that Ethiopia had been pacified and that this pacification was well received by the colonists. Mussolini, on the occasion of the ceremonial submission of 250 Ethiopian leaders, ordered that the news be spread as widely as possible both at home and in the colony. Once again Fascist propaganda was selling its own view of the facts, which the Italians enthusiastically welcomed.

> La pretesa dell'atto di sottomissione contribuì a deteriorare i rapporti tra l'amministrazione italiana e l'elite etiopica, i cui membri venivano così posti di fronte a un dilemma cruciale. Nel caso avessero adempiuto all'ordine dell'amministrazione italiani i capi etiopici avrebbero corso il rischio di screditarsi nei confronti della loro stessa popolazione; se invece si fossero sottratti all'ordine fascista, si sarebbero dichiarati di fatto oppositori del regime, e di conseguenza passabili di sanzione da parte dell'autorità Italiana.[12]

The assassination attempt on Rodolfo Graziani, marks a definitive watershed, with the Italian governor categorically ruling out any cooperation from Ethiopian notables in the administration of the Empire.

La volontà espressa da Graziani di radere al suolo l'intera città vecchia, per potere così eliminare il pericolo di una ribellione indigena, può essere certamente imputata allo sconcerto che l'attentato provocò nel Governatore Generale. Tale sconcerto può comunque soltanto in piccola parte giustificare la grossolanità della sua visione politica circa l'amministrazione coloniale, e sopratutto la gestione dei rapporti con gli indigeni. (141)

In order to ensure that the complete dismissal of Ethiopian noble leaders took place, the governor proposed a plan of action consisting of five main points. They summarily provided for the transfer of the chiefs to concentration camps, and compulsory residence

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[12] Pes, Op. Cit., P. 123.

for suspected ras. To these proposals, Benito Mussolini agreed with the Governor General, disagreeing with him only as to Graziani's willingness to commit summary executions and set tuculs[13] on fire.

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[13] Tukul, is a term used to refer to round homes in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, and other parts of eastern Africa.

1.4 The Addis Abeba massacre

> Fascist brutality in Ethiopia reflects the essential nature of the movement from its inception. It was no renegade aberration in the African 'heart of darkness', but part of the bleakness at the centre of fascism itself.[14]

> Ethiopia was the place where fascism could shed any inhibitions, escape from the shadow of defeat and feelings of inferiority, and impose its core beliefs of hierarchy and absolute obedience. Mussolini put it on 30 December 1934: 'For a rapid and decisive war, but one which will be also difficult, overwhelming power must be deployed. Later in the war, Mussolini urged the use of bacteriological weapons but met resistance from Marshal Badoglio, not on moral grounds but because they were no longer necessary after the military situation had been stabilised in Italy's favour. According to Angelo Del Boca, the appointment of Badoglio to replace Emilio De Bono at the end of 1935 marked a shift to a war of unlimited destruction and annihilation. No Ethiopian target was henceforth secure from air attacks, including cities, roads, hospitals and simple peasants working in the fields. (140)

After Mussolini proclaimed the Empire on May 9, 1936, anyone who proved unwilling to submit to Italian rule would be condemned and shot. This resulted in the extermination of thousands of soldiers taken prisoner during the fighting. The Italians were already notorious for committing brutalities in their colonies. In London, Ethiopian minister Werqineh Ishetè known as Charles Martin; published an epistle in which he declared himself very concerned about the possibility that the Italian army might have replicated the atrocities it had inflicted on civilians in Libya in 1911. Since the Italians were known for the slaughter of civilians, Ishetè's alarmed words created a wide echo. After Mussolini proclaimed the Empire on May 9, 1936, anyone who proved unwilling to submit to Italian rule would be condemned and shot. This resulted in the extermination of thousands of soldiers taken prisoner during the fighting. The Italians were already notorious for committing brutalities in their colonies. In London, Ethiopian minister Werqineh Ishetè known as Charles Martin; published an epistle in which he declared himself very concerned about the possibility that the Italian army might have replicated the atrocities it had inflicted on civilians in Libya in 1911. Given

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[14] De Grand, op. cit., p. 139.

the name for the slaughter of civilians that the Italians possessed, Ishetè's alarmed words created a wide echo. Seven months after the Italian occupation began, in December 1936, Ethiopian government officials in Addis Ababa in collaboration with members of Halie Selassie's entourage recruited a group of activists to launch a public attack on Graziani's headquarters. On February 19, 1937 (12 yekatit 1929 according to the Ethiopian calendar), the plotters took action. The occasion was a public alms ceremony organized by Graziani, during which activists threw several grenades on stage with the aim of killing the viceroy.

In termini militari, l'attacco dello Yekatit 12 fu un fallimento; non ci fu alcuna insurrezione, né conseguenza di alcun tipo. Inoltre, non morì nessun italiano, perlomeno non gli ufficiali del Governo generale, anche se più di uno, Graziani compreso, rimasero feriti […] L'attacco dello Yekatit 12 fu a tutti gli effetti un attacco eclatante e pubblico al Comando superiore dell'esercito italiano, ma la serie di atrocità contro la popolazione civile che ne seguì è poi passata alla storia come il massacro di Addis Abeba.[15]

The shock of seeing their hero on the ground unleashed chaos in the Italians, the fascists began to attack the crowd. The massacre thus began, in a whirlwind of confusion and delirium that saw fascists and ascari[16] soldiers firing into a crowd of defenseless Ethiopians. The result was that most of the Ethiopians, died in the courtyard of the palace.

> Le uccisioni non furono perpetrate solo dai soldati regolari, né la fucilazione si rivelò l'unico metodo per giustiziare gli etiopi, perché le Camicie nere iniziarono a dominare la scena e a dare la caccia a chi stava cercando di fuggire. Alcuni erano armati di pistola, altri di pugnale. Stando ai testimoni oculari «tutti gli etiopi catturati nel cortile del palazzo vennero uccisi dalle milizie fasciste a colpi di revolver, baionette, e pugnali, a seconda di quale fosse l'arma più a portate di mano». (85)

Ian Campbell reports that Sylvia Pankhurst, daughter of British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, was a tireless reporter of what was going on in Ethiopia, publishing in the weekly New York Times and Ethiopia News in Essex. Her account, along with

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[15] Campbell, op. cit., p. 77.

[16] The ascaro, was an Eritrean soldier in Italian East Africa, framed as a regular component in the Regi Corpi Truppe Coloniali, the Italian colonial forces in Africa.

eyewitness accounts of those who managed to escape the attack; shows how few people managed to escape in the very first moments of chaos and later were chased and killed in the streets.

La stragrande maggioranza dei tremila etiopi che in quel giorno di San Michele si erano radunati nel cortile era già morta a mezzogiorno, ma una buona parte di chi riuscì a fuggire venne uccisa nella seguente operazione di pulizia. (87)

What had been passed off as a sudden and unexpected attack on the Italians concealed a very different reality.   Because the Italians expected the attack on Graziani to be followed by an armed assault by the rebels, what happened next took the form of a predetermined procedure. Additional soldiers were summoned with an urgency to the palace to create a cordon of protection around the area, the so-called *Circle of Death*; no Ethiopian trapped in the circle made it out alive. Even the few survivors of the Circle of Death massacre could not escape the madness of the Italians. Particularly interesting is the story of one of these survivors, Sara Gebre-Iyyessus, a woman victim of the fascist policy of arrests against relatives. Sara was the wife of Finance Director Beshahwired Habte-Weld, an Ethiopian notable who was present at the palace that day. The woman was arrested, the day after the attack along with her two children. Italian soldiers had been ordered to arrest them because her husband was suspected of being involved in the Graziani bombing. Campbell points out that one of the most notable aspects of the Addis Ababa massacre was the killing of children, which began in the Jan Mèda area, shortly after the Yekatit 12 attack.

> Il tenente Meleselin, poliziotto etiope in servizio al Governo generale al momento dell'attentato, è stato uno dei testimoni oculari che hanno scritto un libro sulla propria esperienza durante l'Occupazione. Nella sua opera, Meleselin descrive i predoni italiani arrivare all'improvviso nelle case in cui la gente era intenta a mangiare e bere caffè, e poi, al grido di «*Buongiorno!*», al quale «bambini, donne e anziani» avrebbero risposto in italiano in buona fede, colpirli con baionette, fucilarli o bruciarli vivi. (102)

"Italiani brava gente", is it perhaps the appellation by which Italians are called and recognized, which allowed them to go almost totally unpunished for one of the most heinous massacres in the history of colonization? Many scholars answer this question by justifying the actions of the Italians as the result of a policy of indoctrination by Fascist culture. According to Mussolini's totalitarianism, the new fascist man had to possess characteristics that made him feared rather than loved. Even it was often said that this attitude of enduring and inflicting pain at the same time had been a logical consequence of the atrocities and pains soldiers had endured during World War I in the trenches, unable now to readjust to life. Whether the roots of this attitude can be traced back to fascism or to a time before it, the fact remains that the great powers, Britain and the United States, remained silent and turned the other way. Italy never had to answer for the crimes committed in Ethiopia. The history of fascism in Italy underwent nostalgic revisionism. After Mussolini was deposed, Italians, even the most staunch supporters of the Duce, found it difficult to admit that they had been fascists. People no longer wanted to hear about fascism. Italy subsequently, suffered no condemnation either for aiding fascism's seizure of power or for invading Ethiopia without a reason. The history of fascism in Italy underwent nostalgic revisionism. After Mussolini was deposed, Italians, even the most fierce supporters of the Duce, found it difficult to admit that they had been fascists. People no longer wanted to hear about fascism. In the collective imagination, fascism managed to be remembered not for its particular violence but for being in some ways a comic parenthesis the history of Italy.

> Questa reinterpretazione fu incoraggiata non solo dai servizi dei cinegiornali dell'Istituto Luce in cui il Duce veniva ripreso in pose esagerate, ma anche dalle ripetute e imbarazzanti sconfitte subite dall'Italia nei combattimenti contro nemici ben armati e determinati. Adesso, nel XXI secolo, l'invasione e l'occupazione militare dell'Etiopa hanno finalmente iniziato ad attirare l'attenzione di un più ampio gruppo di accademici italiani, ma questi temi sono entrati a fare parte dell'ambito di studi del «colonialismo»: ciò appare fuorviante, poiché si rischierebbe di fornire una sorta di legittimazione alla tentata distruzione e annessione di uno Stato sovrano. (473)

As Ian Campbell points out the inability to find a single person responsible for the Addis Ababa massacre can be attributed to the deceptions of the British government concerned with defending its ally.

> I recenti tentativi di presentare il fascismo come una grottesca e innocua farsa, e la brutale invasione e occupazione militare dell'Etiopia come un'azione di colonialismo benevolo e paternalistico sono tutti italiani, e costituiscono un affronto alla memoria di tutti quegli innocenti che morirono nella carneficina del febbraio 1937. (473)

1.5 *The white man's burden. The educational institution in Italian colonies.*

The colonial state had to respond to two basic functions. One was to facilitate the exploitation of overseas territories by the colonial power and the other was to ensure order in Ethiopian society. The repression of the indigenous people took place in a structural manner. From the most ruthless repression to the simple exhibitionism of white power. Colonial institutions were new entities, dictated by the encounter/clash between Italian institutions and local realities. Despite presenting itself as seemingly omnipotent in its borders, in reality the Italian state appeared weak in the colony. As Nicola Labanca's analysis points out, like all colonial institutions, Italian institutions could not do without the cooperation of native society.

> Spesso la collaborazione fu relegata alle mansioni subordinate e rimase confinata dall'*ascaro* allo *zaptiè*[17] all'umile guardiano dei palazzi dell'amministrazione coloniale: non ci furono nell'amministrazione coloniale italiana ufficiali, impiegati o tanto meno funzionari «indigeni». Alcune difficoltà post-coloniali dei paesi già sottoposti a dominio italiano trovano una spiegazione nelle debolezze, se non proprio nella mancanza, di classi dirigenti autoctone.[18]

The case of the educational institution best represents the colonial will to satisfy the interests of the Italian community. The school was to carry in the Overseas «the burden of the white man», and this translated into teaching the natives what civilization looked like. First of all, it should be mentioned how in Ethiopia there were no school systems but schools, private and public. They were aimed at the youth of the Italian community or the natives, the latter differing in those for children of chiefs and those for common subjects. As for school personnel, they varied. There were the missionaries of the early days or the public teachers that had worked during the last years before the end of the Empire. The Italian colonial administration never proved inclined to fill the gaps for the small natives. The reason for this unwillingness was that the education of colonial subjects had to remain restricted to avoid public order problems.

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[17] Zaptié, or zaptiè, was the name used to refer to members of the Carabinieri Corps recruited from the indigenous populations of Libya, Eritrea and Somalia between 1888 and 1942

[18] Labanca, op. cit., p. 332

> Mentre i piccoli italiani dovevano allenarsi ad essere la futura classe dirigente della colonia, gli eritrei potevano al massimo sperare di essere interpreti, artigiani o, se donne, buone massaie. (335)

Another emblematic case was Somalia. The total absence of a substantial Italian community brought very serious damage to the educational institution, this is proved by the fact that the colony had no public schools. Even different was the Libyan case where the Italian presence was characterized by the closure of most of the local traditional schools and a sharp decline in Arab schooling.

> Nel 1924 il fascismo introdusse un nuovo ordinamento scolastico: arabi e italiani avrebbero avuto scuole elementari diverse, e la lingua italiana sarebbe stata obbligatoria per tutti. La scolarizzazione dei piccoli italiani venne seguita, quella dei piccoli libici procedette assai più lentamente. (336)

1.5.1 *Colonial Patronage and the construction of the colonial subjects*

In order to fully understand how Ethiopians underwent a process in which they were transformed from free citizens of Ethiopia into colonial subjects, it is important to analyze how colonial patronage underlies this process.

> Patronage is a term that refers to the economic or social power that allows cultural institutions and cultural forms to come into existence and be valued and promoted. Patronage can take the form of a simple and direct transaction, such as the purchase or commissioning of works of art by wealthy people, or it can take the form of the support and recognition of social institutions that influence the production of culture. The patronage system may even, in one sense, be said to be the whole society, in so far as a specific society may recognize and endorse some kinds of cultural activities and not others. This is especially true in colonial situations where the great differences between the colonizing and colonized societies means that some forms of cultural activity crucial to the cultural identity of the colonized, and so highly valued by them, may simply be unrecognizable or, if recognized at all, grossly undervalued by the dominant colonial system.[19]

It is impossible to understand the changes that have taken place in Ethiopian society without first having clear the extent to which the power of colonial institutions and its system of patronage forever altered native culture. The privileging of written culture over oral culture is a demonstration of how, the colonizers for example, intended to deny all other forms except the Eurocentric, liberal-humanist ones. Colonial powers instituted these privileges through patronage systems that preferred and encouraged written forms over orality.

> In the hands of the early missionary patrons, the acquisition of literacy was seen as the mark of civilization, and being raised to a 'civilized' state was a concomitant of, if not an absolutely necessary precondition for, salvation. This cultural hierarchy was reinforced by Colonial Educational Systems and Colonial Literature Bureaux, whose task was to develop certain forms of communication, such as written texts in the indigenous and colonial languages – newspapers, journals and various kinds of fiction – to encourage the development of a class of colonials willing to participate in colonial

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[19] Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts 2nd Edition*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007, p. 38

modes of social and artistic production […] Literature was given support, while oral practices were seen as primitive and were thus neglected or actively discouraged. (39)

To attempt to give an explanation for the process of de-oralization that took place in Ethiopia, it is interesting to analyze the differences studied by historian and anthropologist Walter J. Ong regarding "oral" and "written" societies. Ong states that every language has a profoundly oral character. But although words are inherent in oral speech, writing imprisons them in a visual field. In una cultura orale, la restrizione della parola a suono determina non solo la maniera di esprimersi, ma anche i processi intellettivi. Noi sappiamo ciò che ricordiamo.

> Quando affermiamo di conoscere la geometria euclidea, non intendiamo dire che in quel preciso momento ricordiamo tutti i suoi teoremi e le sue dimostrazioni, ma che siamo in grado di ricordarli prontamente. Il teorema «sappiamo ciò che ricordiamo» si applica anche a una cultura orale. Ma come fanno le persone a richiamare qualcosa alla mente in una cultura orale? La conoscenza organizzata, che oggi gli studiosi apprendono in modo da «saperla», cioè da potersela rammentare, è stata con pochissime eccezioni riunita e resa per iscritto.[20]

> Ritenere che le popolazioni a cultura orale non siano intelligenti, che i loro processi mentali siano «rozzi», fa parte di quella mentalità che per secoli ha indotto gli studiosi a pensare erroneamente che, poiché i poemi omerici mostrano tanta abilità, devono essere per forza composizioni scritte. (103)

This tendency to minimize and consequently censor Ethiopian oral culture can be a prove of how the colonizer construct the colonial subject. The result of this process is that the colonized subject finds it difficult to identify with anything other than the culture of those who dominate him or her.

> The concept of subjectivity problematizes the simple relationship between the individual and language, replacing human nature with the concept of the production of the human subject through ideology, discourse or language. These are seen as determining factors in the construction of individual identity, which itself becomes an effect rather than a cause of such factors.The overlap between theories of ideology, psychoanalysis and post-structuralism has amounted to a considerable attack upon the

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[20] Ong, *Oralità e scrittura, Le tecnologie della parola*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2014, p. 79.

Enlightenment assertion of individual autonomy, and continuing debate centres on the capacity of the subject so formed by these broad social and cultural forces either to disrupt or to undermine them.[21]

The construction of the subject within certain historical, social and cultural contexts has been studied and interpreted by the work of Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, discourse, produces a subject that depends on the rules of the cognitive system that produces it; in this sense, discourse has a greater range of influence than ideology or language. Within any historical period, various discourses compete for control of subjectivity, but these discourses are always a function of the power of those who control the discourse to determine knowledge and truth. Thus, while a person may be the subject of various discourses, subjectivity will be produced by the discourse that dominates at the time. (205)

Foucault's theory is useful in understanding how Ethiopians during the years of colonial occupation, were subjected to a foreign indoctrination that pervaded their culture and slowly modified (if not eliminated) the cultural references of their culture. This process affected everyone, men and women of every age. The latter in particular have been a subject upon which various racial, class, and sexist oppressions have insisted for years.

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[21] Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, op. cit., p. 202.

1.6 *Women in AOI, a double perspective*

From the beginning of European colonial expansion, there was a cultural tendency that eroticized the spaces to be conquered and idealized colonial territories as virgin, fertile and passive. The white man is authorized to conquer these territories and consequently authorized to conquer his women. His civilizing mission clearly extends to the 'civilization' of women's bodies as well. The relationship between black woman and white man is reproduced in that between imperialist nation and colony. In the case of Italy, it is the middle class of the north that embodies the nation's new reference values. Africa is seen as an immobile, still primordial continent, and as a result the black woman allows the white man to forget about civilization, morality, and regain the primitive sphere that Western civilization had caused him to lose. The reinforcement of this image of the African woman, is facilitated by the dissemination of pornographic photographs in colonial territories that depicted her as a black Venus, an image associated with eroticism and exoticism. Since pornographic photography had been banned in Italy since 1861, the fact that in the colonies the circulation of this material was free was a kind of metaphor for Africa free from the moral taboos of the homeland. An important contribution on the issue, is provided by Giulia Barrera's studies, particularly regarding the functioning of the Madamate in Eritrea. Barrera says that during the era of Italian colonialism in Eritrea, from the late 19th century until 1941, many Italians had an African concubine. Unions between different races were very common, evidence of which are the many mixed-race children born during this period, It seems that about 10,000 mestizos were born in East Africa in the period 1936-1940 alone.

> Generally speaking, Italian men categorized their Eritrean sexual partners as either "sciarmutte" or "madame." Sciarmutta was an Italianization of the Arabic term "sharmᵃta" and stood for prostitute; the term madama applied to concubines who associated with Italian men, although Italian men and their madame did not always cohabit. In a broader sense, the term seems to have referred to an African woman in an exclusive relationship with an Italian man. By Italian standards the madamato or madamismo (i.e., the relationship with a madama) had no legal sanction; Italians considered it something different from marriage, questioning whether or not an African

woman could ever become a "real wife." Italians debated the issue throughout the colonial period, but for most the answer was a definite "No."[22]

Ideologically, black women were about sex and white women were about feelings. But reality contradicted this theoretical distinction, which is why Fascism outlawed it. After the founding of the Empire, perspectives regarding miscegenation changed significantly. The regime began to replace images of the Black Virgin with ethnographic depictions that emphasized certain physical traits considered signs of inferiority with the aim of asserting European superiority and legitimizing colonization.

> Da quel momento vennero implementati una serie di dispositivi giuridici miranti a controllare il comportamento di italiani e "sudditi" per riaffermare il prestigio dei bianchi. Furono vietate le relazioni coniugali ed extraconiugali tra "razze" diverse, proibita la legittimazione e l'adozione di figli nati dall'unione di "cittadini" con "sudditi", instaurata una capillare segregazione razziale. I "meticci" furono ricacciati nella comunità indigena e ogni istituzione precedentemente creata per la loro assistenza fu posta fuori legge. Obiettivo di tali misure era la volontà di rafforzare la piramide etnica e di non consentire, al suo interno, alcuna "zona grigia", per garantire alla "razza italiana" un posto di spicco tra i colonizzatori.[23]

The marriage issue in East Africa has different characters from the Christian idea of Italian marriage. Generally, marriage was established by a covenant between the bride's father and the husband's family when the two (most commonly the bride) were still children. The custom was that the bride would go to live with her husband when she was 12 years old, bringing a dowry; this custom was particularly common in the Tigre region. In addition, another important condition for marriage was the bride's virginity, which is why such an early age was required.

> From this brief description of marriage for pact, it can be deduced that such strict rules were likely to marginalize certain women, some of whom might welcome the mating opportunities offered by Italians. Predictably, non-virgin girls, women of "impure

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[22] Barrera, *Dangerous Liaisons, Colonial Concubinage in Eritrea 1890-1941*, Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, 1996, p. 1.

[23] Volpato, *La violenza contro le donne nelle colonie italiane. Prospettive psicosociali di analisi.* DEP. DEPORTATE, ESULI, PROFUGHE, 2009, p. 112.

blood," and women without a dowry constituted a pool of viable candidates for becoming madame.[24]

Following this custom, many Italians chose to marry African girls without even the slightest sense of revulsion or awe at having what for many may have been their daughter as a servant or wife. Indro Montanelli, a well-known Italian journalist for *Il Corriere della Sera* who was deployed as a reporter to Ethiopia, was one conspicuous case among many. He wed a 12-year-old girl who stayed by his side the entire time he was in Africa. When feminist Elvira Banotti, during an interview, challenged him about how such a relationship in Europe would be perceived as rape and child abuse, he reacted with the famed line "Sorry, but in Africa it's another thing...they marry at 12!"[25]

The distinction between concubine and prostitute was not widely conceived. Apparently, those who could afford it economically preferred to own a concubine and leave part-time prostitutes to the soldiers.

> Laketch Dirasse, who has studied prostitution in Addis Ababa, argues that the Italian occupation induced the decline of traditional prostitution, which historically had been locally regarded as an honorable activity. Early in the century, many women, she argues, ran small drinking places and "supplemented their trade in native brew by consorting with multiple mates for remuneration." According to tradition in Addis Ababa (as elsewhere in Africa), "the relationship between the prostitute and her regular clients [was] not merely a commercialized sexual transaction." As Pankhurst shows, Italian colonialism led to the progressive commercialization of prostitution in Eritrea. In turn-of-the-century Italy, prostitution was subject to state regulation; prostitutes were registered and underwent periodic medical evaluations. At that same time the influential Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso was popularizing his belief that some women were "born prostitutes" and were lower on the evolutionary scale than "normal women." Thus, many Italians arrived in Africa believing that prostitutes belonged to a different category of people who should be strictly confined to the margins of society. So it should not surprise us that in 1885, as soon as they landed at Massawa, the Italian army issued a regulation on prostitution: prostitutes could no longer live in villages,

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[24] Barrera, op. cit., p. 18.

[25] YouTube. (18 Giugno 2019). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8lJr2STfiI, from Gianni Bisiach *L'ora della verità,* 1969.

> where they could freely mingle with the rest of the population, but had to live instead in a segregated area.[26]

> Before becoming madame, some women were little more than children. Many Italian males had sailed to Eritrea dreaming of Africa as a "virgin land of virgins," and at least some of them seemed determined to take full advantage of that. It appeared that for many men, possessing a young virgin was more gratifying than procuring a prostitute [...] Furthermore, the customary marriage age in Eritrea rendered young girls accessible, whereas in Italy the marriage age was considerably higher. (26)

Regardless of the fact that some jobs existed in Eritrea that resembled that of prostitution, and regardless of what the local customs were on the age of marriage; having sexual intercourse with a child remained an example of child abuse in the motherland. It is obvious then that the women who were involved in madamate practices were often abandoned orphan girls who had no power (neither economic nor social) in defiance of their colonizers. In such a context, mixed-race offspring were inevitable. The common belief among Italians in Eritrea was that mixed-race daughters were likely to become prostitutes while their sons were criminals; moreover, Italian law did not provide for any attribution of paternity. As a consequence many Italian men took advantage of the fact that Eritrean women were unaware of this, easily persuaded them to become their concubines, and then abandoned them when they gave birth. (33)

With the advent of Mussolini, the issue of race became more heated and pervasive. He adopted as key instruments of his government a racial policy and the imposition of white supremacy over the colonized through laws. After so much boasting about Italian virility, the Fascist powers found it difficult to implement a strict policy of racial segregation. Instead, Fascism focused on the struggle to suppress the living consequences of Italo-Eritrean sexual liaisons—the mixed-race children. Métissage became the subject of a massive propaganda campaign during which innumerable articles—in both the scholarly and the popular press—singled out métis as a major cause of social disorder. Métis denoted degeneration. "Everybody knows," wrote a

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[26] Barrera, op. cit., p. 25.

judge in his decision, "that the mixed-race combines the vices and faults of his parents' races, and does not inherit their qualities […] The whole philosophy of the Fascist demographic policy was elegantly synthesized in Mussolini's motto: "Nations' fortunes are bound to their demographic power." (40-42)

> One can wonder, for instance, whether the Italians who bravely violated the law against the madamato were equally brave in defying the law that forbade them to provide for their mixed-race children's living expenses. Furthermore, it is beyond question that even if it did not eliminate the madamato, the racial legislation promoted racist behavior; colonial racial attitudes became more brutal and more absolute; and the Fascist laws also served to legitimize the exploitation of African women. During the liberal period it was morally objectionable for an Italian man to abandon an African woman and his mixed-race dependents; during Fascism, it was his duty to do so. The laws did make a difference. (43-44)

The Italian colonial project foresaw, from its origins in the liberal era, that the territories in the Horn of Africa would be the destination where Italian labor would be hijacked. To this end, the figure of the Italian woman was of fundamental value to the Fascist government from the prospect of demographic colonization of the overseas territories. For this to happen, a full-bodied establishment of Italian women in the Abyssinian territories was necessary.

> La presenza della donna in colonia divina necessaria anche per la politica di difesa dell'italianità in quanto considerata depositaria degli elementi ereditari della razza. In qualità di rappresentanti di una nazione imperiale le donne italiane dovevano sentire la coscienza e l'orgoglio di razza […] si andavano coì definendo i caratteri della donna italiana in colonia; soggetto attivo della nuova società d'oltremare, portatrice dei valori e delle peculiarità della razza italiana, custode della famiglia e delle tradizioni ma anche intraprendete e pronta all'avventura in terra africana.[27]

The possibility for Italian women to move to overseas territories, clearly exploitative to the regime's political ends, was sold to women as a chance for them to achieve an autonomy and independence far from being achieved in the motherland. In reality, the Fascist conception of women and their role in society remained that of the angel of the

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[27] Pes, op. Cit., p. 214.

hearth. The Fascist government tried to construct an African myth to sell to Italian women; it spoke to them of a place in which they would assume roles different from those to which they were compelled in their homeland. To train the new female colonial class, the regime established courses to prepare them for colonial life, organized by the Fascist Colonial Institute throughout the kingdom.

> Il programma era suddiviso in due parti: la prima, teorica, comprendete l'insegnamento di storia, religione, geografia ed economia delle colonie, problemi dell'estensione e della difesa della razza, igiene tropicale e puericultura; la seconda, pratica, riguardante l'arredamento e l'igiene della casa, culinaria, lavorazione dei latticini, confezione del pane, coltivazione dell'orto e del giardino, confezione del vestiario, tecnica casalinga e fattoria, artigianato. (215)

As one might expect, the regime took care to inform its women of the dangers of unions with natives, describing to them a terrible risk of spreading diseases from which all natives were believed to be affected, and most importantly, they were informed of the danger of mestizaje, the main threat to Mussolini's purpose of demographic supremacy of the white race in Africa. Despite the regime's numerous efforts to indoctrinate women, few were the ones who turned their lives upside down to take Italian home and family values overseas.

> Al 30 giugno 1940, secondo le stime del governatorato di Addis Abeba, i cittadini della madrepatria che risiedevano nella capitale erano 42365. Di questi soltanto 8026 erano donne, il 18,6 % del totale […] il problema della donna in colonia rimase per i sei anni di vita dell'Impero dell'Africa Orientale Italiana uno dei crucci dell'amministrazione coloniale fascista e si rivelò uno dei fattori principali del fallimento del progetto di trasformare l'Etiopia in una colonia di popolamento per i cittadini italiani. (225)

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 *The paradox of commemoration, educating through memory*

Within the sociological sciences, the field of memory studies has never stopped developing. The 21st century obsession with remembering, immortalizing and stopping in time finds a perfect fertile field in this regard. New technologies make it possible to record, store and reproduce at a speed and ease that we often feel like we're living in a space-time continuum in which the division between past and present appears as a blurred line. However, the practice of remembering is not an exact science, and in doing so we must pay attention to how events that have shaped a society's history choose to be remembered and celebrated. Modern sociology offers many contributions regarding this area. An interesting take on the issue is offered to us by the studies of Paolo Jedlowski (2002), particularly with regard to the relationship that exists between memory and responsibility. The theme from which the sociologist starts is that of the "paradox of commemoration," that is, the possibility of educating for memory through the practice of commemoration. A key connection to understanding the relationship that exists between memory and responsibility is the concept of identity.

> Una società o un individuo che perda il senso del rapporto con il proprio passato perde uno degli elementi fondamentali della propria identità, cioè la capacità di percepire la propria continuità: ma se è vero che, nel suo significato più elementare, la responsabilità è la capacità di un soggetto di rispondere delle proprie azioni, essa presuppone la memoria esattamente perché questa è la facoltà che consente al soggetto di riconoscere di essere "lo stesso" nel corso del tempo.[28]

These two concepts thus turn out to be complementary, in that without memory there is no identity and at the same time those without identity are *ir-responsible*. (96) Consider the problem of identity related to the concept of nationhood. Jedlowski highlights how many current generations struggle to take responsibility for what happened before and during World War II in Europe. In particular, this "taking responsibility" varies from

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[28] Jedlowski, *Memoria, esperienza e modernità. Memorie e società nel XX secolo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2002, p. 95.

country to country. In the case of Germany, for example, the elaboration of responsibility for Nazism has been embraced by the generation of the children of those who lived in the 1930s and 1940s, developing a great sense of "guilt," toward Jews and later other ethnic minorities. As for Italy, on the other hand, the Resistance, has become almost an alibi, to deny and somehow cover up colonialism, racial laws and fascism in general. In this generic framework, the Allies helped to keep the country from being blamed and in so doing to begin that process of removing the blame that the young Italians of 68 did not take on. As a result the transmission of memories did not take place and the past, did not turn into experience. (96)

In order to fully understand how experience is the starting point of the practice of memory (and its consequences), Jedlowski takes up some considerations of Benjamin's philosophy in this field. Benjamin, in many of his works, elaborates a theory on the end of the experience in which he theorizes that subjects immersed in the contemporary world experience a condition of estrangement vis-à-vis their past and consequently fail to be aware of it.

2.2 The end of experience and the crisis of the subject, a look at Benjamin's philosophy

Benjamin argues his theory on the end of experience from the concept of *Erfahrung*. The German term Erfahrung means lived experience or accumulated experience, thus an experience that is not what one has in the immediate moment but something that needs time to mature, settle in memory and return as self-consciousness. This kind of experience in modern times tends to disappear because of the speed and continuity with which the social environment in which people's lives change. In some contexts this change is more rapid this process calls into question the possibility of sedimenting once-for-all valid knowledge. As for shock, it is not embeddable in experience, since by requiring a quick and automatic response it does not have time to settle. Arguing Freud, Benjamin states that stimulation does not leave in consciousness a lasting modification of its elements, but vanishes in consciousness. Massimo Cacciari, points out that the trauma of the shock or simply its threat, is controlled and blocked by consciousness. Consciousness manages to prevent shocks from accessing the sphere of deep memory by confining them to the sphere of Erlebnis, a term that can be translated as immediate experience. When Benjamin speaks of the end of the experience therefore he means that the access to the deep memory of the materials of everyday experience is blocked. This is why traditional experience in the modern era loses its meaning since there is no link between what bound individual experiences to collective memory. (23)

To summarize the concept so far of the end of experience, it is useful to reason about the player metaphor used by Benjamin.

> Ad ogni colpo di dadi, il gioco ricomincia da capo. Il concetto del gioco consiste nel fatto che "la partita successiva non dipende dalla precedente. Il gioco ignora fermamente ogni posizione acquisita […] Se l'immagine del giocatore, che è "nuovo" ad ogni nuova partita viene a coincidere con quella del soggetto moderno, allora effettivamente il processo di sedimentazione dell'esperienza è bloccato. (32)

In the analysis Jedlowski offers of Benjamin's theories, it is possible to draw some conclusions. Experience is a kind of sedimentation and elaboration of experiences from

the perspective of a continuity that can give meaning to the present. More simply, what is consciously experienced is sterilized for the purpose of sedimentation in the unconscious. Habits, which constitute daily life, are the ground within which experience moves. The sociologist argues that the daily life of modern man, which perpetually throws him into a condition of distraction, allows the dazzling light of consciousness to filter through unconsciousness and thus provides him with the necessary time to process it. (40)

What Jedlowski dwells on most at this point is how the individual can have the capacity to revisit his or her experiences and inscribe them in a larger narrative form than just that of the fragment, thus in summary the nexus in memory that connects the present and the past. To do this Jedlowski resorts to a somewhat broader explanation of the sociological concept of memory. Assuming the fact that memory has not been treated in modern sociology in a systematic way, he examines those who have submitted a different approach to the subject, particularly the Durkeimian school, within which the work of Maurice Halbwachs is developed.

2.3 Collective memory

Maurice Halbwachs is a landmark in the sociology of memory, as the concepts he developed provide a theoretical framework on which many works continue to be based. One of his fundamental theories is that everyone's memory is socially conditioned. Building on this assumption, which is fully based on Durkheim's legacy, he postulates that memory processes are a collective phenomenon, transcending the individual. He speaks of social categories without which the fixation and recognition of personal memories would be impossible; these categories are what he calls "social frameworks of memory." If typical social structures, processes and dynamics of a group did not operate continuously, the individual would not have those references that enable him to recognize individual memories. In one of his most important works, *I quadri sociali della memoria* (1996), Halbwachs theorizes the thesis that the social categories of language, time and space constitute the framework that enables the fixation and recognition of individual memories. These categories serve as "a priori forms" in which the contents of individual memories are stored. (46)

> L'insieme di queste categorie costituisce il quadro sociale della memoria dei singoli in un senso duplice: da un lato esse, nel loro permanere e trasmettersi, costituiscono una memoria sociale il cui contenuto riguarda essenzialmente i sistemi di norme, credenze e valori di una società; dall'altro, esse forniscono il quadro entro cui i contenuti delle memorie individuali possono essere conservati e resi attuali. (47)

Jedlowski argues that Halbwachs' originality lies in arguing that the past that returns in the act of remembering is actually a reconstruction of the past, and by the fact that it is a reconstruction from time to time it changes according to the changing viewpoints of the present. Although Halbwachs never gives an exact definition of collective memory, Jedlowski tries to define it based on several of the philosopher's formulations.

> La memoria collettiva di un gruppo è, per Halbwachs, un insieme di rappresentazioni del passato che vengono conservate e trasmesse fra i suoi membri attraverso la loro iterazione. Insieme di eventi e di nozioni ricordati, essa è anche un modo condiviso di interpretarli. (50)

Collective memory thus draws power from the affective relationships that bind the individual with the group, whatever its nature (family, church, political party, ethnic minority, etc.), in this way the individual is moved by the affection and attachment he feels toward his group. Similarly, Halbwachs argues, the end of the affective relationship is responsible for the oblivion into which the facts and discourses that bound him to that particular group fall. In his work *I quadri della memoria*, however, the philosopher points out that every memory of the individual bears the traces of the social frames to which the individual was referring at the time of the remembered event, so for the memory to be preserved the individual must maintain some relationship with the group to which the frames referred.

> Deriva da tutto ciò che la memoria individuale, in quanto opposta a quella collettiva, sia una condizione necessaria e sufficiente per la conservazione e il riconoscimento dei ricordi? No, assolutamente […] perché la nostra memoria si aiuti con quella degli altri non basta che questi ci portino le loro testimonianze: bisogna anche che essa non abbia cessato di essere in accordo con le loro memorie e che vi siano abbastanza punti di contatto fra l'una e le altre perché il ricordo che ci viene rievocato possa essere ricostruito su di un fondamento comune.[29]

In this perspective therefore, the oblivion of the past but at the same time its persistence are two outcomes of the reconstruction that takes place in the present, within socially organized ensembles by individuals (language, discourses, shared reflections, confrontations, conflicts), which contribute to always redefine and reshape the memory of the past. Despite these conclusions, Halbwachs will continue to revise his theories, including other perspectives, such as social or historical memory, in the general discourse of the functionality of collective memory.

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[29] Halbwachs, La memoria collettiva, P. Jedlowski (a cura di), Milano, Edizioni Unicopli, 1987, p. 51

2.3.1 Social, individual and historical memory

For a group to recognize itself as having a definite identity, it needs a set of images from the past that it can retain and recognize as meaningful to its history; that is, its collective memory. However, the concept of collective memory is intrinsically linked to the concept of social memory. Jedlowski making use of Namer's analysis of Halbwachs' theories, explains that social memory is the set of what is virtually offered as the content of their memory to the members of a society. Namer uses the example of the library institution as a metaphor to explain the relationship between these two types of memory.

> La biblioteca è un'istituzione di memoria. Essa conserva e rende accessibile a chiunque, e del resto, proprio per la sedimentazione di strati successivi che l'ha costituita, esso non corrisponde a nessuna "memoria collettiva" particolare. La massa di informazioni che contiene sarebbe comunque difficilmente incorporabile interamente in una memoria vivente. Ma, mute in se stesse, le tracce del passato conservate nella biblioteca attendono di essere rivitalizzate da domande e da pratiche che trasformino la memoria sociale che vi è contenuta in memoria affettiva, a volte collettiva, a volte individuale.[30]

Social memory constitutes a kind of container that various collective memories of particular groups draw on to extract references from the past that are akin to their own visions. Accordingly, collective memory consists of a collection of elements of the past that a group has experienced, and the appropriation by the group from elements of the social past. In this way, the collective memory of a movement or group, will continue over time, because this group has appropriated the contents of past history that have now become tradition. In this sense, collective memory is the place of synthesis between the materials of social memory and the interests and needs of a group living in the present. (63)

 According to this perspective, social memory is more akin to historical memory than to collective memory. Collective memory envelops individual memories but does not merge with them. On the other hand, individual memory is not something completely isolated, Halbwachs specifies. In order to recall his own past, man needs to have

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[30] Jedlowski, *Memoria, esperienza e modernità. Memorie e società nel XX secolo*, op. cit., p. 63.

recourse to the memories of others. The functioning of individual memory is not possible without those tools that are represented by the language, ideas and words of one's environment. If an individual intends to retrieve memories of a past that he did not witness, such as events in his nation's past, he will retrieve them through newspapers or the testimony of those who were present. In doing so, the individual is forced to put himself back into the memory of others, which although it always remains a memory external to his own. It is in this light that Halbwachs talks about different types of memories.

> Bisognerebbe dunque distinguere in effetti due memorie, che si potrebbero chiamare, volendo, una memoria interiore, o interna, e l'altra esteriore; oppure una memoria personale, e l'altra memoria sociale. Meglio ancora potremmo dire: memoria autobiografica e memoria storica. La prima si gioverebbe dell'aiuto della seconda, poiché dopo tutto la storia della nostra vita fa parte della storia in generale. Ma la seconda, beninteso, sarebbe molto più estesa della prima. D'altra parte, non ci rappresenterebbe il passato che in una forma sintetica, schematica mentre la memoria della nostra vita ci presenterebbe un quadro molto più continuo e più denso.[31]

At this point collective memory and historical memory could be evaluated as the same thing, but the difference between the two is subtle yet fundamental. History is the "objective" telling of the events that constituted a certain past, but these events were at the same time chosen and told according to the needs and rules of the social group that brings them to life and in fact unknown to the protagonists of that historical period that has now passed.

> Se la condizione necessaria perché vi sia memoria è che il soggetto, individuo o gruppo che sia, abbia la sensazione di risalire ai propri ricordi attraverso un movimento continuo, come potrebbe la storia essere una memoria, dal momento che fra la società che legge questa storia e i gruppi che furono un tempo testimoni o attori dei fatti narrati c'è discontinuità? (88)

Then collective memory can be distinguished from history in some respects. If history tends to divide centuries into specific periods, collective memory is interpreted as a

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[31] Halbwachs, La memoria collettiva, P. Jedlowski (a cura di), op. cit., p. 64-65.

stream of thought that represents what of the past still manages to live on in the group's consciousness. Because of its objective nature, history tends to fix events once and for all at a particular time, schematizing events and somehow leaving out the connections between what precedes and what follows. Halbwachs speaks of how each historical period has a specific task to complete; it has a beginning a middle and an end. History also reports in an interval of a few years transformations that took much longer. This may be noticed only after time, but in doing so the collective memory will have the feeling that it has never been interrupted, because in its development there are no lines of demarcation.

> Poiché la memoria di una società si sfalda lentamente lungo i bordi che segnano i suoi confini, mano a mano che i suoi singoli membri, soprattutto i più anziani, scompaiono o si isolano, essa non smette mai di trasformarsi, e il gruppo stesso cambia ininterrottamente. D'altronde è difficile dire in che momento è scomparso un ricordo collettivo, e se è uscito definitivamente dalla coscienza del gruppo, proprio perché basta che si conservi in una parte limitata del corpo sociale perché ve lo si possa sempre ritrovare. (92)

In conclusion, the analysis of collective memory shows how the relationships between the past and the present are quite complex. History asserts Maurice Halbwachs, may present itself as the universal memory of humankind, but each collective memory has for its support a group limited in space and time. When one remembers, it is no longer a matter of reliving things that happened in their reality but of relocating them in frameworks that are external to the groups. Despite the variety of places and times, history reduces events to comparable terms that allows it to tie them together to present a single picture. Collective memory, on the other hand, being made up of multiple collective memories, is inherently constituted by the changes in the groups themselves; which sometimes include old and new generations. Each social group has a different history, but in memory, the similarities that have characterized the history of that group are brought to the forefront. (94)

> Nel momento in cui prende in considerazione il proprio passato, il gruppo sente bene di essere rimasto lo stesso, e prende coscienza della propria identità attraverso il tempo. La

storia, come abbiamo detto, lascia cadere questi intervalli dove in apparenza non succede nulla, dove la vita si limita a ripetersi, sotto forme un pò diverse, ma senza variazioni essenziali, senza rotture né rivoluzioni. Ma il gruppo, che vive innanzitutto e soprattutto per se stesso, mira a perpetuare i sentimenti e le immagini che formano la sostanza del suo pensiero. È allora proprio il tempo che è scorso senza che niente lo abbia modificato profondamente che occupa il posto principale nella sua memoria. (94)

History therefore, studies social groups from the outside and contemplates even a very large time span. Collective memory, on the other hand, reports the internal viewpoint of the social group over a much shorter duration of time than history takes into consideration. It presents an image of itself to the group but making sure that the group can recognize itself in later images as time passes. As Halbwachs defines it, collective memory is a picture of similarities, bearing a fixed image of the group in which the group's relations or contacts with others, however, change within it. It would be paradoxical to claim to preserve the past in the present or vice versa but, it happens that the group gradually fixes its attention on parts of itself that once passed into the background. What must survive are the traits by which one group is distinguished from another. And it is precisely the separation from a group that makes all memories resurface as a united block and even the oldest memories seem more recent and therefore more shareable. (95-96)

2.4 How societies remember: the social context of commemoration

Eventually, to summarize the theses on memory explicated by Jedlowski, it can be shown that for Halbwachs individual memory is always also collective memory, and that memory only symbolizes the continuity of the past in the present if the pictures of the past are continually subjected to a labor of selection, synthesis, and reconstruction. Finally, memory is a factor of identity; the identity of the present that is expressed in certain interpretations of the past. Memory has the capacity to institutionalize itself in practices of commemoration, writing, and archiving that allow certain versions of the past to fix themselves and impose themselves on others.[32] What is most interesting about these theses, Jedlowski points out, is how the past is placed in memory as the object of a construction. Instead of viewing memory as a record of the past, the past is understood as a projection of the present, so memory is understood as manifesting content that is no longer current in the present. (52)

 Although he condones the French philosopher's theses, Jedlowski highlights some problems with this interpretation of memory.

> Essa è sostenibile però solo se è affiancata da un'analisi dei limiti che la struttura del passato stesso pone alla sua ricostruibili. Questi limiti costituiscono le condizioni entro cui l'attività organizzatrice della memoria può esplicitarsi. Concentrandosi sull'aspetto costruttivo della memoria, Halbwachs ha lasciato in ombra questo altro lato del problema. Ma se non lo si considera, la costruzione del passato operata dalla memoria rischia di apparire qualcosa di totalmente arbitrario. (52)

Focusing on the problem of the limits of arbitrariness, Jedlowski draws attention to the study of this issue by the two American authors Barry Schwartz and Michael Schudson. What Schwartz focuses on, for example, is how commemoration is influenced by the social context in which it takes place. He examines American history as represented by the works displayed on the walls and in the halls of the Palace of Congress in Washington. The display of works highlights the selection work that the ruling elite has done over time on past events offered by the nation's commemoration with the resulting

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[32] Jedlowski, Memoria, esperienza e modernità, op. cit., p. 52.

conflicts of interest present from time to time. This study shows that, for example, some historical periods are highlighted at the expense of others. (52)

Barry Schwartz argues that if the object of commemoration is usually found in the past; the issues that motivate to commemorate certain issues and bring them back to life must be found in the present. So when he talks about the magnetism of social origins, he means to explain how certain issues or events are brought back to life from generation to generation depending on the issues, needs and experiences of the group experiencing them from time to time.[33]

> When unity was in question, America's political representatives fell back on the common denominator of founding heroes and celebrated their memory. Once unity was attained, these representatives began to commemorate their past and present bureaucratic leaders. That is to say, they began to focus on the stable structures into which the activities of the founders became routinized (Weber). The result is an iconography that became more present-oriented, less heroic, and less charismatic, a pattern that attested to the fact that America, at last, had become an unrevolution-ary culture. (395)

Schwartz also struggles with Maurice Halbwachs' meaning of the objectivity of history, meaning that certain historical facts were so decisive that they continue to be preserved in the nation's memory. He argues that instead the events that are commemorated must have a factual meaning, which is to say, they must continue to have an internal and present significance for those who bring them to life and commemorate them. With this in mind, he analyzes the iconography of Capitol Hill after the Civil War and notes how those objects that symbolize the unity of the nation are still very much present and visible to all eyes.

> In the last 120 years, the commemoration of America's origins has been enriched by the addition of many works of art. These acquisitions mean that the transformation in commemorative practice inheres not in the displacement of early figures but in the superimposition of more recent, and in many cases less heroic, men and event. (396)

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[33] Schwartz, *The social context of commemoration: a study in Collective Memory*, *Social Forces* 61, no. 2 (1982), p. 395.

He thus concludes by saying that we make a mistake in thinking that the only prerequisite for commemoration is the historical significance of social origin. As American history demonstrates, the events that originated its history and consequently its early leaders are the symbols of the nation's unity not only because of their factual importance; but because these themselves are still objects of consensus among the latest generations. (396)

Another interesting viewpoint that Jedlowki suggests is the one addressed by American sociologist Michael Schudson. He highlights what are the limits of arbitrariness in processes of reconstructing the past. Once again the starting point is the conception of collective memory formulated by Halbwachs, but what is analyzed here is rather the contradiction of different collective memories and how they play a crucial role in the processes of reconstructing the past. In his work *Preservation of the Past in Mental Life* (1987), Schudson makes a distinction between three factors that influence and limit this process of reconstruction. The first of these is what he calls the structure of the available past. Social groups do not have all the material needed to reconstruct the past, but the (potentially infinite) material that is available to them, can be bent to the interpretation of their own will. To explain this concept Schudson examines slavery in American society. The phenomenon of slavery can be interpreted by society in different ways, infact some events have been forgotten or successfully ignored. Some parts of our history are therefore inescapable whether they are convenient or not. Reconstruction of the past is confined within the experiences of one's own tradition but sometimes it is even more confined within the limits of those elements that have become salient to a group or individual.

> There is what I will calI a rhetorical structure to social organization that gives prominence to some facets of the past and not others. Once commemoration gets underway, it picks up steam; it operates by a logic and force of its own. Not only are records kept, diaries saved, and news accounts written, but statues are built, museums are endowed, brass plaques are engraved and placed in sidewalks and on the walls of buildings. Certainly the statues can be destroyed, the museum exhibits redone, the

plaques removed--but this is not easy to do and may well create public controversy that revives rather than erases memory.[34]

Schudson also brings other examples to explain this concept. For example, when a novel becomes a classic, it is treated as a great work of art and is canonized in schools, conferences, etc. According to recent studies, this happens not only because of the aesthetic value of the work but mainly because of the political, economic and social relationships that the author or publishers or friends possess. In this way the work acquires a rhetorical power that is perpetuated; in turn influencing culture and with culture the tradition, since tradition is first and foremost our language. This can also happen in other fields such as science where a work is credited to a famous author despite the fact that the main work was not done by him or her but by recent graduate students or academically less influential colleagues. (8)

The second limitation to past reconstruction identified by Schudson involves the combination of socio-psychological observations, which he calls the structure of individual choices and he divides into four categories; trauma, vicarious trauma, channel, and commitment. Trauma is seen as an integral part of people's experiences. For example, Americans not only had to come to terms with slavery as the Germans did with the Holocaust, but they will have to continue to do so repeatedly. The past therefore influences and shapes consciousness, so much so that it triggers mechanisms that enable it to avoid whatever is perceived as a danger that can be likened to that trauma. (8)

 The second category that of vicarious trauma, is related to empathy between groups.

> We might call "vicarious trauma" simply "lessons" since it is the task of much of education to instill in newcomers (children, new recruits to an organization, new immigrants to an established community) not only information about the past but appropriate emotional orientations to it. It should be clear that this includes not only aspects of the past regarded with horror but other aspects regarded with pride. (9)

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[34] Schudson, *Preservation of the Past in Mental Life*, p. 7.

Regarding channels, Schudson reporting on James Coleman's analysis of political conflicts in America, agrees with him in noting that one feature that differentiates communities is the different ways they respond to conflicts. Rare and unique events thus have such an influence on groups that they perpetuate themselves in the consciousness of groups far beyond the original event. Finally, when he speaks of commitment, he means to point out how groups are in some way loyal to a social commitment that concerns and makes the group united. This loyalty is part of the groups' identity organization. (10)

The final limitation identified by Schudson is what he calls the intersubjective conflicts among choosers. People's ability to reconstruct the past is limited by the fact that other people try to do the same thing but in doing so different reconstructions of the past clash with each other. The past in this way becomes a ground of conflict for groups (individuals, organizations, classes, nations) as some groups have more power than others and thus more "right" to impose their views on those of others. Schudson concludes by saying that reconstruction of the past is of fundamental importance to the social sciences, but history tends to reduce social theory to facts, laws and events.

> But if it is true, as I believe it is, that social science will arrive at better understandings of the world only as it better specifies the appropriate contexts for its generalizations, the past has to be incorporated into social science theory, not set aside. (10)

2.5 Memorial rites and the problem of transmission across generations

Once again it is important to emphasize and diversify the differences between the work of history and that of memory. The work of historical reconstruction does not properly depend on the memory of society however it can receive considerable impetus from it, and sometimes significantly alter the historical memory of social groups. Another interesting analysis on this perspective is offered by the work of social anthropologist Paul Connerton. He points out how all totalitarianisms have systematically employed their power to deprive citizens of their memory. It is precisely when the mental conditioning of the subjects of a totalitarian regime begins that the process of memory removal begins. What is most frightening about totalitarian regimes, in addition to the trampling of human dignity, especially the fear that there will be no one left to bear new witness to the past.[35] Connerton, too, in his studies on the memory of societies, acknowledges the importance of Maurice Halbwachs' work. According to the French philosopher's theories, when we answer questions that others ask us we have recourse to our memory but it is intrinsically linked to people, places, speech, and linguistic forms that we share with others. Halbwachs, Connerton argues, does not differentiate between recent memories and past memories because what puts memories on the same level is not temporal contiguity but the communion of interests and ideas of groups.

> I gruppi sociali forniscono agli individui degli schemi all'interno dei quali si collocano le loro memorie e le memorie vengono fissate da una specie di distribuzione topografica. Noi collochiamo ciò che ricordiamo entro gli spazi mentali forniti dal gruppo. Ma questi spazi mentali- ripete Halbwachs- hanno sempre come punto di riferimento gli spazi materiali che occupano determinati gruppi sociali. (44)

Assuming that Halbwachs believes that different segments of societies with different pasts will have different memories that depend on the different mindsets of the group in question; Connerton points out some shortcomings of this theory. He focuses attention on how collective memories are transmitted within the same social group from one generation to the next. What Halbwachs seems to have forgotten to consider, Connerton

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[35] Connerton, *Come le società ricordano*, Roma, Armando editore, 1999, p. 21-22.

argues, is that images of the past and knowledge of the past related to remembrance are nurtured by acts that can sometimes be ritual. Halbwachs seems to want to try to explain this "generational" problem by bringing in the example of the transmission of family memory. This type of transmission is represented by the case of grandparents, who transmit their memories to their grandchildren through stories. Connerton wants to pay particular attention to the translational activities that enable collective memory. To do this he pines attention to particular types of repetitions, such as memorial rites or activities of bodily life, which through their repetitiveness compose the memories of society. (47)

Connerton examines problems and implications of ritual actions, starting with a definition provided by Lukes, who argues that ritual actions are activities governed by symbolic norms that direct its participants to feelings of special importance to them. He describes ritual actions as actions that are not merely expressive, in that they have the function of arousing feelings. Continuing in this line of thought, he states that ritual actions are also not merely formal because these activities are felt by those who practice them. Ritual actions, he continues, also have the power to influence non ritual mental behaviors and attitudes. (54)

> Sebbene definiti secondo spazio e tempo, gli atti rituali sono anche - per così dire - permeabili. Essi sono ritenuti significativi perché hanno valore nei confronti di un insieme di successive azioni non rituali per l'intera vita di una comunità. (55)

Connerton therefore views ritual action as performative and not merely symbolic. In doing so he concludes that commemorative celebrations remind a community of its identity as it is represented through what he calls the narrative-master. It is a kind of collective variant of individuals' personal memory, that is, making sense of the past as a kind of collective autobiography but with cognitive elements. Worship reiterated in narrative-masters is not only a story told, in fact is an image of the past which is transmitted and supported by rituals. What is remembered in commemorative celebrations is added to a collectively organized variant of personal and cognitive memory. For celebrations to be persuasive to their participants they do not have to be

cognitively competent but rather accustomed to such manifestations. This inclination, Connerton argues, is found in the performative character of celebrations, in their representativeness. (80-81)

Commemoration is thus an important aspect of memory that several sociologists focus on. If Connerton talks about the performativity of ritual actions to explain how social groups manage to pass on their memories from generation to generation, Jedlowski's remarks about commemoration as an institutionalization of memories are extremely interesting. When he talks about commemoration he takes as an example the institutionalization of memories of violent deaths by political groups; such as those who fell in war or those who were unjustly killed by a hand that is not intended to be legitimized. In these types of cases Jedlowski assimilates commemoration to grieving, in that to commemorate in this case means "not to forget" and to turn the life of those who are gone into a reminder. Conflict arises when those who want to remember clash with the will of those who killed, because the latter will want to make their crime forgotten or will try to legitimize it in retrospect by calling it by a different name.[36]

> La commemorazione, da elaborazione di un lutto, diventa dunque *nome del passato.* La scelta di chi commemorare, quando, con che parole, è una scelta carica di implicazioni: esprime una *valutazione*. E gruppi diversi, che hanno valori e giudizi diversi, vogliono ricordare eventi e persone diverse, con nomi diversi. (99)

Totalitarian regimes, Jedlowski continues, have always imposed their own versions of the past through terror; but through their struggles, citizens are able to bring to life what the regimes want to cover up. Institutionalized remembrance, according to the sociologist, also alienates those who provided the initial impetus for this celebration. He speaks of the objectification of remembrance. Insofar as remembrance has become part of an 'official' discourse, it is as if by commemorating, a project is affirmed. There is a further problem Jedlowski points out, which is that when the elites embodied by institutions do not enjoy much credit, the charge of remembrance tends to disappear. Therein lies the problem of the transmission of memory between generations.

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[36] Jedlowski, *Memoria, esperienza e modernità*, p. 99.

Remembrance being institutionalized When the transmission of remembrance has to convey something unpleasant, a scandal, a wound it can no longer function, it can no longer account for evil. Negative remembrance, argues Jedlowski, is a paradox in that we attempt to oppose evil by commemorating the victims of that same evil. (101)

> La "positività" della commemorazione- volta a interpretare, a educare, a sostenere la "buona identità" e il progetto di un gruppo- occulta proprio ciò che pretende di mostrare: il danno, la morte. Che è la violenza di ciò che non è interpretabile, che ammutolisce ogni educatore, che mina ogni identità e rende penoso ogni progetto. (101)

According to Jedlowski, the repetition of remembrance through the excessive amount of rumors and information that characterize society often means that these voices do not really reach anyone. The most frequent reaction then, is that of indifference . In disputing this excess of images, he also refers, for example, to film production that celebrates historical events significant for a nation. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, is a good example of a narrative that aims to bring post-war generations closer to the atrocious events of Nazism. But throughout what is told is an aseptic tale, depicted on screen in an indirect way. Historical memory then lives on if it can pass as a memory that moves from one person to another but always concerning them. The information passed on then must be embedded in experience otherwise it is in danger of being merely silence. (102)

2.6 Remembering the colonial past: myths and tales of "Italiani brava gente"

The image of the good-natured and friendly Italian has managed to establish itself in the collective imagination worldwide. The definition Italiani brava gente, refers to the supposed benevolent characters of Italian people, making them strangers to inhumanity. Historian Angelo Del Boca, traces this myth back as early as Italy's first colonial policy in 1885, as the country attempted to characterize its colonization campaign by always showing itself to be humane and a bringer of civilization, as its history shows.

> Essi sono però alla pari – certamente secondi ai nazisti – degli altri popoli che, nello stesso periodo di tempo, hanno promosso campagne coloniali e hanno preso parte agli ultimi due conflitti mondiali. Gli italiani, però, si differenziano nettamente dagli altri popoli per il continuo ricorso a uno strumento autoconsolatorio, il mito degli «italiani brava gente», che ha coperto, e continua a coprire, tante infamie.[37]

This portrayal of the Italian as a victim rather than an offender can be found in numerous postwar films and productions. The causes of this eyesight can be attributed to a number of things. Claudio Fogu, in his work on Italian memory policies, points to three reasons for this phenomenon. First, he speaks of a "divided memory," in that Italy after the wars found itself to be a country divided geographically and politically.

> For twenty months, between September 43 and April 45, the Italian peninsula was divided into a Nazi-occupied and fascist-administered center-north, and an Allied-liberated south under the formal authority of the Italian monarchy; the resistance movement and the Nazi-fascist repression of civilians were therefore an almost exclusively northern phenomena. In the south the long- lasting Allied liberation rapidly overshadowed the memory of the brief German occupation.[38]

For this reason, Fogu highlights the fact that the postwar identification of the war with the partisan Resistance caused the marginalization of the memory of Southern Italians and all those communities that had suffered the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi-

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[37] Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire*, Vicenza, Neri Pozza, 2010-2012 (e-book), versione originale 2005, p. 139.

[38] Fogu, Italiani brava gente, *The Legacy of fascist historical culture on italian politics of memory*, p. 149.

Fascist military. Not only that, but the Resistance established as a symbol of anti-fascism was one of the foundations on which the young democratic Italian Republic was built and on which the Communist Party built its discursive strategy to assert its national democracy. The Republic had become Western Italy's main political instrument for the defense of human rights. (149)

The second factor that allows the Resistance to be associated with anti-fascism is the monumentalization of the so-called biennium, which succeeded in marginalizing the memory of those who lived under the regime.

> In the immediate aftermath of the war and for at least the next four decades the double image of Fascism as a parenthesis in Italian history and an external virus that had penetrated its healthy historical body-famously elaborated by the liberal philosopher Benedetto Croce sustained and legitimized both public amnesia regarding the ventennio and the historicization of the biennio as the true face of Italian national identity. (149)

The process of forgetting all areas related to the regime's foreign policy began immediately after the war, with the gradual erasure of the memory of Italian anti-Semitism and racism. Ultimately, Fogu argues that the enduring image of the Italian good person was purposely created to purge fascism of its executioner traits. The last feature of the process of historicizing and monumentalizing fascism were provided by fascism itself. In its two decades of power, the fascist regime was able to provide rituals related to the commemoration of Italy's national past from the Risorgimento to the Great War, and it engaged in the great effort of shaping a specific fascist historical imagination as a historical agent. (149)

If Italians in the postwar era were successful at reinventing themselves as antifascist, it was not only by forgetting that they (or a majority of them) ever were fascist but also by transfiguring the historical imaginary they had under the regime. (149)

2.7 The German villain, a longtime enemy in Italian memory

One of the other themes on which the rhetoric of the Italian good person was based was the comparison with the bad Germans. In the collective memory of Italians, the Germans have always represented the atavistic enemy. The two countries saw their forces clash since the nineteenth century, all the way to World War II against which partisan Italy redeemed the Nazi-fascist wave. This negative association of German in Italy's collective memory played a fundamental function in the process of building national identity and eliminating blame. Representatives of the republican ruling classes used these images for the formation of a common Italian memory, which leveraged the atrocities committed by the German neighbors.

> Nella coscienza collettiva pare sedimentata un'immagine tipizzata: l'immagine del tedesco arrogante e brutale, convinto della propria superiorità razziale rispetto all'italiano e pronto ad imporla in ogni occasione, il volto senza umanità dell'automa freddo e insensibile, abituato ad eseguire senza batter ciglio qualsiasi ordine superiore e a compiere senza pietà le stragi più turpi; l'immagine del sanguinario "carnefice", del "boia" responsabile dell'efferata uccisione di tanti italiani inermi, alle Fosse Ardeatine, a Marzabotto, a Cefalonia, nelle centinaia di luoghi teatro di stragi ed eccidi.[39]

Making the Germans appear to be horrible invaders involves the tendency to make comparisons between the actions of German and Italian soldiers and their attitudes toward the conquered populace. Italian press and publicity remained silent about the complicity between the two troops, and highlighted the great characteristics of solidarity and goodness of the Italians toward the conquered peoples. Schadenfreude, the famous German characteristic of feeling joy over the misfortunes of others, represented the benchmark par excellence in comparing and distinguishing the brutalities of the two armies. Focardi explains how many anti-fascist intellectuals and historians such as Gaetano Salvemini, for example, had focused on anthropological characteristics between the German barbarian who acted like an automaton and killed coldly and mercilessly; and the Italian who instead tended to fraternize with the peoples with

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[39] Focardi, *L'immagine del cattivo tedesco e il mito del bravo italiano. La costruzione della memoria del fascismo e della seconda guerra mondiale in Italia*, p. III

whom they came in contact. The defense of the Italian soldier actually concealed very specific political objectives. Both the anti-fascist left and the more monarchical and conservative circles aimed to highlight these differences and justify the Italian with the aim of negotiating in peace treaties, thus preventing Italy from paying the demands made by the United States, which wanted to impose territorial reductions and reparations payments on the country. In this regard, Focardi reports the words of diplomat Mario Luciolli who tended to downplay the damage done by the Italians. (65-69)

Focardi asserts that the comparison deployed by antifascist politics, which aimed to emphasize the differences between the "naturally" fierce character of Nazis and the "accidentally" evil character of Italians, remained a strongly political need. The goal was to separate the responsibility of the Italian people, who were now to be reborn from the ashes of fascism, from the politics of Mussolini's regime. Intellectuals such as Benedetto Croce and others from the moderate area of the country, had ensured that in order to avoid a punitive peace for the Italian people, a true and in-depth analysis of the relationship between the Italians and Fascism was lacking, even Palmiro Togliatti had argued that Fascism had failed to penetrate deep into the soul of the Italian people. (161)

The two different visions of fascism and Nazism were respectively reinforced by the press and the works of various artists who painted specific images of the Duce and the Führer, placing them more than once on different levels. Hitler was described as a satanic person, the antichrist by definition. Though demonized, Hitler came across as such a great figure, a ruthless bloodthirsty dictator, that Mussolini by comparison came across as a mediocre figure, as a cocky autodidact, a narcissist with a taste for drama. If the Duce was a ruthless bloodthirsty leader, a real tyrant; Mussolini was a practically comic figure. Remarking on this difference was important because behind it lay the relationship dictators had with their subjects. What was always emphasized by the Italian press was how Mussolini had impersonated and exploited only some of the vices of the nation's character unlike Hitler who had found fertile ground in his people, who

were already naturally inclined to reason and have their own racist and anti-Semitic aspirations, all demonstrated by the fact that the Führer had come to power through free elections. (163-164)

2.8 How not to come to terms with one's past, colonial oblivion and the processing of loss.

The scholar Francesco Filippi uses the enduring characteristics of the Italians more than once in his works. After the Second World War, the *Bel Paese* lost all of its possessions; as a result, unlike some other countries, it did not experience the phenomenon of decolonization. This process, or the transition of subject territories from the condition of dominion to that of independence. This procedure favors a subsequent discussion on the role and accountability of former colonial powers in countries with a long history of colonization. Shifts in forces following World War II saw Italy gradually lose power over its former colonies to other powers. Italy's inability to keep up with decolonization causes any concrete analysis of the past to be forgotten; conversely, everything good found in the colonies is traced back to the Italian period.[40] But how did the Italians perceive the end of their rule? What was the impact of the colonial system on the collective and public memory of Italians? Filippi explains about how Italian policy, once it took note of international placement, had the season of colonialism filed away very quickly. Moreover, subsequent governments tried to make foreign policy by exploiting the very issues of decolonization.

> Una politica «internazionalista e terzomondista» che caratterizzerà la politica estera della Repubblica. Una mossa sensata: dato che, giocoforza, non si hanno più colonie, tanto vale giocare la carta della potenza europea attenta alle nuove dinamiche di quelli che, con un triste eufemismo, vengono chiamati «Paese in via di sviluppo». (126-127)

The newly born democratic republic repudiates the regime and proclaims itself anti-fascist, after the Resistance experience it seems to no longer have to come to terms with its colonial past by not recognizing it as its own. «È uno schema concettuale messo in campo già nei confronti della memoria del fascismo stesso: scaricare sul fascismo qualsiasi colpa e poi dichiarato espulso dall'eredità memoriale - e quindi dalla responsabilità storica - degli italiani.» (128)

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[40] Filippi, *Noi però gli abbiamo fatto le strade. Le colonie italiane tra bugie, razzismi e amnesie*, p. 114,124.

Moreover, while all the defeats of European imperialism are reported in great detail, the image that spreads of Italian colonialism is the image of a colonialism that did not produce the same damage as the others. A comparison arises with the other former powers, which in the meantime begin to serve their sentences. There is leverage on what of Italian lingers in neighborhoods, such as the architecture of cities like Mogadishu, Asmara or Tripoli. Even the fact that it was the British army that drove out the Italians and not the local population is used as justification for the idea that the local populations had never been hostile toward their colonizers. This false image also causes republican governments to refuse to bring Italian war criminals accused of atrocities committed in the colonies to international justice. Out of all of them for example, Rodolfo Graziani the architect of the Addis Ababa Massacre whose final death toll amounted to about 19,000 people. (132)

The title of Filippi's work *Noi però gli abbiamo fatto le strade* (2021) turns out to be interesting and representative of the phenomenon by which the Italians after World War II managed to create the rhetoric of the good Italian who will be remembered rather than for the use of poison gas on African populations, for building them cities and bringing modern infrastructure to those backward lands. Evidence of these "charitable acts" is provided by the documentaries and newsreels of the Luce Institute from the 1930s onward. Fascist propaganda makes the most of the idea of ancient Romans building roads, bridges and bringing modernity.

> Date le limitatissime altre fonti di informazione disponibili sulle colonie di quel tempo, quello delle strade diventa un vero e proprio topos coloniale, rimasto in piedi anche dopo la perdita dell'impero d'oltremare. Ancora oggi fra i presunti tratti positivi delle invasioni italiane in particolare in Africa c'è lo sviluppo della rete viaria. (137)

In reality, the few usable stretches built did not produce visible effects on the economy, and moreover they became the main routes on which the British attacked Italian possessions. Roads and infrastructure remained a narrative topos that helped shape the judgment regarding the experience of Italian colonialism. What remains in memory is constructed from the propaganda narratives of Italic civilization.

2.9 Remembrance as an intention, the relationship between self-critical memory and modernity

Paolo Jedlowski in his work *Intenzioni di memoria* (2016), gives examples of the trend that spread in the 1960s of counterposing "good Italians" against "bad Germans," using cinematic examples of the time. The first film cited is Florestano Vancini's *La lunga notte del '43* (The Long Night of '43), which takes a short story by writer Giorgio Bassani. The tale tells the story of the assassination of eleven citizens by the hands of troops of the Republic of Salò that took place in November 1943 in Ferrara. This film is interesting in that the tragic murder takes place before the eyes of a pharmacist who lies and says he saw nothing. The producers of the film at first suggested to the director that he attribute the massacre to the Germans, r iding the wave of demonization of Germany, respecting what the audience would have wanted to hear and see but Vancini objected. What Jedlowski points out is how the attitude of the protagonist, who decides to keep silent about leaving his country and emigrating to Switzerland, precisely this silence strikes the viewer and at the same time questions him. The choice to have the fascists carry out the massacre is an important choice made by the director. In this case one can speak of self-critical memory, because he does not attribute crimes to others but recognizes those of his own group.[41]

> Allo spettatore di questo film arriva insomma un messaggio duplice: se da un lato gli è proposta una ricostruzione del passato che lo interpella in quanto italiano, dall'altro gli si chiede se della rimozione di quel passato non sia per caso, complice. Inviare un messaggio come questo è l'espressione di un atteggiamento specifico nei confronti del passato: è un'intenzione di memoria. (9)

Once again Jedlowski dwells on the importance of remembering. Remembering or not remembering corresponds to intentions. Memory, can be exercised like a muscle. There are mnestic phenomena that play a definite role, e.g., rituals, monuments, educational programs; they express the will of a group to remember something and continue to do

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[41] Jedloswki, *Intenzioni di memoria. Sfera pubblica e memoria autocritica,* p. 7-8.

so over time. At the same time, censorships, omissions or intentional manipulations are evidence of the intention to forget and make forgotten. (11)

Returning to the concept of collective memory, that is, the social representations concerning the past that a group produces, institutionalizes, cherishes and transmits through the interactions of its members. Regardless of whether these events occur during the lifetime of current members or relate to a more distant past, such memory endures and serves the function of cognitively and symbolically sustaining the sense of a collective identity. Collective memory becomes institutionalized in the sense that it is realized in specific practices such as in places of worship or recurring commemorations. These practices can therefore be based on shared and consensual criteria or be the subject of conflict. The power to create and stabilize memory is closely related to a society's power relations; thus the main function of collective memory is to foster cohesion among a social group and ensure its identity.[42]

> Le rappresentazioni collettive del passato servono a legittimare le credenze della società e ad ispirarne i progetti, legittimando così le élite che li incarnano: quanto più una società è complessa e quante più élite diverse competono per il predominio, tanto più la definizione del passato è oggetto di strategie volte ad imporre le rappresentazioni che meglio si conformano agli interessi dominanti. (113)

Jedlowski draws attention on the function that memory has in selecting and interpreting the past from the perspective of present interests and problems, and prompts questions about the extent to which it can reconstruct the past by arbitrarily transforming the image of a group. Recalls, in this regard, Schudson's arguments on the limits of the arbitrariness of reconstructions of the past that are represented by the plurality of collective memories living within a society. It is thus inferred that collective memory can often be said to be "serving" different interests (national, regional, ethnic) that groups and individuals use to satisfy their own needs. At the same time then, memory is linked to identity but is what can contradict this identity itself. (114-115)

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[42] Jedlowski, *Memoria, esperienza e modernità. Memorie e società nel XX secolo*, p. 112.

Jedlowski concludes his reflection on memory by considering it in relation to modernity. He argues that the innovation that most influences memory is the introduction of printing, which enables the spread of writing and thus the progressive externalization of memory. Subsequently, technology began to offer increasingly precise tools for fixing the past. Modernity, characterized by rationality, looks at memory with an instrumental attitude, so it is valorized by it according to the aspects that are most consistent with its purposes. (118-119)

The problem of processing the past with regard to traumatic events of the past such as the Holocaust, or persecution of different kinds, testifies how memory in modernity has the function of inviting societies to consciously rethink past events in order not to repeat the same mistakes again. At the same time Jedlowski warns, like any communicative excess the multiplication of commemorations can generate a sterilization of emotions. The cult of memory can in some cases foster a deresponsibilization towards the present and the future, and in many cases divert attention away from other "uncomfortable memories" such as those related to the colonialist past of European countries. It is in this type of reasoning that the analysis carried out on the memories of Italian colonialism falls. Any memory, the sociologist reasons, cannot exist without its oblivion. The excess of memory will trigger an oblivion, or a sterilization and trivialization of memory itself. From the perspective of the contemporary world, steeped in fast media processes prone to overproduction of images and stimuli, the process of forgetting becomes almost inevitable. First of all insofar as it is part of the very nature of human subjectivity, on the other hand by actual intentional processes.

> La censura delle informazioni è bandita dalle moderne società democratiche, ma l'insieme dei media può veicolare con facilità disinformazioni sistematiche o generare dimenticanze, favorito in ciò dal ritmo stesso con cui ogni giorno nuovi messaggi si incalzano.[43]

The final type of memory that Jedlowski takes into account is public sector memory. In the first place, he explains that public memory is the venue for confronting collective

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[43] Jedlowski, *Memoria, esperienza e modernità. Memorie e società nel XX secolo*, p. 123.

memories that exist outside of a society, and in the second place, he explains that the processes used to develop public memory are those through which the criteria for plausibility are defined and the patrimony of social memory is chosen and presented to society. Even public memory is exposed to the realms of politics and business and asserts itself in the service of groups of people. This kind of preservation could put society at risk by encouraging people to reflect freely on their past and learn from their experiences. (123)

In conclusion, Jedlowski forecasts that through practices, the past's contents, and hence memory, may survive in society. In terms of practices, he means any type of social group characteristic that develops through time and has the capacity to change in response to the changing demands of life. Therefore, the paradosso of memory is characterized by the tendency of the past to structure the present through its own past events, but it is the present itself that chooses which of these past events to treat and which to ignore.

> La capacità di raccontare sempre di nuovo la storia è la capacità di dialogare con il nostro passato: ciò che, in senso proprio, è l'aspetto essenziale della nostra esperienza. (125-126)

Memory, a topic long discussed in various disciplines such as religion, philosophy or psychology; has been analyzed by sociologists as a set of activities that consider the past and reassess it through the terms of the present. The activities of interpreting the past is what has been chosen to focus on in the present work, with a view to an analysis and understanding of the memories of Italian colonialism. In order to explain how the postwar generations consider and evaluate their country's past, it was analyzed and highlighted how the processes of selecting the past are based on the consensual criteria. Jedlowski speaks precisely of memory intentions, drawing on sociological analyses in this field that highlight how the reevaluation of the past is often dependent on the power relations existing in a given society. In this sense, the issue of commemorative practices was considered, which as has been pointed out, if they do not take place consciously in the minds of members of a society and if they do not experience them, they risk to

remain empty celebrations of meaning. Often, the reevaluation of past events, if they have been found to be inconvenient to a society's reputation, has been directed at the free will of the elites governing that society. The elaboration of one's past therefore, often turns out to be a "commanded" process, with the aim of constructing an identity not infrequently conditioned by social, political and economic motives.

> The paradox of memory is the same as that referred to by the 'hermeneutic circle': the past structures the present through its legacy, but it is the present that selects this legacy, preserving some aspects and forgetting others, and which constantly reformulates our image of this past by repeatedly recounting the story.[44]

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44 Jedlowski, P. *Memory and Sociology. Time & Society*, *10*(1), 29–44., 2001, https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463x01010001002.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Italian post-colonial studies, a delay translated into literature

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new literary phenomenon emerged in the Italian cultural landscape, spurred by the escalating migration from North African and Eastern European nations as well as the widespread rediscovery of the works of foreign authors who had relocated to Western nations. From decade to decade, the phenomena known as postcolonial studies became stronger, occupying more and more space among readers, publishing outlets, the academic community, etc. Such writings first arise in the middle of the 1990s, when female authors from former Italian colonies for example Somalia's Shirin Ramzanali Fazel published her novel *Far from Mogadishu* in 1994, or ten years later Igiaba Scego with *Rhoda.* Over the course of the decade, the production sees a multiplication of various texts to the point where it is now known as Italian postcolonial literature. The perspective of these women writers, is that of those who have suffered colonial violence. The contribution, among many, that must be credited to these works is that of having provided and providing occasions for reflection on the removal of the colonial period from Italian historical memory. The term postcolonial might be dissonant when thought of in relation to Ethiopia, since the latter, as has been analyzed, was not properly colonized by the Italians, rather invaded and occupied for a certain period of time. However, colonization left a profound mark culturally, linguistically and socio-politically. Colonial memories in Italy played a minor role compared to the impact they had in foreign literatures such as French or English. The general Italian delay (first of all from the point of view of migration policies), is one of the reasons for this slow process of recovery of colonial memories. Sandra Ponzanesi analyzes and explains how new immigrants in Italy, through autobiographical narratives, are managing to bring out the stories of Italy's colonial past. Memory at this point merges with history and the personal experiences of people who clash with the policies of a country that continues to suffer from a backwardness purposely created by those who have held power for the past eighty years. Ponzanesi highlights that part of the writers from the Horn of Africa are women, unlike the first wave of writers (1980s-90s), who were predominantly male.

The reason for this phenomenon would lie in the fact that many of these women migrated independently, without reuniting with husbands and relatives, and thus had to find ways to support their families economically.[45] In addition to the autobiographical works of African writers, there is also specifically diasporic writing. It is the case of Ethiopian authors who have migrated to the United States and Canada, such as the most recent Nega Mezlekia with *Notes from the Hyena's Belly. An Ethiopian Boyhood* published in 2000 and Maaza Mengiste with the acclaimed *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (2010) and *The Shadow King* (2019).

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[45] S. Ponzanesi, 2000, "The Past Holds No Terror? Colonial memories and Afro-Italian Narratives", *Wasafiri*, 15:31, 16-19.

3.2 The Shadow King by Maaza Mengiste: a change of perspective

Maaza Mengiste is an Ethiopian author and essayist who focuses particularly on her native country while writing on topics including migration, war, exile, and revolutions. She is renowned for being a human rights campaigner. She was born in 1971 in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia. Her family was forced to leave Ethiopia as a result of the 1974 coup d'état, and her three maternal uncles were all among the casualties. This event had a significant impact on both her personal and professional life. Before settling in the US, she lived in Nigeria and Kenya. She studied creative writing at Queens College at the University of New York, where she is currently a visiting assistant professor of creative writing. Her latest novel *The Shadow King*, has been critically acclaimed and shortlisted for the 2020 boozer prize. The novel is divided into four books with the chapters interspersed with different headings that she titles *Photo*, *Chorus* and *Interlude*. The work of researching, writing and revising the book took the writer a full 10 years. The result of this long writing can be seen in the complexity of the work's language, which at the same time makes it extremely lyrically.

We are in Ethiopia and it is 1974. In the *Prologue* we are introduced to the novel's protagonist, a young woman named Hirut who is intent on delivering a box containing personal belongings, to a man who is an old acquaintance. The story will be taken back, in the first chapter entitled *Invasion*, to 1935 during the Italian invasion of the country. What may initially appear to be a story of war turns out to be much more from the very first pages. A coming-of-age novel but also a historical novel, *The Shadow King* tells of how Ethiopian women were a key element in the resistance against the advancing Italian army. All the characters in the novel are masterfully described by Mengiste, who manages to create a level of empathy and self-identification between reader and stories. The intention of the women is to fight with the men, not just give birth to children and console troops. In other words, they aspire to be more than what the outside world perceives them to be. In several interviews the author explains that the initial idea for the book was to tell the story she had always been accustomed to hear as a child, namely that of the Ethiopian army resisting and winning against Mussolini's army. Once

the research for the book began, the author realized how much she actually did not know about this war, especially about the role the women played. In a recent interview, Mengiste explains how her research came about over the years, and tells how she first approached the history of women who fought in the war by doing oral research in Ethiopia itself. Talking with her mother and close relatives, the writer was pleasantly shocked that the story she was writing bore a great deal of resemblance to the real history of her family, especially the experience of her grandmother, who was one of those women warriors. Concerning specifically the transmission of these stories, the interviewer asks Mengiste what she thinks are the differences in the way of transmitting the memory between different cultures, Mengiste replies:

> I think when we talk about war, when we talk about bravery in a conflict, we automatically look towards stories about men and about boys. We think that aggression is the territory of men and it's masculine, and I do imagine what my mother and her sisters might have thought when they're talking about my great-grandmother but never moving that story to me or to my brother or anyone else in our family. As far as I know I think what happens is the story of women is kept within the world of women and no one thinks that what is spoken in the kitchen is as important as what's spoken in a boardroom or in the university. Women are the carriers of history as much as anything but because those stories happen within their spaces no one thinks that that's important including the women themselves.[46]

Another interesting question posed by the interviewer concerns the difficulties encountered in Rome while researching in Italian libraries and state archives. Mengiste's answer is quite interesting and sums up in a few simple pictures the attitude of Italians to a foreigner researching Italy's colonial past.

> One day I was in Rome in the "Discoteca di Stato"[47], I was there to look at speeches and anything that had been recorded, and it was my first day there so they asked me to fill out a form with my name and what you need. So I filled the file with anything I needed like the recordings of the fascist period, the colonial era, anything from 1935 to 1941. Then I gave it to this woman, the librarian, and she took it and she looked at it

[46] You Tube (9 Marzo 2020). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeWuGKhQUOU&t=158s, Spotlite by Literanda.

[47] Central Institute for Sound and Audiovisual Assets.

and then she looked at me and she said "un attimo! Hold on!" and she ran to the office. While I was waiting there I saw three heads pop up right at the office and they look at me and they go back into the office, so I just wait and a gentleman comes out and he said "ok we will have the things for you" [...]. There's a chair next to me in this room and a man comes up with a stack of files so he sets the things down he pulls up the chair, sits down and he keeps saying "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry for what we did to your people I'm so sorry. There are three things Italians are ashamed of Mussolini, mafia and Berlusconi!"[48]

Mengiste states that every single interaction with those people made her realize that the history of colonialism is a difficult slice of history for Italians who have not yet fully addressed it. At the same time, the writer recounts how she also had other kinds of encounters that were not as pleasant, when the people she came in contact with became agitated and tried to get rid of her as soon as possible. She concludes her thoughts by reiterating that this kind of history needs to be brought to the table, to be addressed and passed on, but at the same time she declares herself positive as conversations of this kind are beginning to take place in Italy even outside of universities and academic venues.

The Shadow King enfolds several themes, starting with the experience of the Ethiopian War and the resistance of colonial occupation, Mengiste works from several points of view. Mainly that of the protagonist Hirut, which is opposed from the very first pages to that of the book's other female protagonist Aster. Secondarily also the point of view of the Italians, such as General Carlo Fucelli and the photographer Ettore Navarra. The point of view of the colonized therefore is not the only point of view from which the story is told. Mengiste's skill lies precisely in this; the devastation of war floods two peoples and two civilizations equally, and the suffering of those whose homes are destroyed and loved ones are slaughtered leaves neither victims nor perpetrators impartial.

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[48] You Tube (9 Marzo 2020). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeWuGKhQUOU&t=158s, Spotlite by Literanda.

3.2.1. Narrative structure, characters and main themes

The narrative structure of *The Shadow King* is unusual and at first glance it is difficult to interpret, because it is interspersed with special sections. The sections entitled Chorus, report the story in sung form, and the voice comes from a chorus that narrates the exploits of the warring Ethiopians and the protagonist Hirut. The Interlude sections are entirely dedicated to Emperor Halie Selassie; through these parts the reader is informed about the emperor's movements and his decisions regarding the war. Finally, the sections entitled Photos, describe through the photographs taken by the Italian soldier photographer Ettore, the scenes of war, portraying in a rather crude way, too, the people and their actions. The novel consists of 5 main sections, of which the first and last, prologue and epilogue constitute the opening and closing elements that provide the novel with a cyclical structure. Between the prologue and epilogue there is the description of the story of the young protagonist Hirut, who is an orphaned servant girl who works at the home of two Ethiopian nobles. The husband Kidane is a brave warrior who will lead the Ethiopian army against the Italian army, and his wife Aster towards whom Hirut develops mixed feelings, will lead the women into battle. Another character introduced from the earliest pages is the house cook, who will always be referred to simply as "the cook." Mengiste's smooth narration among the different characters makes the reader share in the feelings for each of the three. Sometimes we witness the telling of the same event but from multiple points of view. For instance, the omniscient voice of the novel begins narration of some scenes, which is later continued through the narrative of the chorus or the photographs. Moral judgment is almost reset to zero by the writer who emphasizes the similarities between the characters' experiences and their suffering. In the privacy of the home or on the battlefield, it is the human condition that is taken into account.

Memory plays a key role in the novel. Resistance materializes through different forms, first of all in the form of memory, as the first words of the prologue indicate.

> SHE DOES NOT WANT TO REMEMBER BUT SHE IS here and memory is gathering bones. She has come by foot and by bus to Addis Ababa, across terrain she has chosen

to forget for nearly forty years. She is two days early but she will wait for him, seated on the ground in this corner of the train station, the metal box on her lap, her back pressed against the wall, rigid as a sentinel. She has put on the dress she does not wear every day. Her hair is neatly braided and sleek and she has been careful to hide the long scar that puckers at the base of her neck and trails over her shoulder like a broken necklace. In the box are his letters, le lettere, ho sepolto le mie lettere, è il mio segreto, Hirut, anche il tuo segreto. Segreto, secret, meestir. You must keep them for me until I see you again. Now go. Vatene. Hurry before they catch you.[49]

"She does not want to remember but she is here and memory is gathering bones." This powerful metaphor suggests the fragile condition of young Hirut who is about to make a material and spiritual journey into her own memory. The letters, which contain photos and accounts of the days of her imprisonment, are the living testimony of the suffering she has been trying to bury for 40 years. Hirut makes the last journey of her life to rid herself of that memory, but that memory itself is and will forever be a part of her and the many women who, like her, took part in the resistance. The memory of the pride of Ethiopian people is the foundational core of the resistance; it is the memory of the glorious victories of Adua and the resistance against other invading peoples that never causes the many who enlisted to defend their homeland to lose hope.

One of the novel's defining elements is the constant presence of alternating light and shadow. The Shadow King's title immediately conveys the impression that something will be hidden and reside in the shadows. For Mengiste's characters, moving between light and shadow is an act of escape. Almost every scenario in the book involves light, and the metaphors the author employs suggest that light can take on various shapes and serve a variety of purposes. Light can be "a square box of light," "a drop of sun," and can be at once "tender" as well as "predatory." Light is present when Ethiopians are thrown into pits to die by the Italian army, but it also illuminates scenes of romantic intimacy and at the same time scenes of rape. When Ethiopians utilize glass to reflect coded signals or when an Italian photographer uses light to "catch" Ethiopian detainees in his photographs, light is likewise used as a weapon of war. The most important

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[49] M. Mengiste, *The Shadow King*, Edinburgh, Canongate Books Ltd, 2019, p. 3.

function of light is the creation of shadow. Light and darkness are the main plot devices throughout the entire story. Instead of representing the good/evil duality, this dichotomy expresses the polarity that each human body carries. Internal conflicts and incompatible mental states can be found in every human body. There are several scenes in the novel in which characters seem to disassociate from themselves in order to survive by becoming "shadows." For example when Aster, the wife of the valiant Ethiopian warrior Kidane, is raped by the latter, Mengiste writes:

> she feels herself splitting […] she is not even there even though she is the weight against which she is balancing as if he might drown while he gasps. Her mind grows nimble in the pain and she feels herself leave this stinking room and sweaty man and soon she is hovering over herself, string down at the girl reaching for the sword to split this man in half then make her way home. And then. She is lost and disappearing. (53)

At the same time, Mengiste writes about a different rape scene by the same Kidane, but this time with the young protagonist Hirut. «She watches her own spirit stand from her stained body and walk away» (190).

 The verb splitting expresses the victims' forced desire to disassociate themselves from their bodies in that moment of pain in order to endure and survive by becoming shadows.

The theme of doubles is a recurring theme throughout the novel. Hirut in order to cope with the pain and resist the various forms of suffering inflicted on her, attempts to dissociate herself but at the same time remain aware of who she is. When she is captured by the Italian army along with Aster, Hirut spends her days in a state of mental dissociation staring at the void before her and ignoring the taunts of the Italian guards. The impression the guards get from observing Hirut's behavior exactly describes this dissociation exercise.

> They think she is lost. They think she cannot see herself, double-bodied and split, clothed and naked, young and old, bending toward the priests who reach through the fence and put a hand on both her heads and give her solemn blessings. They think she

has found a way to escape while standing still, but Hirut, daughter of Getey and Fasil, born in the year of a blessed harvest, knows that this is also a way to fight. (366)

Grief splits the characters in the novel into multiple selves. Shadows, often materialize like ghosts in the eyes of the protagonists. For example, Kidane who talks to his deceased son Tesfaye or Emperor Haile Selassie who is haunted by his daughter who died at the age of 16, toward whom he harbors feelings of guilt for forcing her to marry a man almost 40 years older than her. The internal conflicts that the characters experience on their bodies and in their souls make it clear how a firm, unambiguous identity is impossible. Each character must split into two, into the body they embody that faces war camps, rapes, and killings, and into the soul that allows them to disassociate and find the power to resist suffering. The ultimate split in the novel occurs with the stratagem found by the protagonist Hirut to embody Emperor Haile Selassie. The young protagonist realizes that one of the soldiers in Kidane's army, Minim, bears a striking resemblance to the emperor, and so she suggests the idea of dressing him up in royal clothes and showing him among Ethiopian villages to empower the people. Minim thus goes from being a poor musician to personifying a symbol of hope and strength for his people. Minim has become the Shadow King, has become his own double, and his shadow is the source of power for an entire people.

The theme of doubles also recurs through other forms in the novel. The figure of Ettore Navarra, the soldier photographer in the Italian army stands ambiguously within the story. The photograph, an important element in the narrative, represents the object of the protagonists' memories. The relationship between Ettore and Hirut is ambivalent in that it moves between a kind of collaboration between the two but at the same time an opposition determined by belonging to the two warring factions. This kind of opposition is what Homi Bhabha has brought back into colonial discourse from psychoanalysis. Ambivalence in colonial discourse can be described as the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationships between colonized and colonizer.

> Most importantly in Bhabha's theory, however, ambivalence disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination because it disturbs the simple relationship between

colonizer and colonized. Ambivalence is therefore an unwelcome aspect of colonial discourse for the colonizer.[50]

The relationship between colonial discourse and the colonized subject is likewise ambivalent since it has the potential to be both exploitative and nurturing—or to seem to be nurturing—at the same time. This kind of ambivalent relationship is what happens between the two protagonists. The young protagonist will always maintain a reluctant attitude toward the photographer who is forced on the other hand to perform actions against her will, such as taking photos of moments of extreme suffering for the prisoners. Yet Hirut after rebuilding her life and setting aside those terrible moments, returns to Addis Ababa to bring the mysterious box back to Hector, perhaps leaving out a feeling of recognition for the photographer who despite his infamous role did not embody the prototypical fierce colonizer.

> The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry- a difference that is almost nothing but not quite- to menace- a difference that is almost nothing but not quite. And in that other scene of colonial power, where history turns to farce and presence to 'a part' can be seen the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia that repeat furiously, uncontrollably.[51]

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[50] Ashcroft Bill, Griffiths Gareth, Tiffin Helen, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts 2nd Edition*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007, p. 10.

[51] H. Bhabha, *Of Mimicry and man, the ambivalence of colonial discourse*, London, Routledge, p. 91.

3.3 Women in war. The different aspects of resistance in Ethiopia.

> When I was first starting the book, I had really no idea of women in war, particularly in this war. I was going to write the story that i had heard growing up which is that of an army of men charging against Italians and Mussolini's army which was the most advanced in Europe. The Ethiopians somehow won, but they shouldn't have won, it was a completely illogical win, and for a little kid that story is a myth, it's legend and I grew up thinking this is amazing so when I started writing I thought this is a story I really would like to tell. Once I got into research I started realizing how much I did not know about this war. I had never imagined the realities of what war is like... I started finding out that women were actually also in the frontlines, that completely changed the book for me.[52]

As the writer's testimony shows, the Ethiopian people internalized a sense of pride through the governance of many of their emperors. For instance, Emperor Tewodros II (1855–1868) started promoting the idea of a modern, unified Ethiopia as early as 1855. The latter set the example of resistance when he gave his own life rather than surrender to the invading British in 1868. His two successors Emperor Yohannes, fought against Egyptians and Italians and Sudanese; and Emperor Menelik was a modern leader who led to the unpredictable defeat of the Italians at the famous Battle of Adua in 1896. The last emperor Haile Selassie also ruled during the fascist invasion, witnessing both defeat and victory.

> These last four emperors maintained a similar vision of creating a unified modern Ethiopia, and attempted to impose new ideas of loyalty and national identity on a dispersed and diverse population. The effects of this long history of struggle against a series of invaders created a sense of identity and pride associated with ancient historical referents based on political glory and religion, not only among the elite but also among the common people.[53]

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[52] You Tube (9 Marzo 2020). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeWuGKhQUOU&t=158s, Spotlite by Literanda.

[53] Abbink, G. J., Bruijn, M. E. de, & Walraven, K. van. (2003). *Rethinking resistance: revolt and violence in African history*. Leiden: Brill. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12876 , p. 94.

When the Italian army arrived in Addis Ababa and Mussolini declared Ethiopia as part of the empire, only part of the country was actually under their control. After the Battle of Maichew, the real resistance of the people began. The Ethiopians made life difficult for the Italians especially in the rural areas. The Patriots, members of the resistance began to be called shifta by the Italians, which can be translated as bandit or outlaw but in reality the term denoted any form of resistance to an authority that had failed to deliver justice. Usually a shifta emerged from the noble classes and had some form of wider, critical vision on the social order that enabled him/her to express, in words or in action, real or perceived injustices and responses to the situation. (95)

Although only male emperors such as Menelik II are remembered as those who led the people to victory, what was really crucial was the participation of women in the resistance. They contributed to the war by providing assistance, espionage and sabotage actions that were fundamental to the unfolding of the story. Women's participation in the war had already occurred in other wars. During the Battle of Adua in 1896, Emperor Menelik and his wife Empress Taytu marched together in the front row.

> Chris Prouty reports that Taytu had organized thousands of women, including Zewditu, her step daughter and later empress (1916-1928), and Azalech, her cousin, and strengthened the defence lines by supplying water and taking care of the wounded. She was also a military tactician whose participation had helped to bring about the defeat of the Italians at the Battle of Mekele a month before the Battle of Adwa. Ethiopian women had, thus, a reputation to uphold in defending the national cause. (100)

One of the most valiant of these women was Woizero[54] Shawaragad Gadle, who founded a resistance movement. The women of this association provided various services during the fighting, such as providing bandages, clothing and ammunition sometimes stolen from the Italians and brought to the Patriots in the field. Some women also organized military operations and fought in the field.

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[54] A married woman in Ethiopia; Mrs

> In the countryside not only did women prepare quanta (dried meat), qollo (roasted cereals), besso (instant cereal powder) and various foodstuffs that may be compared to 'dry rations' in modern military jargon but also sharpened swords and shuttled between the zones of operation and their houses. According to G. Tafere's dramatized description, they also 'sent down from various slopes avalanches of stones, not heeding the shower of bombs that were coming down from the air, and women like Woizero Fantaye actually fought on the battlefields'. In her documentary study, Salome Gebre-Egziabher provides a list of women patriots in the resistance movement and also gave the names of prominent Patriots from every region, including hundreds from Eritrea. (101)

Woizero Shawaragad Gadle became a symbol of courage and representation of that minority considered unfit for war. A character from whom Mengiste takes inspiration to create the figure of Aster, wife of the valiant Ethiopian leader Kidane. Aster is a figure who goes through a transformation from the beginning to the end of the novel. In the early chapters she is presented as a figure in opposition to the protagonist Hirut with whom the reader naturally empathizes. She comes across as despotic and villainous, trying to get Hirut into trouble by concealing beneath these behaviors a jealousy toward the latter. With the onset of the war, however, her attitude begins to change; the need to create a common front among the women to help the men resist the attacks of the Italians will see the two protagonists side by side. In Chapter 1, *Invasion*, we witness the women's consciousness-raising, as they, led by Aster, begin to take action to contribute to the resistance. The Italians are about to arrive, but the Ethiopians still have some time because of their strategic location in the mountains.

> They are standing near Aster's tent, waiting for more women with the powders and salt that Aster requested. Ahead, a group of villagers eases up the last few steps of the hill, each woman is stooped beneath a backbreaking load of firewood. Two of them wave before veering off to what used to be the cook's area. Several more are dragging burlap sacks toward where Aster stands, her arms folded, looking imperious in Kidane's father's cape. They have been arriving since dawn from surrounding villages, bringing casings and wood, scarves and food for the army […] They've been picking these up from what the Italians leave behind, Aster says. We just need the casings. We'll give them back their killings. Aster shakes her head. I'll teach every woman how to make

gunpowder. I'll teach all of you how to shoot a gun. You have to know how to run toward them unafraid.[55]

Aster is the dominant figure in the women's group; she is the one who instills confidence and teaches other women to stand up for themselves, to fight as equals to men. The adjectives used to describe her once again see her illuminated by light, as if she were the protagonist of a dramatic scene. Aster's voice comes from above, like a divine voice to which women are compelled to stretch their ears, to learn from her.

> ASTER IS A glorious figure astride her horse, Buna. She has loosened her braids and thick strands of hair fall against her neck and spread like a dark curtain around her sunlit face. She snaps the animal to a trot across the crest of the hill, her cape fanning around her figure, the golden clasp trapping flints of afternoon light.

> Women! she shouts. Sisters, are you listening to me? Her voice rises into the sky: a blade slicing through the valley below, startling the women from their tasks, forcing them to lift their heads and turn in her direction. Sisters, are you ready for what's to come? (111)

At the same time, from the group of women who gathered to listen to Aster, voices emerged expressing dissent against this new leader. Some of the women argue about what right Aster has to impose herself on the others and dictate the law, they argue about what her origins are, they call her a slave. It is at this moment that Aster's ancient despotic nature comes out and the young Hirut recognizes in her the woman who until recently would hit her with a whip and leave her lying on the ground. Despite the moment of general dissent like this, Aster does not allow herself to be confused. Anyone who does not feel like joining the resistance and fighting for their people can go; she stands impassively ready for war on a par with the valiant warrior Kidane, her husband.

> Aster cannot hide her anger; her composure has left and there is no hint of the elegance with which she manages to do everything. She is stripped of reserve, and what Hirut sees is the part of Aster that beat her with a whip and left her in a stable. There it is, trembling in front of them all in the form of Aster.

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[55] Mengiste, *The Shadow King*, p. 110.

Aster continues: This woman is like the rest of them, they'll divide our country so we lose and become slaves of the ferenj. They think these invaders come in fairness, she says. These fools don't understand what happens if we lose.

The two of them glare at each other, then the woman spits on the ground and turns to the other women: She's a thief, worse than a beggar. Let the ferenjoch come, I'll help them. Then she rushes away, and down the hill, her cries growing fainter with distance.

Any of you who want to leave, go, Aster says.

Two more women stand up and hurry away without looking back, their heads down. Aster is rigid, her face impassive again, the stern set of her mouth a defense against any sign of emotion. She takes a breath and tips the pail toward the rest of the women. It is half full with sulfur.

Who remembers what to do? she asks. Who remembers what it means to be more than what this world believes of us? (115-116)

3.4 Her-stories, intersectionality in the contest of war

The women protagonists of *The Shadow King*, are subjected to multiple oppressions throughout the story. Particularly the young protagonist Hirut, who is more than once robbed of her agency in terms of being a free woman first, belonging to an inferior social category, and additionally black. The young woman experiences many incidents of abuse against her. What is surprising, however, is Mengiste's choice to have many of these abuses carried out by the Ethiopian characters in the book. The discourse then comes out of the contours of racism; it is not just about the abuse carried out between one race and another, between a colonizer and a colonized, but it is inscribed in a broader sphere of reasoning; what Kimberlè Crenshaw in 1989 defined as intersectionality.

The concept of intersectionality is widely used in academic and political debate. The term indicates the overlapping, hence intersectionality precisely, of different social identities and what may be the related discrimination, oppression and domination. This theory was first developed by U.S. activist and jurist Kimberlè Crenshaw. In particular, Crenshaw focuses on the issue of black women in modern society and beyond. According to the scholar, one cannot understand the oppression and discrimination of Black women by considering only gender or only race, as the two categories are entangled. Crenshaw brings up a very powerful analogy to explain this concept, namely that of traffic at an intersection. Discrimination is like traffic going in all directions at the intersection.

> Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.[56]

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[56] Kimberè Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,* University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989, p. 149.

One of the central points in Mengiste's narrative is that of the body as a battlefield. The women's bodies in The Shadow King, are subject to a continuum of violence that finds no rest nor differences between moments of war and moments of peace. What Mengiste calls "her-stories" are the stories of women subjected not only to the control of the colonizers, but also to the dynamics of oppression within their own group. The bodies of the female protagonists, Hirut, Aster, Ferres and the cook, are the battlefields where another war is played out, parallel to the one happening outside. An early example of this concept can be observed as early as one of the novel's first moments. It is 1935 and the scene is set in the military camp.

> KIDANE IS ETCHED IN THE SAME HARD LIGHT THAT COATS THE ROCKY path between them.
>
> He extends his arm in her direction and beckons. This is the move that begins the theft. It is this gesture that seals the night. The hand that stretches forth also violates a natural order. This is why Hirut shivers: she has just glimpsed what lurks in the newly ushered dark.
>
> Hirut, come. Kidane makes of himself a looming figure, a hazy nightmare forming bones.
>
> Hirut closes her eyes and wraps her arms around her knees. She holds herself tight, then she waits, a quaking figure pretending to sleep while listening to a man speak her name.
>
> Hirut. He has found a level between silence and whisper, a tone that makes the distance between them shrink.
>
> Hirut stares into the mouth of the forest. There are hours left in this night, so many unlit paths that lead only to greater darkness.
>
> Little One, let's go.
>
> Something is bending her toward obedience as if she were born only to serve.
>
> I'm not going to make it through this war, he adds. I'm going to die. Do you understand what I'm saying?
>
> There is a long, pregnant silence that stretches between them, a vast land that opens and she is sinking, helpless to stop the downward momentum.

Little One, you don't understand but you'll see. Get up.

When he says her name again, it comes to her as a warm, thick breath against the side of her face. It is a new obscenity crawling over her skin. He reaches for her arms and she looks up into the dark well of his eyes. It takes one minute, two minutes, three minutes for her to form the thought that they are face-to-face in an intimacy that makes her recoil but: a body capable of dying in war is also capable of injury, and what she knows of the body is its tender places, those areas incapable of complete protection, and of the many things Dawit has taught her, it is this that is her most important lesson: that men, too, can bleed in many ways. So when Hirut rams her forehead against Kidane's, she is just testing a theory, uncertain and unsure of what she is doing.

Wujigra, she whispers.

And when he blinks, surprised, but does not move away, she does it again with the force of a stone sprung loose of its slingshot. She hits Kidane's forehead with her own so hard, with such quickness and precision, that her ears ache from the deadening crunch. The impact shoots bright sparks behind her eyes and blinds her momentarily and she flounders in dizziness while he sinks against her for balance. Then Hirut, newly heroic and still afraid, finds her center, pushes him off, and stands to run.[57]

"a long pregnant silent that stretches between them, a vast land that opens and she is sinking." The metaphor of a long pregnant silence stands for a moment that will change Hirut's life forever. The scene represents one of many moments when the young girl is abused. "Little One," the nickname by which she is called by Kidane, first describes her as inferior to him, secondly without a clear identity. Hirut begins to perceive this appellation as an obscenity; it is at that moment that she realizes that men can also suffer and can bleed. Utilizing her memory and keeping in mind the important lessons the other soldier taught her, Hirut musters the courage to reply to the abuse. The rifle she received from her father, Wujigra, appears repeatedly in the novel. It is the last remaining memento of her family and the sole memory that can transport her back there even though she is miles away. For the girl who believes she can turn her body and herself into a gun, the gun also becomes a refuge.

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[57] Mengiste, *The Shadow King*, p. 187-188

Hirut kicks and yanks and bites until she scrambles to her feet. She is so busy looking for her mother and the cook that she does not sense the hands flinging her back on the ground. Instead, she believes the sudden flight is proof of miraculous ascent. She imagines the separation between her feet and the earth as evidence of a greater feat. And as she rises in the air, held in a relentless man's grip, Hirut thinks of those men who turn into hyenas, she thinks of angels disguised as men, she thinks of Kidus Giorgis and his dragon-slaying sword and the saint's horse lifting its hooves to vanquish evil. Even when the ground rushes up to meet her back and Kidane's face looms above hers, Hirut still imagines flight. Soon, she will have to admit what is happening, but for now, her mind gifts her a small mercy: it leads her back into the cave where Dawit lies, his leg healed, the bandages off, his breaths back to normal. He extends her Wujigra and nods for her to take it. In the corner, Beniam holds his arms out for a warm embrace. O brave soldier, they say to her, past the ringing in her ears, past the cushion of blessed silence: Go ahead and shoot, make us proud. (189)

The moment of dissociation that Hirut experiences in this scene is described through some almost hallucinatory images. Although she tries to extricate herself by kicking and struggling against her abuser, she ends up on the ground again. Here she begins to imagine herself elevated from that ground as images of men such as Ethiopian patron St. George, depicted in the Ethiopian flag flying above a dragon, pass through her head. Her mind is elsewhere, while her body is a victim of violence. The only thought that keeps the young woman alive is her desire for revenge against Kidane, which she solemnly utters in a kind of threat and promise. "Remember this on the day you die. Remember this and know why I killed you, Hirut says. The abuses inflicted on the women in The Shadow King, take place both in Abyssinian and Italian territory. In the Returns chapter, the two protagonists Aster and Hirut are captured and imprisoned by the Italians. Aster shows an attitude of absolute steadiness and resilience to prove his endurance and soldierly fabric. The two prisoners must withstand the insults and gazes of their captors, protecting their bodies and dignity at the same time.

They have come often to the prison waving the photos of her and Aster, laughing and shouting at the full- bodied women while caressing the flattened copies in their hands. Their arrival sends Aster sliding back into the building while Hirut chooses to stay outside and practice resilience, testing her strength in the face of their ridicule. She has managed, somehow, to keep the tears away and her head up, her back straight, her gaze

locked on the horizon for long enough to watch them return to their camp, finally bored. She has counted each retreat as a triumph, another mark on an imaginary rifle […] She is a soldier trapped inside a barbed-wire fence, but she is still at war and the battlefield is her own body, and perhaps, she has come to realize as a prisoner, that is where it has always been. (369)

Hirut and Aster are two hoped-for worlds. Aster, a woman born into nobility, contrasts with Hirut's humble origins. Two distant worlds who find themselves in the same physical space at the moment of imprisonment, where they are warriors and survivors. Hirut experiences various discriminations on her skin. Before the war, more than once Aster's temper flares against the young girl over issues related to the woman's jealousy of her. The oppressions that insist on the young girl thus stem not only from the dynamics of racism and sexism toward her, but also abuse imposed by those, in this case a woman, who have a higher social position than her. The metaphor of the incident that occurs at the intersection devised by Crenshaw finds a fitting example in this story. The conquest of the African continent served as therapy for the Italian male gender. According to Giulietta Stefani, the theme of the degeneration of masculinity was already a widespread topic in much of Europe by the end of the 19th century. With the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the advent of World War I and the changes in society from that point on such as industrialization, scientific revolutions and the general acceleration of lifestyle; gender identities came into crisis. Women gradually began to occupy more space in society and in the world of work, and the old male lifestyles (those of the bourgeois elite), began to be considered degrading to the male who was rendered fearful and sometimes hysterical and effeminate. The rise of the nationalist movements and war frenzies of the first decades of the twentieth century, seemed to aim at a reconstruction of of the true masculine essence. The Great War legitimized and reinforced the idea of the fighting, strong, emotionless male. In Italy, these sentiments culminated with Mussolini's fascism.

La propaganda fascista insistette sull'idea della guerra all'Etiopia come occasione per dimostrare al mondo il carattere e la potenza nazionale proprio in termini di virilità, come nelle parole dello stesso Mussolini: "È una prova nella quale siamo impegnati

tutti, dal primo all'ultimo, ma è una prova che collauda la virilità del Popolo italiano. È una prova, o camerati, dalla quale certissimamente usciremo vittoriosi".[58]

Once again, the body became the site through which this masculinity was legitimized. Between 1800 and 1900, racist ideologies regarded the body as the central element of differences between individuals. The superiority of men then found legitimacy in the confirmations derived from these studies that affirmed the weakness and inferiority (physical and mental) of women.

> If taken separately, nineteenth century sexism and racism were both sustained by formalized knowledge pertaining to distinct (pseudo)scientific frameworks. In our collective imagination such frameworks may at times create informal and fluctuating ideologies, in other instances however they may be structured into well-defined norms and social practices. In both situations we find the same logic: both sexism and racism support relationships based on dominance, founded upon a biological matrix that develops through the "naturalization" of social relationships […] If we consider racism and the female body, in particular the African female body, it is evident how the merging of gender and race leads to a dual and powerful process of naturalization of differences: to traits such as instinctiveness, and in some cases savagery, attributed to certain "races" we can add others (weakness, limited intelligence, inclination towards domes- tic roles) all charged with eroticism, pornography, sexual submission.[59]

Barbara Sorgoni argues in one of her many writings on Italian colonialism in East Africa that fascist ideology was obsessed with the issue of race. In particular, Sòrgoni focuses on the problem of concubinage, which was a highly stigmatized phenomenon in the motherland that in Eritrea was called madamate. The madam was usually a native living temporarily with an Italian who provided domestic and sexual services and was repaid in food, clothing or money. Many authors of the century justified this custom by explaining that Italians who went to Eritrea (mostly men), having difficulty settling in a new and unfamiliar territory needed some "distractions." Also often brought in was the

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[58] G. Stefani, *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa Orientale: Una storia di genere*, Verona, Ombre Corte, 2007, p. 43.

[59] A. Vaccarelli, "*The Black Venus. African female bodies as objects of desire between colonial sexism and racism*", *PEDAGOGIA OGGI,* Vol. 15 No. 1, 2017, p. 152-153

excuse that concubinage was assimilated with the custom already existing in the colonies of temporal marriages called *demoz*.

> For instance Alberto Pollera, a civil servant who spent his whole adult life in Eritrea and published important ethnographic essays, writes: "since concubinage in Abyssinia is legalised through the institution of demoz, native women are quite happy to have a relation with white men. Until 1935 madamato is openly tolerated on the ground that it reflects a local arrangement. And the three terms: concubinage, madamato and demoz are treated as equivalent.[60]

Sorgoni explains that the marriage issue was actually far more complicated than how it was posed by some Italians. The *demoz* form of marriage, was one of two forms of marriage in the Tigrinya group, which involved a marital contract between two consenting adults who lived together for a pre-fixed period of one year with the possibility of renewing this contract. Going deeper into the matter, ethnographic resources show how, first of all, this form of marriage was prevalent only in some areas of Tigray and not in all colonies; as the colonizers were careful to point out, and secondly, the *demoz* guaranteed several rights to the woman and any children born under this union. These rights stipulated that women should receive a contribution, a kind of "alimony," even if they were left by the man before the granted date. In addition, children born out of the *demoz* relationship were deemed to be the children of the father under a declaration signed by the mother, and thus enjoyed the respective rights imposed on the father. (8-9)

> As we can see, demoz in Eritrea was very different from a relationship of concubinage experienced in Europe. In Italy, concubinage was illegal, it was socially and morally stigmatised, and no juridical device protected the aban- doned woman or her natural children, who were often negatively addressed "bastards". But demoz was also different from the Tigrinyan form of concubinage, which apparently existed under the name of cin gherel and which was locally perceived as an informal and looser union when compared to demoz. (9)

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[60] B. Sorgoni, *The Construction of Inter-Racial Sexuality in Colonial Eritrea. Poverty and Prosperity.* The Nordic Africa Institute, 1997, p. 7.

As already mentioned in Chapter 1 of this paper (p. 28), one of the most emblematic cases regarding the issue of different perceptions of madamate in Italy was that of the highly acclaimed journalist Indro Montanelli. The journalist, who during an interview on the TV program L'Ora della Verità spoke about his relationship with the then 12-year-old Eritrean girl Milena, justifying the said relationship with the famous phrase "in Africa things are different"; in another famous intervention in the fascist "civilization magazine" he stated:

> We will never be dominators without a strong sense of our predestined superiority. We do not fraternize with negroes. We cannot, we must not. At least not until we have civilized them.[61]

Italian common sense, collective imagination and scientific discourses based on racial differences between peoples that spread in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped shape the Black Venus fantasy, which combined the darkest forms of sexism and racism together in the figure of African women. The discriminated figure of the black woman thus finds its roots in this era and like an echo like an echo, is still reflected in various contexts today.

> I consider how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color marginalized within both.[62]

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[61] Vaccarelli, op. cit., p. 154.

[62] K. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*", Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No 6 (Jul. 1991), p. 1243-1244.

3.5 The influence of fascist popular songs on the imagery of the Black Venus

The fascist propaganda songs, whose principal theme was the rescue of helpless indigenous from the hands of African barbarians, undoubtedly contributed to the objectification of the African female form in the collective consciousness of Italian soldiers. The images of exoticism and eroticism associated with the bodies of African women (without often making age distinctions), focus on the stereotype of the "Black Venus." The language with which the woman is described is one that can be likened to zoological language, with appellations such as "cat," "faithful dog," etc. This description served to deprive African women of agency, reducing them precisely to their bodies alone. Described by various Italian explorers as purely bodily and instinctive, apt to provoke violent male sensations through the movements of their bodies. For example, the Italian geographer and explorer Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti in one of his famous writings describes the natives thus:

> Se la loro bellezza, più che tale, è fine e piacente , gli occhi ne completano il fascino. Larghi, morbidi, di un nero profondo, scintillanti, languidi talvolta e che sempre rivelano l'intelligenza e trasporti passionati, mettono i brividi suscitando ignote e violenti sensazioni.[63]

Popular music was one of the arts that contributed most to spreading this ideal of womanhood in A.OI. but especially in the motherland, through fascist folk songs. Gianpaolo Chiriaco, an etnomusicologist and singing scholar, who teaches the subject at Università Libera di Bolzano; has spent three years working at the Center for Black Music Research in Chicago, where he focused on black vocality and cultural identities. He conceptualized and organized the international "Black Vocality" symposium at Columbia College as well as the website www.afrovocality.com. Has displayed his work at conferences, publications, performances, seminars, and installations. The African woman's body as sexual conquest thus becomes a metaphor for colonial conquest. In fascist popular music this becomes a major theme. One of the most emblematic songs representing this concept is the song "Faccetta Nera" used as a march

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[63] L. Robecchi Bricchetti, *Nell'Harrar*, Milano, Galli, 1896, p. 44.

by fascist soldiers. Music in the fascist era was one of the most powerful tools in the construction of fascist identity and consensus. The peculiarity of fascist songs, Chiriaco explains, is that they were extremely catchy music, in fact involving some of the most prominent musicians and producers of the time in their creation. the refrain of the song Faccetta Nera goes like this:

> Faccetta nera, bell'abissina / Aspetta e spera che già l'ora si avvicina!/ quando saremo / Insieme a te, / noi ti daremo/ Un'altra legge e un altro Re./ Faccetta nera, / Sarai Romana / La tua bandiera/ Sarà sol quella italiana! / Noi marceremo / Insieme a te/ E sfileremo avanti / al Duce e avanti al Re.[64](Fare cit you tube?)

The meaning transpiring from the song suggests that the Abyssinian beauty will soon be taken to safety by Italian troops and will be made Roman, so the conquest of the woman's body represents the conquest of Africa itself. Other elements, as Chiriaco explains, were used in songs to influence colonial enlistment. So in addition to the sexual desire for female Africans developed in songs such as "Facet Black" or "Black Legs," they aimed to appeal to the exoticism of the continent. In this regard, another famous marching song of the time, "Macallé," tells of the wonders to be found at the famous market in Macallé, capital of the Tigre region. "At the market in Macallè, everything you're looking for is there." The city, one of the symbolic places of Ethiopia's campaign, is portrayed as an attraction for Italians, an exotic place where everything is available and can be bought cheaply. The erotic/pornographic vision created by the regime through music that depicted the African woman as an object to be conquered/buy, began to be repudiated after the enactment of the 1938 racial laws, as some of the songs had become a source of embarrassment.

> The same images were used afterwards but with different aims: total racial segregation and prevention of mixed-race offspring.[65]

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[64] Faccetta nera, 29 AGOSTO 2016, You Tube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3cTrbVATd0.

[65] Vaccarelli A., *The Black Venus. African female bodies as objects of desire between colonial sexism and racism,* p. 160.

3.6 Photography as preservation vehicles for memory

Film, photography, literature and popular music are the main arts that influence a people's ways of thinking and culture. Photography in particular find different space and meanings in The Shadow King, which give the novel the characteristic of atypical writing and at the same time help to provide a 360-degree view of Italian perceptions of African people and vice versa. Photography within the novel is an element present from the very first pages, when the scene set in 1974 sees the protagonist Hirut intent on returning to Addis Ababa to deliver the mysterious box containing many memories of her past life to former soldier-photographer Ettore Navarra.

> In the box are photographs of her, those he took on Fucelli's orders and labeled in his own neat handwriting: una bella ragazza. Una soldata feroce. And those he took of his own free will, mementos scavenged from the life of the frightened young woman she was in that prison, behind that barbed- wire fence, trapped in terrifying nights that she could not free herself from.

> Inside the box are the many dead that insist on resurrection.[66]The metal box, is a central object since at the beginning of the novel its contents are still secret, will only be revealed toward the end of the story. But above all, inside that box are the memories of

> the Ethiopians who died, the memory of the prisoners, the memory of a population.Hirut has not yet put her past behind, "Inside the box are the many dead that insist on resurrection." After nearly 40 years the negotiation continues to go on, through those photographs the dead come back to life. The intersections called *Photos* provide the visual representation of war. In the last section of the book, *Returns*, the scenes described depict Ethiopians in prison, the reader through these descriptions is able to picture very accurate images of the conditions of Ethiopian prisoners and the atrocities they suffered.

> Photo

> The prison: a shrunken wooden box of a building surrounded by a barbed- wire fence: one small widow, virtually airless, without the mercy of light. There, between two hulking stones, beyond a short footpath leading toward oblivion, Fucelli points to a dark form in the sky, his mouth open, his eyes wide, that pale face twisted in gleeful cruelty.

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66 Mengiste, *The Shadow King*, p. 3.

Above his head, a startled bird arrows up, into the sun. The soldati and ascari, menacing figures sculpted in shadow, lean toward the plummeting form of a prisoner made heavier by despair. Two trucks frame the vision like guard posts, windshields and tires splattered in mud, canvas dropped to reveal two more men, bound by rope and frozen by terror, waiting for flight. (79)

Photo

A young boy, bony shoulders and large-headed, shivering in the bright sun. Lips chapped, mouth parted, eyes stark in a gaunt and hungry face. A slender finger raised to the sky, a gesture for patience, for time, for mercy, for hope. (80)

Photo

A woman slumped against a walking stick, paralyzed leg dangling beneath her long dress. A row of braids that fan out to thick, dark curls. Tattoos gracing the line of her throat to her jaw. Bruises near her eyes, at her mouth, a thread of blood dried against her ear. She is mid-sentence, her tongue against her teeth, curving around a word lost forever. (81)

Photography, before being a narrative element within the novel was a source of inspiration for the construction of the characters. Maaza Mengiste during her years of research in Italy and Ethiopia, stated several times that she drew inspiration from photos she found in flea markets or from archives of different kinds. In 2019, the writer, as a result of her research and the writing of the novel, created an online archive under the name Project3541. The project is described as: " an artistic and educational endeavor that uses written, visual, and oral histories to provide an intimate perspective on the global and personal consequences of the 1935-41 Italo-Ethiopian War. Some of the photos from the archive

The Ethiopian War was a systematically represented event photographically, thanks to the Luce-AO Institute, which helped create a massive mobilization for the war by controlling the production and distribution of images. The photographic documentation that the Luce-AO forces distributed did not only portray military scenes but included various aspects, such as landscapes the flora and fauna, which helped to spread the idea

of exoticism and stereotypical perception of Italians with respect to the African territory. The topos of the beauty and availability of African women originated in this very way, the idea of the backwardness of the continent, and other beliefs reinforced by the very photographs. Documentary photographs have also been used over the years to demonstrate the benefits the Italians brought to AOI, such as the building of roads and infrastructure of various kinds. In the first twenty years of republican Italy, the memory of World War II and the memory of fascism went into a kind of oblivion of these events made of silence and resentment. It is precisely thanks to the recovery of sources such as letters, diaries, travel notes, and photographs, recovered from veterans and witnesses of those years, that the more private and personal memoirs have told much about the experience of living and working on the African continent.

So much testimonial material remained for years and years forgotten in the attics and "metal boxes" of Italians, out of modesty and a specific desire to remove and forget an embarrassing page of Italy's collective history.

> La visione di queste raccolte personali ci restituisce un quadro vivido e palpitante delle pulsioni che percorsero gli animi di quella generazione, dei loro miti, imbevuti di retorica patriottica e sorretti dalla granitica certezza della missione civilizzatrice nei confronti del popolo etiope che il fascismo aveva inculcato loro, e anche del determinato punto di vista con cui guardarono al mondo africano, influenzati dal gusto esotico; ma ci dice molto, al di là della retorica di regime che indirizzava all'esaltazione della superiorità tecnica e militare italiana, sul dramma di una guerra rivelatasi più dura del previsto, piena di insidie, in cui furono commessi massacri indiscriminati e non vennero risparmiate torture e umiliazioni corporali, come le stesse immagini documentano.[67]

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[67] Bolignari, M., *Lo scrigno africano. La memoria fotografica della guerra d'Etiopia custodita dalle famiglie italiane*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2012, p. 32-33.

Weizero Abebech Cherkos Addis ababa, 1935

I own a picture of a young Ethiopian girl whom I have started to call Hirut. She is in her teens, and her hair is pulled away from her face and hangs down her back in thick braids. She wears a long Ethiopian dress and even in the aged, black-and- white photo, it is easy to see that it is worn and stained. In the photo, Hirut has turned from the camera. I imagine that she is looking down at the ground, doing her best to focus her attention on something besides the intrusive photographer who is beside her, getting ready to shoot.[68]

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[68] M. Mengiste, "Writing About the Forgotten Black Women of the Italo-Ethiopian War", *Literary Hub,* 2019, p. 2.

Project 3541, Afrovocality, and numerous other such projects are aimed at bringing back and keeping alive the (removed) memory of Italian colonialism in East Africa. Through the work of women writers, ethnomusicologists, historians, sociologists, and enthusiasts of all kinds, the memory of a large segment of the population can be recovered, studied, and served as a tool to better understand what colonization brought and took away. Music, literature, photography and all other arts, will forever be mediums that convey people's stories, stories of suffering but also of peace regained after years of forced removal of the most atrocious and difficult memories. Maaza Mengiste's The Shadow king is a story that encapsulates the many facets of war. The story of Ethiopian women, a vital arm in the victory against the fascists, the story of a young girl growing up far from canonical family love and having to hound her way through a difficult world of oppression and multiple abuses. The story of a people who discover that their strength lies in their ability to work together, and the tale of the men at the front who, regardless of their allegiance to one side or the other, suffer and die in the service of a pointless occupation.

Conclusion

When we talk about colonialism, how much is known about the places destroyed and the atrocities committed by Italians in the Horn of Africa? How many young people today know about the brutality committed by Italian armies and the number of victims in those years? What is the relationship between Italians and their colonial past?

The present work has attempted to answer these kinds of questions. The narrative of Italians good people affected the memory of the Italians in the first place and secondly of their public image in the rest of the world. The theme of memory, the main focus of this paper, served to explore the motives, causes and consequences that affected the consciousness of Italian people regarding the years of colonialism. Understanding how the concept of memory goes far beyond the straightforward human ability to preserve traces of one's past experiences and that through memory one is able to recall those events, has been possible thanks to the analysis of the discipline of sociology of memory. This idea needs to be examined from multiple angles in the current world since it allows us to bring events that happened even very long ago, back into the present in increasingly complex ways.

Memory, which cannot be regarded as a fixed and unchanging concept, becomes a concept that is continuously subject to selection, filtration and reconstruction at both individual and collective levels. Collective memory, individual memory and historical memory are closely related to certain social aspects that define and influence them. Since the past should always be viewed as a social creation that changes within society, it is always represented differently depending on the context in which it is studied. The nexus between collective memory and power relations is what the sociology of memory has focused on in depth. As Halbwachs asserts, the main function of collective memory is to enable a cohesion of a social group through its recognition in a given identity. Since this identity is constantly changing in the modern world, determining an unchanging content of collective memory becomes a conflictual process. Elites will try to rule this society more frequently as it grows larger and more complicated by using

tactics that confirm their dominant interests in the past. It has been shown that among these strategies, memorial rites are the most important for most societies. There are many intentional mnestic phenomena, such as many institutions, rituals, monuments, educational programs and narratives. Similar intentional erasures, manipulations, silences, and censorships are ways to try to make people forget. The reinterpretation of the past, which took place for the most part in the last decades of the twentieth century, has enabled many western societies to reopen the debate on the memory of colonialism. It has been demonstrated how narrative is a practice in which the subject analyzes his or her own experience and enters into interaction with others, through the analysis of the work on memory by sociologist Paolo Jedlowski. Since it includes more than just what we really experience, we refer to experience as the mechanism in memory that connects experiences and gives them context. When self-critical memory, another sort of memory, is taken into account, memory goals are also revealed. Starting with the shady corners that each former representation has built and legitimized, this kind of memory examines and evaluates itself. Public memory, which is the outcome of the collection of all cultural objects about the past that are situated in a society's communicative space, competes with this type of memory which we may characterize as being more intimate. Contemporary racism is heir to the memory of Italian colonialism. The process of blame removal and demonization of the other lingers in representations and attitudes toward migrants. Gathering information about what one encounters relies on how inclined one is to recall it. We can be aware of our experiences after they have occurred thanks to recollection. To accomplish this, it is crucial to focus on the research and pay close attention to other people's memories. Modern technologies and means of communication allow even more effective transmission of others' stories and memories.

Through the analysis of *The Shadow King* by Maaza Mengiste, one such memoir was investigated at. First of all the memory of the writer. The research work, which took the writer 10 years, was a real journey into the memories of those who helped her recover the untold stories of the war in Ethiopia. Through this work, she was able to understand how much the subject of colonialism is an open wound in the minds of Italians. Bringing these stories to light allowed the writer to confront her past, the collective and

public memory of her people and the Italian people. Although made up, the tale depicts the blending of these recollections with her own memory—that of an Ethiopian migrant who come back to her native country to provide life to those who had fallen victim of oblivion. *The Shadow King* is not meant to remain a book to be read and laid on the bookshelf. Mengiste's research work continues well beyond the writing of the novel. The author hopes to inspire everyone who reads the book and is interested in this history to look through their family memoirs for tales that have been kept hidden for more than eighty years due to the stigma and occasionally ignorance that surrounds the topic of colonialism. For this reason, she created the online archive *Project 35/41*. The project collects written, oral, and visual testimonies through curriculum, exhibitions, and other creative platforms. Many other projects such as Afrovocality, mentioned in this paper, help keep the debate on these issues alive. It is possible to preserve these memories through literature, photography, art, and the work of all scholars and enthusiasts. By doing so, we can prevent commemorative rituals from devolving into meaningless "paradoxes" and enable them to tell us more than the historical narrative we are accustomed to.

This paper has attempted to show how memory does not always and exactly correspond to a group's identity and current interests. Memory can be seen as the storage of those traces that serve to reevaluate the present from a perspective of understanding or critiquing those processes that led to it. Current public debate in many parts of the world politicizes identity by using the past and selecting only what serves the support of that chosen identity to the defense of the interests of a given elité. On the other hand, the past can be re-enacted in the name of elaboration. This type of re-enactment opposes the processes, not always spontaneous, of forgetting, which are designed to make people forget everything that is inconvenient or problematic. Elaboration restores a more conscious confrontation with the problematic issues of the past with the aim of leading to individuals taking responsibility for their own history. Elaboration is a process that requires an awareness and a disposition to listen to and understand one's own history. Through the analysis of three different areas, this contribution aimed to explore the

memory of Italian colonialism by making a journey that, starting from history and moving through sociology and literature, simulated such an elaboration.

The memory of the past haunts the protagonist of *The Shadow King*, but it is through the processing of what she has experienced that Hirut is always able to put herself back together and confront those who have caused her harm. The past structures the present with its legacies through mechanisms of retrieving or abandoning them, always reformulating history anew. The essence of experience is the ability we have to dialogue with our past, our history and our memory.

Abstract

For the past 80 years of Italian history, the phenomenon of Italian colonialism in East Africa has been characterized by a failure in Italian society to process the trauma inflicted on the colonized populations. The "missed funeral" by Italian institutions, triggered an altered narrative of those years in the consciousness of Italians. In recent years, however, a more objective and historically accurate narrative of the events that influenced the culture and society of the years of totalitarianism has resurfaced. The collective memories of Italians from the period of fascism onward have characterized much of the discriminatory and xenophobic mentality that can still be found in the *bel paese* today. Starting from the history of Italian colonialism in AOI, the proposed contribution aims to highlight how peoples remember, how the collective memory of a people differs from its historical memory, and how the narrative proposed by the central powers; before and after the years of colonialism, returned to the Italian population a distorted narrative of the atrocities carried out in Africa particularly in Halie Selassie's Ethiopia. The paper will conclude with an analysis of the novel "The Shadow King," by Ethiopian writer Maaza Mengiste, which will highlight the intersectional perspective of an Ethiopian woman towards the Italian colonization of the years 35/41, and thus provide a 360-degree look at the phenomenon of colonialism, looking at it from an opposing perspective, namely that of the colonized people.

Keywords: Italian colonialism, sociology of memory, collective memory, Ethiopia, fascism, women at war.

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Summary in Italian

Il tema del colonialismo italiano nel Corno d'Africa è stato caratterizzato da una mancata elaborazione da parte della società italiana del trauma inflitto. La visione distorta della storia reale, ha contribuito a tramandare delle memorie collettive caratterizzate da una discontinuità del ricordo, generando non poche volte atteggiamenti di carattere xenofobo, figli di un retaggio di matrice fascista ancora purtroppo presente nella mentalità di molti italiani. Negli ultimi decenni, grazie al lavoro di ricerca di numerosi studiosi, sociologi, storici, scrittori, artisti di vario tipo, questo tipo di memorie inizia a essere prima di tutto rispolverato e in secondo luogo ad essere analizzato sotto diversi punti di vista.

Il presente lavoro, dal titolo *The narrative of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia between history, sociology and literature*, tratta la narrazione del colonialismo italiano, con particolare attenzione all'Etiopia, durante l'occupazione fascista del 35-41. Il contributo si suddivide in tre capitoli ed è costituito da un impianto teorico che fa riferimento a tre diverse aree disciplinari. Come suggerisce il titolo di questa tesi, la narrazione dell'esperienza coloniale è stato il principale metodo che ha contribuito a creare le auto-rappresentazioni bonarie degli italiani. Parlando quindi di narrazione, essa troverà spazi e significati diversi in ciascuna delle tre parti che compongono il lavoro.

Nel primo capitolo, un excursus storico riporta i primordiali progetti espansionistici degli imperi del diciannovesimo secolo analizzando le fasi e le ambizioni degli italiani. Il capitolo prosegue effettuando un salto temporale all'epoca dell'espansione fascista e al progetto di occupazione dell'Africa Orientale di Mussolini con la conquista della cosiddetta colonia primogenita, l'Eritrea. Da questo punto in poi l'attenzione si concentra sul territorio etiope, mettendo in luce il contesto politico e culturale dell'Etiopia al tempo dell'arrivo dei fascisti. *Il posto al sole* tanto agognato da Mussolini, rappresenterà per gli italiani un territorio non sempre facile con il quale rapportarsi. Con l'amministrazione del viceré incaricato Rodolfo Graziani, le colonie arriveranno a un punto di insofferenza che sfocerà con il nefasto massacro degli etiopi

nella città di Addis Abeba. L'analisi delle colonie italiane nell'A.O.I. procede con l'approfondimento del sistema educativo italiano e il conseguente studio del mecenatismo coloniale da parte dell'invasore italiano nei confronti dei colonizzati. Il capitolo si conclude con un'analisi della doppia prospettiva della condizione della donna, mettendo a confronto la condizione delle donne etiopi e quella delle donne italiane pronte a imbarcarsi per il lontano continente africano.

Il secondo capitolo si muove entro l'area di ricerca della sociologia della memoria. L'esperienza coloniale italiana ha rappresentato per il popolo italiano una parte di storia del Paese difficile da metabolizzare e affrontare. In particolare, la memoria del colonialismo è legata a un passato scomodo per gli italiani che è stato non poche volte oggetto di un'amnesia e di una ricostruzione degli eventi a opera del fascismo stesso e della successiva Repubblica. I luoghi comuni e le menzogne, edificate dopo la seconda guerra mondiale grazie al processo di rimozione delle proprie colpe e di demonizzazione dell'altro, hanno contribuito a costruire l'immaginario collettivo degli "italiani brava gente", italiani vittime delle follie di un dittatore. Gli studi sulla memoria in campo sociologico trovano in epoca moderna un terreno fertile nell'atteggiamento quasi ossessivo di conservazione della nostra storia della società moderna, pullulante di strumenti atti alla registrazione e archiviazione della memoria. In questo capitolo, pertanto, l'attenzione si concentra sul concetto di memoria come costrutto sociale e non solo, basandosi sui diversi tipi di memoria proposti dai pionieri della materia. Partendo dalle idee del sociologo Paolo Jedlowski, che analizza il concetto di memoria in base all'esperienza della modernità nella società del XX secolo, viene per prima cosa analizzato il tema della commemorazione. La commemorazione, se non avviene entro un contesto che si conosce a fondo, rischia di essere una pratica svuotata di significato, un paradosso. Da qui in poi, lo studio continua approfondendo i concetti di memoria collettiva, sociale, autocritica e storica. Per comprendere a fondo come i sociologi abbiano affrontato, e tutt'ora affrontino questo tema, si è approfondito l'ambito della memoria collettiva a partire dagli studi del filosofo Walter Benjamin, della scuola di Durkheim e del sociologo della memoria Maurice Halbwachs. Dopo aver esaminato da un punto di vista teorico il concetto di memoria, l'analisi si concentra sui meccanismi

che le società adoperano per ricordare, quindi il contesto sociale entro quale avviene la commemorazione e i processi di trasmissione delle pratiche rituali attraverso le diverse generazioni. Ogni società umana sente il bisogno di trasmettere il proprio patrimonio culturale al fine di preservarlo. Affinché questo avvenga l'atto di trasmissione della memoria deve diventare un atto intenzionale. Per questo motivo il concetto di memoria collettiva diventa un insieme di rappresentazioni sociali riguardanti il passato, che ciascun gruppo produce, istituzionalizza e trasmette ai suoi membri. Il passato di una società e le rappresentazioni che di questo passato si tramandano non sono mai, tuttavia, indipendenti dalle strutture di potere che governano tali società e, di conseguenza, lo è anche la memoria di un popolo. Se la principale funzione delle memorie collettive, come asserisce Halbwachs, è quella di legittimare le credenze di una società, allora più è complessa quella società più le élite che competono a governarla lotteranno per controllare e dirigere secondo i proprio interessi quelle credenze. Le pratiche commemorative sono, appunto, gli strumenti di queste strategie di indirizzamento da parte delle istituzioni e delle élite. In questo contesto si inscrive l'immagine dell'italiano bonario e del concetto elaborato dallo storico Angelo del Boca degli "italiani brava gente". Il conseguente paragrafo analizza la differenza tra il popolo cattivo tedesco e il popolo buono italiano, differenza sulla quale la storiografia italiana ha sempre insistito per difendersi e giustificare le atrocità commesse dagli italiani, calcando il concetto buonista del "ma gli altri hanno fatto di peggio".

La terza e ultima parte di questo lavoro affronta la questione coloniale sotto la sfera letteraria. Il campo letterario preso in considerazione è quello degli studi post-coloniali, ovvero quella vasta gamma di fenomeni sociali, politici e culturali che si sviluppano a partire dal tramonto del colonialismo europeo verso la metà del XX secolo in poi. Grazie al lavoro di studiosi e studiose che operano in ambito accademico e non solo, il campo degli studi post coloniali ha germogliato in Italia, seppur con ritardo rispetto ad altri paesi. Questo ambito studia come le civiltà colonizzate siano state strutturalmente influenzate e modificate dalla civiltà occidentale, e di conseguenza come la produzione artistica dei soggetti coinvolti abbia risentito di queste influenze. Tra i pionieri di questo filone troviamo lo studioso palestinese di letteratura inglese Edward Said con il suo

capolavoro *Orientalism;* egli, per la prima volta, rivolge una critica all'eurocentrismo ritenendola causa della creazione di un immaginario orientale stereotipato all'intento della cultura occidentale stessa, insistendo particolarmente sull'immagine creata del Medio Oriente. Per quanto riguarda il caso della letteratura italiana postcoloniale, essa si caratterizza per avere una storia più breve, legata a contingenze storiche che hanno fatto si che il passato coloniale italiano cominciasse a riaffiorare più tardi rispetto a quello degli altri imperi. Il ritardo italiano deve essere dunque messo in relazione con i motivi interni alla cultura e alla sua elaborazione del passato, quindi messo in relazione con la rimozione e la mancata elaborazione del colonialismo. Per i motivi spiegati finora, questo filone letterario trova la sua fioritura tra la fine degli anni Ottanta e l'inizio degli anni Novanta, in concomitanza con i flussi migratori provenienti dai paesi del Nord Africa e dell'Europa Orientale. Già a partire dalla prima metà degli anni Novanta cominciano a fare la loro comparsa una serie di testi scritti da autrici provenienti dalle ex colonie italiane come l'Etiopia, l'Eritrea e la Somalia. Tra le autrici di questo genere ricordiamo la somala Shirin Ramzanali Fazel con *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (1994), Igiaba Scego con *Rhoda* (2004) e l'acclamato *Regina di fiori e di perle* dell'etiope Gabriella Ghermandi pubblicato nel 2007, solo per nominare alcune celebri scrittrici del genere. Dopo aver illustrato brevemente i motivi del ritardo italiano nella produzione e nello studio della letteratura postcoloniale, il capitolo prende in analisi il lavoro della scrittrice etiope Maaza Mengiste, la cui famiglia emigrò in America dopo il colpo di stato all'imperatore Hailè Selassiè nel 1974. La scrittrice, che ha vissuto tra Lagos, Nigeria, Nairobi, Kenya e Stati Uniti, ha studiato a New York dove attualmente vive e svolge la professione di insegnante di scrittura creativa. Dopo aver pubblicato nel 2009 il suo primo acclamato romanzo *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, torna a parlare dell'esperienza dell'occupazione fascista in Etiopia con la pubblicazione nel 2019 del suo secondo romanzo *The Shadow King.*

Con l'analisi di quest'ultimo, si intende ribaltare la prospettiva adoperata finora. Il punto di vista adottato nel romanzo è quello dei protagonisti etiopi, i quali si ritrovano ad affrontare l'invasione delle forze italiane. La storia, ambientata in Etiopia, si sviluppa entro un arco temporale di quarant' anni. Dal prologo, che inizia nel 1974, la storia

torna indietro al 1935 quando inizia l'invasione delle truppe di Mussolini. *The Shadow King* si caratterizza per essere un'opera dalla struttura narrativa particolare; suddivisa in cinque parti, racconta la storia delle donne etiopi che furono un elemento fondamentale per la vittoria contro l'oppressione fascista. L'oppressione si presenta nel romanzo in diversi livelli. Le donne, in primis la giovane protagonista Hirut, sono afflitte da una doppia oppressione, in quanto africane e donne. La resistenza delle donne diventa una resistenza collettiva che riesce a far opporre i protagonisti all'invasione dei colonizzatori, ad esempio attraverso l'escamotage trovato da Hirut nel far impersonare l'imperatore Hailè Selassiè in un giovane musicista. Ancora una volta, la resistenza torna a essere una tematica principale anche in termini di opposizione fisica: resistenza di Hirut nei confronti di Kidane, l'uomo che abusa di lei.

The Shadow King, rappresenta una risposta alla mancanza di memoria riguardo al colonialismo in Italia. La memoria del suo popolo e le sofferenze di cui è stata testimone in guerra aiuteranno la protagonista ad affrontare la vita, portandola al tempo stesso, a scontrarsi con i demoni del suo passato. Le arti come la musica o la fotografia, assumono all'interno del romanzo il ruolo di veicoli della memoria. Le dinamiche di potere legate all'uso della fotografia mettono in luce le oppressioni di cui soffrono le donne. L'immagine della donna africana, sensuale, disponibile e afrodisiaca, è strumentalizzata in un primo momento dal regime di Mussolini per attrarre i giovani italiani verso l'arruolamento. Ciò avviene anche attraverso la musica, tramite le marce che accompagnavano i soldati in guerra, composte da alcuni dei cantanti più famosi dell'epoca. Un esempio fra tanti è la celebre canzone *Faccetta nera*, il cui testo è caratterizzato da immagini razziste con cui viene descritta la donna africana. La memoria si muove all'interno di *The Shadow King* attraverso diversi canali. La Mengiste ribalta lo sguardo sul colonialismo italiano mettendo in relazione ogni personaggio con la memoria di quel colonialismo. Il dolore e la sofferenza patiti sono raffigurati nelle fotografie contenute nella scatola di metallo che viaggiano con la protagonista Hirut e che la accompagnano per quarant'anni. La struttura ciclica del romanzo, che si apre e si chiude con la scena di Hirut intenta a riportare la scatola ad Ettore, permette al lettore di compiere anch'egli un viaggio attraverso la storia e la

memoria del popolo etiope. La storia quindi non è unica, è una storia composta dalle mille voci spezzate dei personaggi che non dimenticano le ferite del passato ma non rinunciano al desiderio di un futuro migliore. La visione non è più totalizzante, fuoriesce dagli schemi della narrazione storica, si intinge di punti di vista diversi e talvolta sconosciuti, come quello delle donne etiopi, protagoniste in prima fila della resistenza contro l'invasione italiana.

Il presente contributo ha tentato di dimostrare come la memoria non corrisponda sempre ed esattamente all'identità di un gruppo e ai suoi interessi attuali. La memoria può essere considerata come il deposito di quelle tracce che servono a rivalutare il presente in un'ottica di comprensione o critica di quei processi che vi hanno portato. Il dibattito pubblico attuale in molte parti del mondo politicizza l'identità utilizzando il passato e selezionando solo ciò che serve al sostegno di quell'identità prescelta alla difesa degli interessi di una data elité. D'altra parte il passato può essere rievocato in nome di una elaborazione. Questo tipo di rievocazione si oppone ai processi, non sempre spontanei, di oblio, atti a far dimenticare tutto ciò che risulta scomodo o problematico. L'elaborazione restituisce un confronto più consapevole con le problematicità del passato con il fine di portare ad una assunzione di responsabilità degli individui nei confronti della propria storia. L'elaborazione è un processo che necessita di una presa di coscienza e di una disposizione all'ascolto e alla comprensione della propria storia. Attraverso l'analisi di tre ambiti diversi, questo contributo ha voluto esplorare la memoria del colonialismo italiano compiendo un viaggio che, partendo dalla storia e passando dalla sociologia e la letteratura, ha simulato una tale elaborazione.

Il ricordo del passato perseguita la protagonista di *The Shadow King*, ma è grazie all'elaborazione di quello che ha vissuto, che Hirut è sempre in grado di rimettersi in gioco e affrontare coloro che le hanno causato del male. Il passato struttura il presente con i suoi lasciti tramite dei meccanismi di recupero o abbandono di essi, riformulando sempre di nuovo la storia. L'essenza dell'esperienza è la capacità che abbiamo di dialogare con il nostro passato, la nostra storia e la nostra memoria.