INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

PART I
MEMORY AND RELIGION IN THE GREEK WORLD

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Memory, expressed in different ways, plays a central role in ancient Greece as well as in many other cultures. This is because, in part, it represents a mediation between human beings' unstable present and their "religious" practices. These practices in turn anchor social precariousness in a final and radically "other" reality, that of the supernatural, which by definition is not subject to precariousness. As Peter L. Berger says, one of the effects of the relationship between memory and religion is "to 'locate' human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference".[1]

Memory organises time for both the gods and for men in generational and genealogical order. Social groups, cultural patterns and religious systems "live" the past and use it to model and sustain representations of identity, that is to provide an answer to a need for sense. This is one of the reasons why memories are fluid and yet, at the same time, crystallised. It is this ambivalence which allows memory, or rather memories, to control and regulate the erosive and centrifugal power of change.

Ordering and re-ordering the past is therefore to trace a map that mainly draws attention towards what from time to time becomes the *centre*, in respect of that which, on the contrary, remains on the margin. That is, memory proceeds in a "re-constructive" way, reorganising the past according to frames of reference in the present. If sense of the past gives collective continuity to experience, history is the *raw material* which *elaborates* new horizons of meaning. Only in this way will the *shared past* have *normative value* for the present: this kind of past functions as a tribunal where present disputes and uncertainties can be appealed.

It follows that the preservation and erosion of memory are two aspects of the same process. In my opinion, this process furnishes a space in which to negotiate the tension between change and innovation on one hand, and on the other the tendency to discern elements of immutability:

> "The human personality is an arrangement for the preservation of conventional distinctions […] balancing motivation against compulsion by managing the transitions between them, and society is an arrangement among actors to the same purpose."[2]

It is that which, in certain conditions, we define as "tradition": institutions, values and other elements which structure society all exhibit a relationship with the past. It

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1 Berger 1990, 35. See also 25, n. 11: "Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established." Wagner 1981, 104: "I have argued that man creates his realities through objectification, giving his thoughts, acts, and products the characteristics of certain contexts selected as 'controls'."
2 Wagner 1981, 48.

is no coincidence that the sense of the past is manifested through a break with tradition. One of the symptoms by which this break is recognised is, for example, the set of "invented" traditions created to react to new situations through "social constructions" which exhibit a connection with a presumed past: ceremonial and obligatory repetitiveness creates an illusory effect of immobility and changelessness, as much as it satisfies a sense of belonging.[3] This *work* on memory is necessary every time change in the social and political equilibrium (i.e. power relations) requires the reformulation of a system of rules with shared meaning, creating a social order that places memory at the centre and is generated by the interweaving of knowledge and power relations. In such a way, the story of the past responds to strategic urgency in a given historic moment.

Within this space, oblivion is a constituent part as much as memory is. The incessant and inexhaustible play between memory and oblivion frames conceptual and institutional instruments, capable of ensuring a shared common life and survival of the community that recognises itself in them. With reference to Jan Assmann, who had the great distinction of recovering Maurice Halbwachs' work,[4] we can maintain that every society practices its own *memory culture*. In other words, it incessantly elaborates and re-elaborates a differing collection of references to the "past":

> "Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)."[5]

This vision suggests a crucial question: what is the nature of the past? Is it really such a constantly unlimited and tractable resource? Or does every culture produce binding sets, necessary for a definition of identity?[6] Specifically, in the area of the sacred, the *dromena* and *legomena* provide a grammar and reference system of temporal precepts and places of memory:

> "In the flow of everyday communications such festivals, rites, epics, poems, images, etc., form 'islands of time,' islands of a completely different temporality suspended from time. In cultural memory, such islands of time expand into memory spaces of 'retrospective contemplativeness' [*retrospective Besonnenheit*]."[7]

The Greek world provides a suitable laboratory to observe a space for mediation which complicates, but enhances, the distinction between ethnic and established religions, between "traditional" societies and "historical" ones.[8]

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3   Hobsbawm 1974, 14. See also Hobsbawm 1992.
4   Assmann 1992.
5   Assmann 1995, 129.
6   The lively and contentious debate developed by Maurice Bloch (Bloch 1977) and Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai 1981) focuses on this problem. Unlike Bloch, Appadurai holds that there are constraints on the tractability of the past constituted by cultural sets that every society produces.
7   Assmann 1995, 129.
8   Lévi-Strauss 1973, 40–41. More recently, see Grethlein 2010.

In my opinion, the role that religion or religions play as "particular collective memory"[9] remains at the fore. This type of memory necessarily measures and compares itself with other dimensions which Pierre Bourdieu unforgettably describes as "une lutte à mort pour la vie et la mort symbolique":

> "voué à la mort, cette fin qui ne peut être prise pour fin, l'homme est un être sans raison d'être. C'est la société, et elle seule, qui dispense, à des degrés différents, les justifications et les raisons d'exister; c'est elle qui, en produisant les affaires ou les positions que l'on dit 'importantes', produit les actes et les agents que l'on juge 'importants', pour eux-mêmes et pour les autres, personnages objectivement et subjectivement assurés de leur valeur et ainsi arrachés à l'indifférence et à l'insignifiance […] à la facticité, à la contingence, à l'absurdité. […] La concurrence pour l'existence sociale connue et reconnue, qui arrache à l'insignifiance, est une lutte à mort pour la vie et la mort symbolique."[10]

For all these reasons, memory can be expressed in many ways, but all equally combine to represent mental spaces and regulate communication strategies in the present through the complicated landscape of time. In short, they trace a complex and stratified anthropology of memory.

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9   Filoramo 2004, 264.
10 Bourdieu 1998, 51–52.