

# Annali di Ca' Foscari

Serie orientale

Vol. 54

Giugno – Supplemento – 2018

e-ISSN 2385-3042  
ISSN 1125-3789



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari

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## Serie orientale

e-ISSN 2385-3042  
ISSN 1125-3789

Direttore  
Antonio Rigopoulos

**Edizioni Ca' Foscari** - Digital Publishing

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia

URL <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/riviste/annali-di-ca-foscari-serie-orientale/>

# Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale

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**Editore** Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing | Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia, Italia | [ecf@unive.it](mailto:ecf@unive.it)

**Stampa** Logo srl, via Marco Polo 8, 35010 Borgoricco (PD)

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Scientific certification of the works published by Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing: all essays published in this volume have received a favourable opinion by subject-matter experts, through an anonymous peer review process under the responsibility of the Scientific Committee of the journal. The evaluations were conducted in adherence to the scientific and editorial criteria established by Edizioni Ca' Foscari.

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**Texts in Between Action and Non-Action**  
Genesis, Strategies, and Outcomes of Textual Agency

edited by  
Massimo Leone, Luca Rizzo and Pier Carlo Tommasi



## Foreword

The current issue of *Annali di Ca' Foscari – Serie Orientale* gathers contributions from a doctoral workshop held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice in December 2017. The workshop, and thus the present volume, attempted to reconsider the mutual understanding inherent in 'area studies', generally conceived as an autonomous field of research, which seldom questions the nature of its role. The initiative was organized by the guest editors of this journal issue with the generous support of the Student Office. Overall, it offered a precious opportunity for sharing ideas and fostering interdisciplinary dialogue.

Considering the variety of specializations expressed by each contributor, we have identified the broad topic of textual agency as a thought-provoking ground on which to lay the foundations for our debate. The primary question this collection of essays intends to address is the rethinking of the concept of 'text' and exploring the multiple forms of meaning it engenders. The familiarity with the text as a closed, self-standing unit of meaning has put aside the multi-dimensional process of signification, leading to a widespread misperception of the text's value in its full complexity. Rather, we should delve into the factors or 'strategies' – rhetorical, visual, aural, kinaesthetic – that a text might employ in order to convey its message and thereby re-orient human thought and action. In other words, what conditions may enhance or hinder the text's potential of 'doing things'? Opinions on this matter vary considerably among intellectuals, traditions, historical periods, and cultural spheres; thus no answer can be easily found. Yet, such questions have triggered our interest as young scholars from different backgrounds and areas of expertise, opening a lively discussion around the theme of textual agency.

This notion has been central to theoretical reflection over the past few decades and has recently gained momentum thanks to the influential work of Bruno Latour. In particular, his efforts moved beyond the common philosophical ground which posits a strict ontological divide between subject and object. A similar shift in perspective resulted in a more inclusive idea of 'network', a social space produced by both human and non-human agents through their interaction. Within this framework, the textual artefact has been entrusted with previously unnoticed functions – and responsibilities –, but how can we discern when a text is just an inert object and when it is capable of – or culpable for – eliciting a specific audience's reaction? How can we detect the agenda underpinning its emergence and keep



track of its reception? The problem becomes even more compelling when it is intertwined with cultures distant from our own in time and space.

Often criticized for being too self-referential, area studies are now facing the challenge of proving their relevance by contributing to the creation of a border-crossing, transcultural knowledge. At the same time, area studies may well profit from this mutual encounter by developing innovative tools for critical inquiry to apply in their respective fields. For instance, a nuanced theorization of text and agency could serve the purpose of deepening our understanding of social phenomena and products, without losing sight of their irreducible contexts. In response to such a challenge, the following papers have sought to balance the micro and macro perspectives by looking at individual case studies – which surely will gain the interest of specialists – while tackling the broader issue on the transformative – and transformable – potential of texts beyond East and West. Moreover, the variety of topics mirrors the diversity of methodological approaches, which range from ethnography to semiotics, and from cultural history to comparative literature.

This volume consists of three sections. The first looks at the manifold sources of agency, which frequently finds a powerful catalyst in the human body. In Simona Loi's opening paper, ritual flesh and blood become a living text, which seems to proclaim the flagellants' autonomous choice of self-giving against any orthodox religious narrative. Carlotta De Sanctis focuses on the shifting edge between past and present in her interviews with Turkish left-wing intellectuals, whose life stories embody a disenchanting protest against the current wave of authoritarianism. Silvia Rivadossi examines the rising popularity of urban shamans in contemporary Tokyo and the way in which they build new forms of spirituality through the means of artistic performance. In these cases, one may notice a sort of permeability between text, word, and body, making difficult – if not useless – the task of separating such elements. Texts produce (dis)order and (de)stabilize sociocultural, political, and sexual identities, leading to the formation of unstable boundaries. In turn, the body is endowed with a sort of 'textuality' which allows for the codification and transmission of meaningful signs.

The second section takes into account some of the mechanisms which enable the efficacy of a text, with a specific attention paid to the techniques and forms of logic underlying discursive practices. In its countless declinations, language constitutes a privileged place for the articulation of meaning. More specifically, the oscillation between 'doing things' and 'making others do things' project onto linguistic forms and grammatical constructs, producing multi-layered texts in both content and expression. Luca Rizzo proposes a subtle analysis of a premodern Arabic epigram, read through the lens of semiotics to enlighten the interplay between overt and hidden meaning within the dynamics of textual interpretation. Arianna Magnani traces the migration of books across territories and cultures. She

observes how texts imported from China would become the (complicit) victims of (mis)translation, eventually reshaping the European imagination of 'otherness' on the verge of the eighteenth century. Beatrice Gallelli investigates the rhetorical devices adopted by Chinese Prime Minister Xi Jinping in his political speeches, focusing in particular on the metaphorical language and normative messages they conceal. The authors have shown that a painstaking scrutiny is needed whenever one wants to decode the verbal and non-verbal features from which a text draws its force.

The last section looks into the possible outcomes of textual agency. It opens with Vittorio Cattelan, whose contribution points to the ideological implications of the musical text by discussing the diffusion and reception of Italian opera in Ottoman Turkey. The final paper by Veronica De Pieri attempts to re-evaluate literature in the wake of catastrophic events. Her arguments include but are not limited to the recent Fukushima disaster and aim at emphasizing the ostensible therapeutic effects of writing and reading for people who have suffered a traumatic experience. In conclusion, we might say that the ability of any text to act always implies a symmetrical quality of being acted in response to the re-negotiation of values, beliefs, interests, and practices it constantly prompts and generates.

A special thanks goes to Professor Massimo Leone from the University of Turin and University of Shanghai for giving an inspirational keynote speech and for presenting a vivid sketch of the premises and objectives at stake in his introduction. Additionally, we would like to express our gratitude to Professor Marco Ceresa, Head of the Department of Asian and North African Studies, to Professor Patrick Heinrich, coordinator of the PhD program in Asian and African Studies, to Professor Federico Squarcini, former coordinator of the PhD program, and to Dr. Tiziana Migliore, for their encouragement and advice, especially during the first stages of this project. We are also indebted to Professor Antonio Rigopoulos, whose enthusiasm and generosity made it possible to devote a special issue of *Annali di Ca' Foscari - Serie Orientale* to our initiative. Lastly, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to the editorial team of ECF, all the authors, the anonymous peer-reviewers, and, of course, to everyone who actively took part in the workshop last year. We sincerely hope this volume will set the basis for further discussion and provide the readers with an opportunity to engage with the issue of textual agency across different centuries and geographical areas.

The Editors



## **Part 1**

### The Genesis of Action



# The Roots of Textual Agency

## The Semiotics of Motivation and Demotivation

Massimo Leone

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**Abstract** This introductory essay deals with the origins of textual agency and inertia. Texts predominantly work as indexes, icons, or symbols, according to Peirce's typology of signs. These three types usually exert agency to an increasing extent. The essay seeks to determine the origin of this gradient in the dialectics between motivation and arbitrariness. The more a text is received as motivated, the likelier it is that it might exert a strong agency. This hypothesis leads also to an articulation of the rhetorics of motivation or de-motivation through which communities of interpreters can promote or demote the agentive force of a certain text.

**Summary** 1 Sources of Textual Energy. – 2 The Energy of Motivation. – 3 Objective, Subjective, and Inter-subjective Motivation. – 4 Indexical Motivation. – 5 Iconic Motivation. – 6 Promoting Motivation. – 7 Demoting Motivation. – 8 Motivational Rhetorics. – 9 Perspectives on the Agency and Inertia of texts.

**Keywords** Text. Agency. Inertia. Motivation. Arbitrariness. Semiotics.

### 1 Sources of Textual Energy

No serious reflection on the inertia or on the agency of a text can start without a fundamental question: Whence does the text take its energy? Or, in the case of an inert text, how come that the source of its energy is dry? Texts can be more or less active in many ways. In all circumstances, however, their mere existence as cultural artifacts in a society as well as their interaction with receivers triggers some consequences, be they cognitive, emotional, or pragmatic. Along the dimension of their increasing or decreasing agency and inertia, texts can be ranged along a spectrum. Its two extreme poles will likely remain empty. On the one hand, a totally inert text is impossible. If a text exists, it means that it has been fabricated within the language of a community. Although the community might not exist anymore, and although the language might be unknown to all, the text continues, nevertheless, to exert a mysterious agency. In seventeenth-century Europe, for instance, nobody was able to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs. Yet, scholars like Athanasius Kircher would assume that they were – their indecipherability notwithstanding – texts, which, as

a result, would keep arousing the curiosity of those who were eager to unveil their content. On the other hand, a completely active text is impossible too. Its agency, indeed, always depends on the fact that someone at least recognizes it as a text, and deals with it as such, that is, as a source of meaning enshrined in it at another time or in another space. The first British explorers of Australia, for instance, did not realize that the red desert was a text in which natives would mentally and visually inscribe their foundational narratives. The former saw no trace of writing in the rocks where the latter, instead, would project their knowledge.

Between these two poles, however, myriads of texts are more or less active in the world depending on a multiplicity of factors, which a semiotic and pragmatic approach can dissect and articulate. Certainly, the relative agency or inertia of a text depends on the interaction between a text and its context, that is, between the internal linguistic and/or semiotic structure of a text and the way in which it somehow resonates with the circumstances of its reading. When the western contemporary visitors of the Bologna Museum of Paintings admire Raphael's *Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia* (1514 ca), for instance, they might be impressed by the quality and realism of the representation, yet their reception will be different from that of the early modern Japanese who were first shown religious paintings by Jesuit missionaries. In the former case, Renaissance perspectival depiction has already become part of a visual and cognitive habit, whereas in the latter, it would trigger an entirely new chain of cognitive, emotional, and even pragmatic reactions. According to coeval Jesuit accounts, exposing early modern Japanese natives to images of the Holy Virgin protruding out of the canvas thanks to the 'visual trick' of Renaissance perspective could even facilitate their religious conversion!

This example shows that, besides circumstantial variables determining the agentive potential of a text, its level of inertia and/or activity might also result from textual characteristics that are, in a certain sense, cross-cultural. The first task of a philosophical reflection on this subject, then, should be that of investigating the deep nature of these characteristics. The question here is to single out textual features that, when present, dramatically increase the level of agency of a text and that, conversely, conspicuously decrease it when they are absent. A corollary of such question consists in finding out whether these features are cross-cultural, and to what extent. It is likely to be excluded, for instance, that 'superficial' traits of texts might be determinant in giving rise to this 'deep agency'. The particular genre, format, or style in which a text transmits its meaning, indeed, is subject to enormous variability through time and across space, so that it is quite improbable that these circumstantial features might be the ultimate origin of a text's agency. On the contrary, it is more plausible to believe that, when these genres, formats, or styles are agentive, and are so to the point of systematically cause a response in their readers, that

might be the case for underneath these textual features lies a common denominator, which then expresses itself in various textual forms.

## 2 The Energy of Motivation

A 'natural suspect' in such an enquiry is, therefore, one of the dialectic elements singled out by Ferdinand De Saussure in his structural analysis of language, that is, the concept of motivation. In the lessons converged in the *Course of General Linguistics*, the Swiss linguist would insist on distinguishing between signs and languages that are motivated and signs and languages that are arbitrary. The distinction, indeed, was paramount in order to stress the essentially unmotivated nature of the verbal language, in which, according to De Saussure, meaning does not arise from a positive relation linking signifiers and signified but from a negative relation stemming from the system of differences that composes a language's structure. Indeed, according to this perspective, there are some elements of motivation in verbal languages, yet they are secondary or derivative. A typical example are onomatopoeias, that is, expressions whose phonetic forms seek to mimic the sounds which they refer to; in this case too, however, linguistic evidence indicates that different languages mimic the same sound, such as the cockcrow, for instance, in disparate ways. The opposition between motivation and arbitrariness has played a central role not only in underlying the essentially conventional nature of verbal language but also in problematizing the difference between this and other systems of signs. The more or less arbitrary nature of 'visual languages', for instance, is a traditional matter of debate in semiotics. Also, the whole theorization on the so-called "semi-symbolical systems" revolves around the possibility of re-motivating arbitrary languages in order to increase their agency. These and other discussions, however, as well as the foundational opposition and dialectics posited by Ferdinand De Saussure, remain superficial if an underlying question is not dealt with, the question regarding the nature itself of motivation. What is the definition of motivation, indeed, and what that of arbitrariness? And why should a motivated text be able to exert more agency than an arbitrary one?

## 3 Objective, Subjective, and Inter-subjective Motivation

When a sign, a text, or even a whole language is considered by an individual or by an entire community as motivated, that means that some or even all the elements that compose it are seen as caused by the source of meaning that expresses itself in them. A relation of causality is, therefore, assumed as linking the sign and what it signifies. So as to understand the



extent to which a community holds a cultural artifact as motivated, a sort of commutation test is in order. The analyst should wonder whether the cultural artifact in question admits alternatives and to what extent. In a verbal language, for instance, words are seen as linked to the meaning that they manifest and convey. The word 'cat' in English, for example, is considered as linked to the semantic evocation of a particular animal species and its common sociocultural imaginary. Speakers of English know that, whenever they want to refer to this content, they must use the expression 'cat', and not another one. From this point of view, the word admits no alternatives. Yet, present-day English speakers also realize that, were they speaking a different language, such as Spanish, for instance, the word that they use to refer to the animal species should change accordingly. The relation between the word and its content in the two languages, then, is conventional and binding but not motivated, meaning that there is nothing in the features of the cat and its usual representations that determine the composition of the word 'cat' in English or 'gato' in Spanish.

Verbal language, however, is not entirely void of motivation. The syntagmatic construction of a sentence in a language, for example, somehow mimics the narrative logic that is predominant among speakers of that language. In most Indo-European idioms, thus, the syntagmatic position of the subject, the verb, and the object can be interpreted as mirroring the logical position that these three elements hold in the agentive imaginary of their speakers.

It would be reductive, however, to retain that language can be only objectively motivated, as in the case of the production of onomatopoeias, for instance. Language can also be subjectively motivated, as occurs in the semantic connotations of proper names. There is no particular causal relation between a person with her or his physical and psychical characteristics and the proper name that this person goes by. As it is said in English and in other languages, indeed, this proper name is a 'given' one. Parents might have chosen an entirely different name. Once that the name is given, nevertheless, and, even more, after that it has been ratified not as much by bureaucracy as by family usage, a subjective link of motivation starts to take shape between the person and the name. We become our name and our name becomes our persona, although this causal relation is, of course, not an objective but a subjective one.

With regards to religious meaning, then, the most interesting case is neither that of objective nor that of subjective but, instead, that of intersubjective motivation. There are circumstances in which entire communities decide to attribute a motivational aura to the relation between some signifiers and their signified. That partially happens also as regards the relation of speakers with their 'mother tongue'. This expression is particularly suggestive and appropriate so as to indicate that, for the speakers of a language, a particular feeling of belonging and assurance arises

from the fact of speaking that language and not another one. In antiquity, that even led to dismiss as 'barbaric verses' the language of the other and, in particular, that of the enemy. Such inter-subjective attribution of motivation to one's language – or, anyway, to one language – also returns in modern times in cases of linguistic nationalism, chauvinism, or ethnic conflict. One's language is, then, reputed as more sophisticated than all others, or more apt at expressing certain ideas or feelings. For Martin Heidegger, German was neither conventionally nor arbitrarily but, rather, essentially more a philosophical language than all the remnant European languages – with the exception of ancient Greek, of course. It is evident that, in such trends, a religious dimension starts to emerge. This dimension, however, emerges not because the attribution of motivation to a language is intrinsically spiritual but, on the opposite, because many religious cultures usually hold spiritual meaning as motivated, so that, when the same motivation is attributed to a non-religious sphere, such sphere tends to acquire a religious motivation.

#### **4 Indexical Motivation**

Before considering the construction of religious language as a particular instance of inter-subjective attribution of motivation, it is necessary to specify that motivation between signifier and signified, as Saussure would say, or between expression and content, as Luis T. Hjelmslev would say, can take different forms. Two of them are essential and have been singled out and theorized by Charles S. Peirce. First, a sign can be considered as motivated because there is something, in the reality that the sign contributes to express and convey – that is, to represent and make present – that physically causes the totality of the sign or, at least, its most relevant features. Someone's signature, for instance, is partially non-motivated, meaning that its shape, color, and texture depend on such variable contextual features as the predominant material techniques of writing – ink pen, fountain pen, paper, parchment, etc. – and the particular penmanship the signing individual has acquired in its writing context and training – signatures of the same historical epoch or society tend to resemble. A signature, though, also works as a motivated sign when it is considered not in its gestalt, that is, as an arbitrary symbol, but in its capacity of conveying the idea of the physical presence of the signing individual at the time and place in which the signature itself was produced. In this case, the physical and, therefore, causal and spatio-temporal relation between the signifier and the signified brings about its indexicality and, as a consequence, founds its aura of motivation.

In indexicality, the signified itself causes the motivation of its signifier by producing it. That does not mean, however, that no dimension of

conventionality and, therefore, arbitrariness is involved in the creation of such motivational link. Although the imagination of a relation of causality is one of the most common features in the anthropology of the human perception of reality, it is, nevertheless, a narrative – or, better said, ‘meta-narrative’ – framework that is historically and culturally developed, to the point that, in certain circumstances, it might be ignored or even replaced. In simpler words, cultures collectively ‘learn’ how to establish and represent links of causality and, therefore, indexicality, underpinning the meaning of certain signs, texts, or entire languages. When these links are singled out and become part of the ‘narrative common sense’ of a community, however, they are seen as stemming from the signified themselves.

## **5 Iconic Motivation**

There is a second dynamic of semiotic motivation. If smoke can signify fire, that is so for the latter has produced the former. A photograph of the same fire, instead, also signifies it in a way that entails the creation of a motivational link, yet this motivation does not stem from the signified but from the signifier. A photograph of fire is not caused by such fire in the same way as smoke is caused by it. In the former case, indeed, a relation of causality and, therefore, spatio-temporal contiguity and indexicality holds between the fire and the photograph, yet such relation is not immediate but mediated by a device whose functioning consists exactly in translating a certain configuration of reality in the production of a sign that represents it. This representation, however, cannot be read as a direct index of what it represents – although it ultimately causally derives from it – but as mediated signification of such causality, that is, as icon. An icon, indeed, is a sign in which the motivational link between a signified and a signifier is not manifested immediately but through the mediation of a device. In an index, we read the causal impulse of the signified that has produced it; in an icon, we read the translational impulse of the signifier that has rendered an underpinning causal impulse. The more this translational impulse is predominant, the less the underpinning causal impulse can be detected in signification. When admiring the photograph of a fire, we still think that an actual fire, albeit indirectly, has motivated the creation of the photograph. When admiring the painting of a fire, instead, we concentrate more on the translational impulse of the iconic mediation and less on the subjacent causal impulse. The painter might have seen a real fire, and has actually probably seen it, but this is not considered as pertinent in the semantic reception of the sign.

It is common sense, among students of semiotics, to believe that icons signify their signified because of the resemblance that they manifest in relation to it. The concept of resemblance, however, is of difficult –if not

impossible – definition. The painting of a fire resembles to it in a different way as a photograph or an ekphrastic literary depiction of it, yet semioticians would agree that they are all icons of the fire. What matters in these signs, then, that is, what all these signs share, is the fact that, in all of them, a relation of causality, spatio-temporal contiguity, and, therefore, indexicality is filtered through the translation of a specific device and its particular usage.

## **6 Promoting Motivation**

These subtle disquisitions on the apperception of motivation are necessary in order to realize that, in the different inter-subjective constructions of motivation, what semiotically happens is that the indexical component of a sign is extolled to the detriment of all the other semiotic dimensions. That is fundamental in the creation of a motivational aura in religious discourse. An example will clarify it. A Renaissance painting representing the face of Jesus is not an index of it. The painter has certainly not seen Jesus. He might have seen previous depictions of his face that, in turn, were created with reference to anterior visual representations that, ultimately, might indeed be somehow related to the visual and perceptual experience of those who actually saw Jesus and depicted his countenance through images, words, or other signs. The indexical origin of the Renaissance painting is so remote, though, that its iconicity is certainly preponderant: when admiring the painting, we conventionally see Jesus, but what we see is not as much the face that produced it as the hand that depicted it. Actually, the translational impulse might be so preponderant in the creation and appearance of the painting, that we end up receiving it not as much as an icon as a symbolical and, therefore, arbitrary and conventional representation of Jesus's face. Present-day observers of Antonello da Messina's *Salvator Mundi* (1465-75) recognize the face of Jesus in it, yet they certainly exclude that this representation might have been brought about by causal contiguity with the actual face of Jesus, and even surmise that it is, indeed, out of a convention that we tend to identify as Jesus someone who is represented with long hair, longish beard, an oblong face, etc. Would we recognize the same face as that of Jesus if it had short hair, no beard, and a big smile on it?

Therefore, an inter-subjective attribution of motivation consists in downplaying the translational impulse underpinning the existence and phenomenology of a sign and in extolling its indexicality, no matter how remote it might be. Beholders of Antonello da Messina's painting might collectively tend to downplay the translational influence of the device, the technique, the format, the style, etc. and to emphasize, on the contrary, the indexical source of the painting, up to the point of considering it not any more as a

conventional representation of the face of Jesus but as an iconic depiction of it in which the indexical dimension is, nevertheless, held as predominant and determinant, as though it was a sort of photograph. The historical and cultural reasons for which this motivational switch from symbol to icon occurs may vary, yet the semiotic dynamic of the switch remains the same: the translational impulse is downplayed, the indexical source highlighted.

Before we return on the nature of these reasons, it must first be underlined that such motivating process can be further accentuated so that not only a predominantly symbolical representation is turned into a predominantly iconic depiction, but this too is transformed – in the collective perception of a community – into a predominantly indexical sign. That is the case, for instance, of all paintings that are treated as relics. Reliquary paintings are attributed a motivational aura that stems from entirely excluding any translational impulse: not only there is no conventionality in the icon, but the icon itself has been produced as an *acheiropoieta* image, as a signifier produced by its signified. The painter of a reliquary icon of the face of Jesus is Jesus himself.

## 7 Demoting Motivation

This semiotic modeling of the processes of motivational attribution is heuristic also because it can be reversed: on the one hand, a painting of a face can be treated like a photograph of it, and, further on, a photograph of it can be treated as a mortuary mask; on the other hand, subtracting instead of adding motivation, a mortuary mask can be treated as a photograph or, further on along the subtraction of indexicality, as a painting or even as a symbolical representation. On the one hand, one could argue that the mortuary mask of Napoleon is a motivated and, therefore, truthful sign of his face; on the other hand, detractors could argue that this effigy is due to a technique, to iconic conventions, to a symbolical imaginary, up to nuancing or even effacing all aura of motivation surrounding the mask.

This model, moreover, is conducive to a better understanding of the reasons and the effects of the processes that it semiotically diagrammatizes. There are recurrent causes and effects, indeed, related to either the increase or the decrease in the attribution of a motivational aura to a sign or series of signs. Causes and effects are, in fact, linked and exactly revolve around the agency of texts, around their potential for exerting a force in the world or, on the contrary, around their remaining inert and ineffectual. In general, and quite evidently, the more a community holds a sign as motivated, the more that same sign will also be seen and *will actually be* efficacious in prompting transformations in the world. Engaging an inter-religious war in order to reconquer a space that is considered as truthfully touched by a deity in its mundane passage, for instance, is

quite different from engaging a war in order to reconquer a space where, the community contends, it is conventionally believed that a deity has descended upon. Those who fight for Jerusalem do not fight either for a symbol or for an icon anymore but for a land that has been collectively turned into an index, into sacred land.

More abstractedly, the pragmatic efficaciousness of a motivated sign depends on the fact that no alternative is seen to it or to its most important features. A sacred text, a sacred image, a sacred land, etc. exert an agency, and a powerful one, for they are considered as inalterable, irreplaceable, and unique: there is only one stream of action stemming from the meaning of a text, because this text has no alternative and could produce no alternative meaning. The more a community considers that a sign, text, or language is conventional, that is, might be different from what it actually is, the more this perception of potentiality entails a de-potentiality of the agency that stems from signification. Why acting in response to a sign, if this sign could be different?

## **8 Motivational Rhetorics**

From a semiotic and external point of view, however, the relation between motivation and agency that has just been singled out, described, and analyzed must also be exposed as the possible object of rhetorics of mystification or demystification. From the internal point of view of a community of believers, indeed, a sign prompts action because it is considered as motivated. From the external point of view of semiotic analysis, however, a community ends up considering a sign as motivated because it must prompt an action. From this perspective, for instance, it is not true that land considered as sacred by two or more religious communities exerts a bellicose agency; rather, the opposite is true: two communities that must fight for some reasons – including for the primacy of their symbolical status and not only for structural or economic resources – end up motivating that land whose posited indexicality will ‘oblige’ them to fight.

The reversal of causality link between attribution of motivation and textual agency can be observed also in the opposite direction. On the one hand, it is indeed sometimes the case that, as a sign or text loses its motivational aura, acting in its name, for its sake, and prompted by its agency becomes increasingly difficult. On the other hand, though, exactly as a rhetoric of textual agency can build on an inter-subjective attribution of motivational aura, a symmetrically opposite rhetoric of textual inertia can build on an inter-subjective downplaying of the motivational aura of a sign. Is it so important to hang or not to hang crucifixes in Italian public schools? After all, it is a conventional symbol of Christianity, or even a conventional Italian custom, whose indexical links with the actual crucifixion of Jesus

are, therefore, so weakened that nobody really cares anymore about this sign, whether it is there or not.

## **9 Perspectives on the Agency and Inertia of Texts**

All the essays gathered in this collection reflect, from different perspectives and in relation to various sociocultural settings, about the same semiotic dynamic of motivational promotion or demotion. They rather privilege, as it was inevitable, the social construction of textual agency over the social deconstruction of it, for the emergence of agency is, indeed, related to the former process, whereas the latter is likely to manifest itself in dynamics of textual anesthetization – including those involved in the secularization of religious texts. Despite this inevitable positioning, however, they all point out, with unprecedented clarity, that human communities and individuals are moved by signs in different ways depending on the intrinsic semiotic nature of these signs, and that some signs in particular – such as the religious one, e.g. –, exert an agency that is often disruptive precisely because they all share the same motivational aura. Collective rhetorics can, however, hijack and instrumentalize these semiotic dynamics, reversing the relation between causes and effects: motivation is inter-subjectively added or subtracted, so as to exert collective agency or maintain social inertia. Scholars should not be preoccupied with the correctness of these calls but must nevertheless suggest lucidity on the semiotic processes and rhetoric agendas underpinning them.

## De-orientalising Ritual Blood Calabria's Vattienti, a Case Study

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**Abstract** This article uses affect theory to redefine the flagellation rituals performed by the vattienti and to relate them to the Šī'a celebrations of 'Āšūrā' in Lebanon. The term 'vattienti' designates the flagellants of a small village situated in Calabria (Southern Italy), who perform their rituals during the last days of the Holy Week, while 'Āšūrā' indicates the mournful ceremonies dedicated to the martyr Ḥusayn. The paper argues that the two rites create specific affective atmospheres, and that the comparative analysis of these atmospheres – especially in relation to the agency of the Italian and Lebanese performants – allows us to overcome representations of these rituals that are centred on primordial religious fanaticism. Agency, specifically, is considered here as the human capacity to act and to resist social structures. The methodologies used in this research are qualitative and, especially, ethnographic fieldworks, participant observations and in-depth interviews.

**Summary** 1 Twisted Representations. – 2. Between Lebanon and Calabria: Geographies of Blood. – 2.1 Methodological Clarification. – 2.2 Nocera Terinese's Vattienti. – 2.3 Beirut's 'Āšūrā': The Ḥandaq al-Ġamīq Flagellants. – 3 Affective Atmospheres and Emotions. – 4 When Text Becomes Flesh and Flesh Becomes Text: The Flagellants' Agency. – 5 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Agency. Affective Atmosphere. 'Āšūrā'. Vattienti.

Per fare le cose bene bisogna buttare il sangue.  
(Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente,  
13 April 2017)

For the skin is faster than the word.  
(Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 2002)

### 1 Twisted Representations

In 1960, director Gualtiero Jacopetti, together with Franco Prosperi, took some cinematographic shots in Nocera Terinese (a small village in Catanzaro's district) having as their main theme a particular flagellation ritual that takes place during the last days of Holy Week. A few minutes of these



shots were used to make a video, easy to find online,<sup>1</sup> which, if watched outside of the entire context of the documentary, would appear simply intended to make known one of the many rituals linked to Easter in Calabria, or more generally in Southern Italy. However, as reported by Ferlaino:

the movie altogether presents itself as an anthology of unusual episodes of primeval life and eccentric behaviours, gathered in the first half of the sixties, with an adventurous joyride in various countries all over the world. The documentary *Mondo Cane*, warping reality for the sake of entertainment, seeks to falsify the real meanings of the reported episodes and with unforgiving and amoral remarks tends to give them the cold shoulder and make fun of them. (1990, 134; Author's translation)

The documentary was shown in Italian movie theatres in 1962 and produced great controversy. In particular, it was damaging to the image of the *vattienti* (a term that identifies Nocera's flagellants), and by extension, that of Nocera's inhabitants, Calabrians, and Southern Italians in general, who took offence and were outraged by such a mocking representation (De Vincenzo 1987, 322; Lombardi Satriani 1979, 88-9).

During last year's Holy Week (2017), I went to the same, small Calabrian village to conduct ethnographic research focussed on the *vattienti*'s rituals. Twenty-five years later, the crawling resentment left by the twisted representations depicted by Jacopetti and his team was still clearly discernible among the townsfolk. The outsider's stereotyping eye emphasised the alleged fanaticism of the rituals' participants, presenting them as aggressive savages. Specifically, it is the fact of Jacopetti's having included the parts where the Calabrian flagellants perform the ritual within a sequence of scenes aiming to show an ancient alien world, made up of inhuman and gruesome rituals, that reveals this intention. In this context, one *vattiente*'s words become relevant:

they want to take away the animals from circuses; and we, maybe, following somebody's idea, should become the village's animals? (Author's unpublished interview to a senior *vattiente*, 11 April 2017)

With this article, I would like to pay tribute to the inhabitants of Nocera Terinese, and to the *vattienti*, who, with great human warmth and unparalleled hospitality, welcomed me and introduced me to their Holy Week rituals. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, and Federico Calabrese Martuscelli, Estella Carpi, Sara Fregonese, Marco Lauri, Stefano Loi, Roberta Mungianu, Elena Pupulin, and my supervisor, Professor Marco Salati, for having read previous drafts of the manuscript.

1 The video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCeXiayJvFw> (2018-05-23).

Nonetheless, Jacopetti was not the first nor the last to stigmatise Southern Italy. Ferlaino (2007, 18) reports the expressions 'Italian Indies' and 'Indies of Down Here' as being used by Jesuit fathers to denounce the backwardness and the condition of clerical negligence that they considered to be common traits of Southern Italy's districts and countryside; however, this was actually a matter of a variety of specific rituals being maintained and preserved rather than having been swept away by the reforming fury of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Both Jacopetti and the throng of journalists, photographers, anthropologists, supposed scholars, random sightseers, and tourists who invade Nocera every year have created a twisted representation<sup>2</sup> of the vattienti due to finding themselves in a condition of "positional superiority" (Said 2003, 7).

Since the first hours of my visit to Nocera, I realised that whoever accepted the invitation to talk with me, and agreed to be interviewed or to better explain the ritual, wanted first and foremost to understand the way in which I intended to portray the vattienti, and from which point of view I wanted to depict the phenomenon of voluntary effusion of blood.

During the interviews and informal conversations conducted throughout the ten days of my stay in the Calabrian township (from 7 to 16 April 2017), it was furthermore emphasised by the interviewees how impossible it was for foreigners to deeply and truly understand the ceremony, and that these foreigners should have at least stayed in the township to witness it for a long enough period rather than simply watching a television report, looking at some photos or videos, or visiting Nocera for one day only. Moreover, they also stressed the exasperating nature of the photographers' attitudes and their obtrusiveness, which had grown stronger over the years, as inferred from the following passages extracted from various interviews:

2 Many authors have contributed, through their words, to transmitting an adulterated version of the vattienti, stressing the brutality, the gore, the inappropriate and ambiguous attitude and supposed drunkenness. Reported here are some examples: "Dopo di essersi resi brilli, battono fortemente con un pezzo di legno le parti laterali e posteriori delle cosce" (After getting themselves inebriated, they hit strongly with a chunk of wood the side and back parts of their thighs) (Borrello 1889, 29); "Orrida costumanza" (Horrendous tradition) (Pontieri 1921, 228), "Certamente, mi si farà osservare, è da barbari o da gente insensibile e retrograda un tale eccessivo zelo di mortificazione e di penitenza, in pieno secolo ventesimo" (Certainly, you will let me observe this, it is barbaric or it comes from heartless and hidebound people, such excessive zealotry in mortification and penitence in the late twentieth century) (230), "Poi, quando l'orrido e degenerato atto di penitenza è compiuto e l'effetto del buon vino scemato, i *battenti* rientrano a casa" (Afterwards, when the horrid and degenerate act of contrition is concluded and the effects of the tasty wine gone, the *battenti* go back home) (231); "A Nocera Tirinese (Nicastro) la devozione va sino al fanatismo, e i penitenti fanno le stazioni della Via Crucis battendosi con palle fatte con vetri uniti con pece, fino a lacerarsi a sangue, medicando poi le ferite con un'erba speciale" (In Nocera Tirinese (Nicastro) devotion morphs into fanaticism, and the confessants follow the Stations of the Cross hitting themselves with globes made out of glass and pitch until they bleed, then healing their wounds with a special herb) (Lumini cit. in Spinelli 2009, 15).

If the mouth dries, we wash it out with wine, but we do not drink it. And they say we get drunk: sometimes you even avoid doing that because then those vermin are going to record all of it. (Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente, 11 April 2017)

Getting criticised is not an issue, it is fine, however they want to interpret it; the problem is reporting inaccuracies, or things that do not exist. The unnecessary nit-pick. They reported that vinegar was used, instead of wine; many times, we had very pushy photographers, they do not believe it is actually blood, and with those cameras they interfere, truly obtrusive [...] they said that maybe it is not actually cork but it is a sponge and we squeeze it. (Author's unpublished interview to a senior vattiente, 11 April 2017)

One year I collided with a photographer, the camera got closer and closer. Just do it without disturbing what I am doing. (Author's unpublished interview to a former vattiente, 14 April 2017)

Before proceeding with the analysis, and to ease the reader's comprehension of the geographic, and ethnographic route that the author intends to follow, the next section will be dedicated to the explanation of the vattienti ritual, which will then be linked with the 'Āšūrā' celebrations in Lebanon.

## **2 Between Lebanon and Calabria: Geographies of Blood**

### **2.1 Methodological Clarification**

The choice to correlate two blood rituals that belong to diverse geographic areas, form part of different religious universes, and are carried out according to their own specific procedures may seem audacious. However, what has encouraged me to persevere with such a line of enquiry has been the extraordinary similarity between the answers that the flagellants in both Nocera Terinese and Beirut gave to the same questions (see last paragraphs).

The aim of this article, however, is not to emphasise the similarities and differences between Nocera's vattienti and the flagellants from one of the central quarters of Beirut; accordingly, it will not address these in depth, and will not provide a full comparative picture regarding (e.g.) the rituals' characteristics and associated preparation, the applied hygienic norms, the procedures for cleaning roads, the tools used for the birching, the traditional meals served during both celebrations, the existing theatrical and carnivalesque aspects, the gender implications, and the role of the female counterparts in the rituals (all aspects that deserve their own piece of work).

Instead, the purpose of this article is very enclosed and specific: namely, to propose an ethnographic approach that focusses on the perception of the affective atmospheres (Anderson 2009) that are being generated, and on their influence upon the vattienti's body and sensations. Thus, it is the humanity of the vattienti that emerges. Their own emotive sphere allows us to shift away from the savage and brutal representations of them that has been so frequently propagated.

Specifically, this research proposes to unveil and highlight the agency of Nocera's vattienti/Beirut's flagellants, emphasising that they are themselves immersed in the same atmosphere that they contributed to creating and that emerges from their gestures, their texts, and their blood. Thus, the focus of this article concerns, on one side, the affective atmosphere, the bodies, and their physical reactions, as well as the manifested emotions and the affects<sup>3</sup> and their inexplicableness; on the other, the concept of atmosphere will be bonded to that of agency (Ahearn 2002). Thus, it will propose a reading of the voluntary effusion of blood like a text, like a process of production of symbols and intertwined meanings, and as agency for the Nocera and Beirut flagellants, who resist their respective religious authorities' prohibitions and claim an agentic and industrious role in the society of which they are a part.

The following two subsections will provide a general conspectus of the two rituals; as the author wishes to reaffirm, the below lays no claim to exhaustiveness, but instead aims to simply supply a brief historic and cultural frame of reference from an ethnographic perspective.

## 2.2 Nocera Terinese's Vattienti

Although Nocera Terinese is not the only township in Italy, or in the South, in which there is some flagellant presence, it is the only one to be examined in this article. The reason behind this choice comes from the fact that their ritual is steadily expanding, and every passing year sees an increasing number of vattienti, contrary to other Calabrian townships such as Verbicaro (Cosenza) where the flagellants number less than a dozen and where the ritual disappeared entirely for a period of time, and Terranova

<sup>3</sup> These two terms are not used according to the meaning given to them by common language, but rather following Massumi's analysis (2002, 27-39). Massumi considers affects as 'intensities', like some synesthetic not-fully-formed tensions towards the action, independent and autonomous from the bodies that make them experience, impersonal and transpersonal at the same time; emotions and feelings, moreover, are linked to one's biographic dimension, which manages to recognise them and define them through language, such that they are subjective, personal, and social. In short, they are recognised intensities to which names have been given. On the difference between feeling, emotion, and affect, see: Shouse 2005; in Deleuze and Guattari (2017), affects are described as 'intensities' (361-73).

da Sibari (Cosenza), where the ritual seems to have gone extinct in the 1970s (De Vincenzo 1985, 189, 190, 194-6; Ferlaino 1990, 235-41). In Nocera, however, the vattienti numbered almost one hundred in recent years (2016 and 2017),<sup>4</sup> while this year (2018) their numbers supposedly reached one hundred and five.

It should be noted that the Easter processions, spread among all southern regions of Italy, which involve chest-hitting (with the hand or a sharp iron dampener) or shoulder-hitting with chains, do not result in huge blood loss to the extent that the streets are soaked by it like the flagellant's body; thus, they are not taken into consideration in this research. Moreover, the Seven Years Rituals of Guardia Sanframondi (Benevento) take place outside of the Holy Week period and are celebrated every seven years (in August), and thus also do not form part of this research.

The first written testaments about the presence of the ritual in the Calabrian township, which date back to the end of the nineteenth century (Ferlaino 1990, 60-4), describe the vattienti as fanatics in the grip of sincere devotion and voluntary penitence who, even at the time, maintained the ritual without regard for the prohibitions imposed by the civil and ecclesiastic authorities. Borrello presents them as:

Common people, in simple shirts and underpants, who hit energetically with a chunk of wood the side and back parts of their thighs, and, when they see them well redden, cause the blood to spill out of them using the 'cardo', a piece of cork spread with wax and bristling with glass shards. Then they crown themselves with thorns, cover their face with a black silk bandage and start running wildly through the streets. (1889, 29; Author's translation)

Modern-day vattienti diverge from this description, but still resemble it at a distance: today (but not in the past) they use black clothing, have their faces uncovered, and wear a black bandanna on the head, covered by a huge crown, made from an asparagus-like plant (the *sparacogna*, in their dialect).

The tools used are *la rosa* (rose), a cylindrical chunk of cork finely carved and polished, and *il cardo* (cardoon), to which are added thirteen shards of glass secured with a casting of beeswax (Faeta 2007, 176-7).

<sup>4</sup> In 2016, there were counted ninety-six vattienti, while in 2017 this figure was slightly less at ninety-two. The source is an elder vattiente who, every year, armed with notebook and pen, counts the vattienti and writes this number down with great precision. During the evening of 13 April 2017, he reported to the author: "Se il tempo è buono si rischia di superare i cento" (If the weather is good, we could even surpass the hundred) (Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente).



Figure 1. Vattiente. Nocera Terinese, 2017.  
© Author

Figure 2. Cardi and rose. Nocera Terinese,  
2017. © Author

The first is used in the preliminary phase of the ritual to hit “the meaty parts of the thighs and legs” (telephone conversation with an adult vattiente, 25 November 2016) and, in this way, causes the blood to flow. Afterwards follows the use of the cardoon, which, when used to hit the lower limbs perpendicularly with precise and estimated gestures (Faeta 1990, 217), causes the blood to spill.

This very private and discreet phase takes place inside a *catuoja* (storehouse), generally only in front of close friends and family.

In the past, cardoons were built by the vattienti themselves and by carpenters. Today, there are specific figures who, with great care, begin to prepare them around a month or so before Easter.<sup>5</sup> The process begins with the carving of the cork (harvested during the previous autumn), the cutting of the glass, the obtaining of the beeswax, the actual construction, and the final sanitisation. During a visit to a builder’s storehouse, it was explained to me:

5 In 2017 the starting date has been 8 March (Easter 16 April), while in 2018 was Ashen Wednesday, 14 March (Easter, 1 April); the notices about the dates by the cardoon builder happened through WhatsApp (informal conversation).



Figure 3. Rosemary. Nocera Terinese, 2017. © Author



Figure 4. Vattiente and ecciomo. Nocera Terinese, 2017. © Author

In earlier times one used to go to the carpenters and pay for their work, but they made them badly, with bottle shards. These are 2 mm sheets for frames, the ones that you can find by the glass-maker. After some time, a vattiente decided to upgrade the cardoons. It is not a passion, we are always together, what one does, does the other, there was friendship, time after time [...] he taught me something, little by little. (Author's unpublished interview to a cardoon builder, 10 April 2017)

Borrello furthermore informs us that the vattiente's figure, at least since the end of the nineteenth century, was flanked by that of the *Ecce Homo* (*ecciomo* in dialect) – generally a child or an adolescent, but who can also be an adult male – wearing a red cloth (one of the skirts that make up the traditional female dress) fastened on the chest or on the waist, with a cross covered with red ribbons on the shoulders, and tied to the vattiente with a small rope. He also wears a crown of thorns. He represents Christ, humiliated and laughed at in front of Pontius Pilate.

To these two figures in recent decades has been added that of the wine bearer (Ferlaino 1990, 163) who follows the other two and often pours the wine upon the vattiente's wounds to ensure that they are constantly washed and to avoid the blood clotting and creating dark lumps, as the blood needs to spill freely.

Once the devotional tour (each with its own schedule) is finished, each vattiente, together with his ecciomo, comes back to the storehouse, where, together, they dress and prepare themselves.

There they rest, possibly eat something, and apply to their wounds a rosemary decoction (made by putting the herb in boiling water since the early morning and leaving it to cool by itself), which in a very short time stops the blood from spilling and soothes the skin.

The ritual's origin is strongly debated between those who consider them heirs to the crowds of Catholic flagellants, which were born in Italy during the Middle Ages, and those who believe them to be descendants of ancient pre-Christian cults.<sup>6</sup> The second theory was sustained first by Basile, according to whom:

the ceremony is more ancient, and refers to another ritual, the ritual of earth's fertility, with the blood offering by the minister or by the devotee. From this point of view, it refers to the ancient Mediterranean rituals for Adonis' death or Attis' death, celebrated at the end of March, when spring returns. (Basile 1959; Author's translation)

The vattienti appear in two instances of Holy Week, namely Friday evening and Saturday, throughout the whole day (until 1956, the two dedicated days were Thursday and Friday), and execute the ritual flanking of the processions for the Virgin Mary's statue (referred to as 'The Grieved', and represented by a splendid wooden *Pietà* inspired by Michelangelo's masterpiece, to which Nocera's inhabitants are extremely devoted).

The Catholic Church has always expressed negative judgements and imposed heavy prohibitions on this ritual, especially during the years 1958-1960, during which the ecclesiastic authorities went so far as to resort to deploying public security agents and the Carabinieri (Italian police force) to stop the vattienti (Ferlaino 1990, 122-6). Today, a climate of mutual acceptance persists, although this does not presume a relationship of normalisation, as reported to me by a vattiente:

Then he came outside [talking about the bishop] and we talked, me, him, and a few others, during the exposition, an occasion. He started talking, I answered: "Excellency, the church is still alive and kicking, it never falls down huh? You all gave us a hard time for years". Answer: "Times change". It is too easy after many centuries to make History change the times. They forget. (Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente, 8 April 2017)

6 For a more thorough and complete dissertation on this issue, see Ferlaino 1990, 194-225; on the pre-Christian rituals referred to above, see Frazer 2016, 388-422.



In an informal and unplanned meeting with the village's parish priest,<sup>7</sup> which took place in the barber's shop at Nocera's main square during Holy Week, I had the occasion to ask what he thought about the ritual of blood. He answered me in a manner at once unreadable and blunt: "I do not think, I pray".<sup>8</sup> In a second meeting, equally fleeting and unplanned, at the same barbershop, he recounted to me an anecdote of a Lebanese priest who, having found himself in the village during the vattienti's ritual, it had cause to recall the Šī'a 'Āšūrā'.

### 2.3 Beirut's 'Āšūrā': The Ḥandaq al-Ġamīq flagellants

In Lebanon, the 'Āšūrā' celebrations (from the Arabic *'ašara*, 'ten', meaning the tenth day of the sacred month of *Muḥarram*, the first month of the Islamic calendar) represent one of the highest and most heartfelt aspects of Šī'a identity and religiousness, and have been the subject of numerous and diverse studies of a historical, religious, anthropological, and political nature.

These celebrations evoke the martyrdom of the Imam Ḥusayn (d. 61/680). He was the son of the Imam 'Alī (d. 40/661), cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632), and Fāṭima (d. 11/632), daughter of the Prophet, and was brutally murdered by the caliph Yazīd's (d. 64/683) army at Karbalā' (modern Iraq), on 10 Muḥarram 61/10 October 680. Other members of the family were massacred and deported to Damascus, across the desert (Capezzone, Salati 2006, 55-8; Mervin 2014, 509; Momen 1985, 28-33; Ventura 2008, 311). Since then, and continuing until the present day, Šī'a all over the world celebrate these events with solemn empathy (Bausani 2007, 110; Nakash 1993, 163-78).

During the Ottoman domination in the region, public ceremonies for 'Āšūrā' were forbidden (Olmert 1987, 191-2) and took place instead inside private residences, until the French governors<sup>9</sup> made them legal again.

7 The parish priest with whom the author had occasion to talk during Holy Week (2017) was later transferred to another location. The new priest, who arrived on February 2018, has participated in the procession with great enthusiasm and has not shown any negative or prohibitive behaviour towards the vattienti.

8 The author, in that moment, could not but think again about the words pronounced by the bishop at the time, mons. Saba, who had a very strict attitude towards the vattienti at around the end of the 1950s; in answering to the archpriest, who had encouraged him to soften his position of prohibition due to fears of disorder, the bishop said: "The orders have been given! If you will find yourself in trouble, I will pray for you" (Ferlaino 1990, 125; Author's translation).

9 Lebanon was put under the French mandate by the League of Nations from 1920 to 1943, the year of its independence.



Figure 5. Amal's symbol. Ḥandaq al-Ġamīq, 2015. © Author

However, the beginning of the flagellants' public processions in the south of Lebanon (the region indicated as Ġabal 'Āmil) could date back to the end of the nineteenth century, and there is also a concrete chance that these celebrations could have been introduced by Iranian immigrants who lived in the city of Nabaṭiyya in the south of the country (Ende 1979, 26-8; Tabet 2012, 403-4).

In spite of the fact that the majority of Šī'a religious authorities proclaim to be against bloodshed by means of practices known as *taṭbīr* (cutting the forehead with a barber's razor or the blade of a sword) and *ġanzīr* (the use of chains or bundles of knives tied together and used to hit oneself on the shoulders), such practices continue to be present in the south of Lebanon and in certain areas of Beirut and enjoy the favour of various imams.

In particular, in the Lebanese capital, there is a quarter called Ḥandaq al-Ġamīq<sup>10</sup> situated right near the city centre, where, starting at least from

**10** One of the three urban areas that the Author studied during her doctorate research. It has distinguished itself in the past for being a renowned quarter and is characterised by the presence of members of various religious confessions. Today these traits have, for the most part, disappeared: the quarter-Christian constituent abandoned it during the civil war period, and today the Šī'a seem to be the most evident group on the streets, which they share with Kurds, Sunni and foreigners that carry out menial jobs. The area sustained heavy



Figure 6. Flagellants. Ḥandaq al-Ġamīq, 2015. © Author

the end of the 1980s and the first years of the 1990s, numerous devotees practice scourging during a brief procession along the borders of the quarter. The majority wear a white dress (*kafan*, 'shroud' in Arabic), as well as clothes (t-shirts and sports vests) that bear the symbols of the dominant Šī'a party in the area, Ḥarakat Amal.

The party, as well as the imam of the *ḥusayniyya*,<sup>11</sup> declare themselves in favour of the flagellations and perform them themselves, proud of being portrayed with their wounds.

The other Lebanese Šī'a party, Hizbullah (the political party that has reached a foreground position in the political balance within Lebanon and in the region in recent decades), taking inspiration from a *fatwà*<sup>12</sup> from 1994 in which the most senior Iranian religious authority, the *āyatullah*

material damage during the war, and the beautiful Ottoman and French buildings, which it is still possible to appreciate, have never been the object of redevelopment and restoration projects. For a tale told through images see: Ṭaḥṭaḥ, Marwān "Khandaq al-Ghamiq: The Ghost of Beirut's Past", *Al-Akhbar Newspaper*, 3 June 2015, <https://english.al-akhbar.com/node/9960>. (2018-05-23).

**11** The *ḥusayniyya* is the sacred place used for the 'Āšūrā' celebrations and, specifically, for the *maḡālis* (plural of *maḡlis*), the prayer and grief sessions for the Imam Ḥusayn, his brothers in arms and the other members of the family who were killed.

**12** Within Islam, a *fatwà* is a piece of specific juridical advice given by a competent religious-juridical authority. It can pertain to the most diverse aspects of a devotee's life, of society, religion, economy, etc.

Ḥāmānā'ī,<sup>13</sup> decided to forbid the flagellation practices, replacing them with blood donation campaigns.

The theme of the lawfulness of flagellation divides the Šī'a authorities between those who support it and those who strongly oppose it;<sup>14</sup> by reflection, this division affects the whole Lebanese Šī'a society:

There is no such thing called *taṭbīr*, it's not a part of religion, the Prophet's family did not perform it. [People] only do it to post pictures on Facebook, out of ignorance, and to have fun. (Author's unpublished interview to a professor, 16 September 2017)

Viruses, diseases, the image that we convey of ourselves: after having soiled everything [with blood], caused disgust in everyone, lost our blood, in what manner did we get something positive out of it? (Author's unpublished interview to an employee, 16 September 2017)

It is a topic that creates many divisions between the Šī'a. (Author's unpublished interview to an undergraduate student/journalist, 4 October 2017)

It comes from the word *ṭabra*, which signifies a big knife, and here it is not used a lot. With the *taṭbīr* you express your own sorrow. This is a specific way to do it, but it is not a focus in regard to 'Āšūrā'. It is a thing that shows what happened to Imam Ḥusayn. (Interview to a Šī'a imam, 19 October 2017)

[The number of] people performing it is decreasing. I let fall a few drops, a symbol for what happened to Imam Ḥusayn. I started when I was four years old in Nabatiyya, and when I turned eighteen I started to understand its meaning. (Author's unpublished interview to a volunteer in a mosque, 26 October 2017).

In the next section, the focus will shift to the atmospheric dimension that connects the two rituals.

13 The specific fatwā is available at the following link: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/4209/Tatbir-is-a-wrongful-and-fabricated-tradition-Imam-Khamenei>. (2018/05/23)

14 For an in-depth analysis of these subjects, see Mervin (2007 e 2014) and the website <http://tatbir.org/> (2018/05/23).

### 3 Affective Atmospheres and Emotions

The Monday after Palm Sunday, I scheduled an appointment with the rose and cardoon builder<sup>15</sup> in his own storehouse, which he jokingly calls 'Cardology'. While he was busy repairing some cardoons and making new ones, an elder vattiente arrived and we continued the already-in-progress interview with him and a young graduate student from the village, who was accompanying me. I report here a piece of the discussion between us:

BUILDER Wednesday morning... Be sure of the time, do not be late!

STUDENT We will be there at seven thirty. And then you will see! [said towards the author]

AUTHOR Then we stay all morning there?

STUDENT No! Then we go around... We walk... Then I will point you out even the air changes! It will follow.

VATTIENTE People will change.

STUDENT Eh...

AUTHOR What do you mean? The air changes? What does it change?

ALL Everything! [the three interviewed overlap each other]

BUILDER When the statue comes out... the whole village changes.

AUTHOR But what is it that changes?

ALL The atmosphere... [almost with one voice]

BUILDER It becomes... You see, the atmosphere becomes more sacred, there is more harmony, the village, it becomes like one being, I do not know how to explain it right now, everything disappears, politics, football, from the most important things to...

STUDENT Politics downright disappears.

VATTIENTE Nobody talks about politics.

AUTHOR Instead, the atmosphere?

BUILDER The atmosphere is holy, it is different. You breathe a different air. I really cannot explain it right now.

STUDENT Yeah, true...

BUILDER You will see.

AUTHOR And the church's curtains, when will they close?

BUILDER Wednesday morning, yes, when... after we put away the statue.<sup>16</sup> You prepare the altar, the curtains get closed. You place the palms - which I will go making this afternoon - and the branches. There are six needed at the church. (Author's unpublished interview to the cardoon builder, an elder vattiente, and a graduate student, 10 April 2017).

15 He is not the only one, but for years, he has been the reference point for Nocera's vattienti.

16 The tool-builder is also a palanquin bearer for the statue of the Virgin Mary.



Figure 7. The church of Annunziata, curtains' closing procedure. Nocera Terinese, 2017.  
© Author

The dialogue focuses on the peculiar atmosphere that is generated during the Holy Week in Nocera and which, as reported by the interviewees, begins to emerge on Wednesday morning with *la cacciata della Madonna*, which is the day when the statue is gently removed from the shrine where it is preserved for the whole year (inside the church of Annunziata), thoroughly dusted by the palanquin bearers, and exhibited for the worship, which lasts all throughout the day and the following night.

The description of the atmosphere<sup>17</sup> that can be inferred from the dialogue can be immediately reconnected to an article by the phenomenologist Böhme, where he seems to indicate an apparent sense of frailty, as if this (the atmosphere) was all of the things that are evoked in moments where rational explanations would seem to be impossible: “Non so come spiegarcelo mo” (I do not know how to explain it right now). Indeed, he asserts:

17 See the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8VGhojHNMM> (2018-05-23)

One has the impression that 'atmosphere' is meant to indicate something indeterminate, difficult to express, even if it is only in order to hide the speaker's own speechlessness. It is almost like Adorno's 'more' which also points in evocative fashion to something beyond rational explanation and with an emphasis which suggests that only there is the essential, the aesthetically relevant to be found. (Böhme 1993, 113)

The alteration of atmosphere was also related to me multiple times in the following days by other interviewees, who added details, undertones, and various sensations:

The whole village is more emotional, it really cares about it. (Interview with a senior vattiente, 12 April 2017)

First off, since I start seeing the first cars parked over there (in front of the cardoon builder's storehouse), already since then I start feeling a little anxious... the emotion. I feel it inside. There does not exist a word to describe to you what I feel. It has been almost a month, I already know that this period is starting. The more it approaches... right now it is already different, there is a peculiar air. You get it in the air, only during the vattienti's period. It is not the same normal life, or daily routine.

People from Nocera working elsewhere come back. You see people with the cross in the alleys. You see things that you do not see every day, you see groups of people gathering to prepare the crowns, the flask of wine.

It is a peculiar air, you see things that you have not seen before, these little details. (Author's unpublished interview to an ecciomo, 10 April 2017)

And up until the deadline I am always eager with anticipation, who knows? Maybe I will do it, maybe not. When the period approaches, you can feel a breath, you hear those things in the streets, you meet the people that go around looking for the sparacogna to make the crown... Lent, these ten days, you see some storehouses open again, getting cleaned. After the Palms, then, something starts moving, you see it in the moments, in yourself, in the mindset. You enter the zone. (Author's unpublished interview to a former vattiente, 14 April 2017)

Böhme continues to specify how such indeterminacy refers primarily to the ontological state of the atmosphere (and not to its qualities, which, by contrast, are well describable and perceivable: holiness, emotionality, with hints of fear, tension and anxiety, in this case), meaning that we cannot be sure if the atmospheres emanate from objects (the statue of the Virgin), from places (the church with its closed black curtains, making it dark and

gloomy;<sup>18</sup> the parked cars in front of the cartoon builder's storehouse; the reopening storehouses; the red crosses and the wine being transported in the alleys) or if, instead, they seem to be coming from the subjects who experience them (the vattienti that prepare and then hit themselves, who are seen looking for the pointy herb for the crowns, who seem to be more tense and deep in thought in the days before,<sup>19</sup> the presence of blood linked to the vattienti, the strong and distinctive smell of blood and wine together).

We are not even sure if they can be exactly pinpointed, because it seems that they fill the space "with a certain tone of feeling like a haze" (Böhme 1993, 114). He proceeds to point out that they exist in a hybrid situation, in between an individual and their surroundings: the atmospheres cannot be considered entirely as some objective characteristics or properties of things, even if they emanate from them; nor, by contrast, do they have fully subjective traits, as it is not possible to qualify them as mindsets or the individuals' feelings, even though they themselves experience these throughout their body.

The 'body' of the flagellant, specifically, seems to absorb in itself, much like a sponge, the tensions, indeterminateness, and inexplicableness of the atmosphere that precedes Friday and Saturday's flagellations in Nocera, giving them back to us in the form of peculiar body reactions:

VATTIENTE I decided to not do the ritual and physically I had such reactions... Let's say they were annoying, I do not know, this tingling, this sensation that...

AUTHOR But did you have also goosebumps?

VATTIENTE That too, that too.

AUTHOR So then you donated blood that morning, Saturday morning [Holy Saturday], right?

VATTIENTE No, I could not make it, because it was already past the time when it was possible to donate blood, but I donated it immediately afterwards. Sure thing though, I wanted to do it that morning.

AUTHOR But that morning, did you think that the donation could, in some way, fix it momentarily - not as a substitute - but as a way to say *at least I did this*?

18 The same atmosphere of grief and gloominess is created inside the *husayniyya* with the turning off almost all the lights when, during the *mağlis*, the moment of collective crying and lamentations begins, usually accompanied by the hitting of one's own chest, thigh or cheeks.

19 During an informal conversation on Palm Sunday, one anecdote that was reported to me was that of the vattiente who lived on the floor above and who, every single night from almost ten days before the ritual, could be heard walking back and forth, along the corridor: "He then confirmed us he could not sleep well and he was very tense (and you could tell that by the look on his face!). Nowadays he still hits himself, despite being at the respectable age of sixty years old" (Author's unpublished interview to a local family, 9 April 2017).



VATTIENTE Unconsciously, probably it was just like that. But truly it has been just... Trying to bottle up a reaction, too, a physical action... that action of itch, of urge, to feel... I cannot even find the words, to feel something inside you that must come out. And this something was the blood, probably. This too has been one of the things that surprised me a little, that when I was talking to an old vattienti, he said to me "Be aware of the fact that when you will stop, you will feel this urge". If this had any influence on that reaction, I do not know. But I will assure you that...

AUTHOR And then the following year?

VATTIENTE Well, the year afterwards I did the ritual.

AUTHOR You did it then, did you hit yourself the year afterwards?

VATTIENTE Yes, I said to myself "I do not want to live with that mindset anymore". (Author's unpublished interview to a former vattiente, 14 April 2017)

In another interview, the bond between atmospheric mutations (Friday evening)<sup>20</sup> and relative physical reactions emerged even more explicitly:

ELDER VATTIENTE The body is affected by it, the body feels this change for some days.

AUTHOR And what is this sensation in the body? Is it some sort of tension?

YOUNG VATTIENTE They are emotions that cannot even be described.

ELDER VATTIENTE In Nocera, in dialect, they say it raises *o pielo*.

YOUNG VATTIENTE *O pilu caninu*.

STUDENT Goosebumps! [laughing]

YOUNG VATTIENTE Already when you hear the statue coming out with the music, the legs already... (Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente, a young vattiente, and a graduate student, 11 April 2017)

Thus, the flagellant's body is not merely a body that receives and absorbs the atmospheres, but one that itself contributes to creating them:

20 After an entire year of being preserved behind closed doors, on Holy Friday, in the evening, the statue of Madonna is brought outside the church of Annunziata. The whole village partakes with great engagement in this event. People gather in front of the religious building's main door, in respectful and appropriate silence, and await the exit of the statue, which is brought slowly outside by the palanquin bearers. At that precise moment, the band begins to play a slow and heartfelt funeral march, *La Jone* (musical composition by Enrico Petrella [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sTg\\_RRogms](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sTg_RRogms) [2018-05-23]), which contributes to creating an atmosphere that is dense and full of anticipation. Links to some videos taken during the exiting of the statue are provided here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoCnaMhC4C4> (2018-05-23).

We can say that atmospheres are generated by bodies – of multiple types – affecting one another as some form of ‘envelopment’ is produced. Atmospheres do not float free from the bodies that come together and apart to compose situations. (Anderson 2009, 80)

According to Anderson, then, the atmospheres can be described as some sort of affective excess, like a spill-over of the affects located in that space. They are first generated from the bodies, they emanate by the bodies, but then the atmospheres surpass the bodies, gaining full autonomy in the surrounding space. Böhme, moreover, suggests that the affective atmospheres are what fills the space and the distance between object (from which they emanate) and subject (who perceives them): they are “the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived” (1993, 122).

In Nocera’s case, the atmospheres arise like an alteration in the air that can be sensed distinctly (“The change in the air”, “you can breathe a different air”, “I feel it inside”, “I know that it starts in that period”, “there is a peculiar air”, “you enter the air”, “something starts moving”, “you enter the zone”, as related in the interviews) and are created by tangible signs (the flask of wine, the crosses in the alleys, the open storehouses, the sparacogna, the vattienti’s cars parked in front of the cardoon builder’s storehouse), which are objects that completely fill space that would otherwise simply be ‘normal’, daily routine space.

Moreover, as Brennan notes: “Affects are not received or registered in a vacuum” (2004, 6) and those who describe the atmosphere that precedes the flagellants’ ritual are aware of how the space becomes filled with details and peculiarities as well as affects. Brennan, in her book, also brings forth the idea that affects, and thus atmospheres, can be transmitted between individuals. In particular, she uses the concept of *entrainment*, of a chemical nature (68-70), which operates through smell – or to be more precise, through some smells of which we are not aware (pheromones) – and that is described as “critical in how we ‘feel the atmosphere’” (2004, 9).

Particularly relevant to an analysis of the atmospheres that the vattienti describe is, again, the piece by Anderson, who resumes and expands Böhme’s theories and reports that:

On the one hand, atmospheres are real phenomena. They ‘envelop’ and thus press on a society ‘from all sides’ with a certain force. On the other, they are not necessarily sensible phenomena. (2009, 78)

The atmosphere of the Holy Week in Nocera envelopes and constricts whoever might find themselves immersed in it, acting with a strength that causes undeniable, concrete, and specific physical reactions (the goosebumps, the itchiness, the annoyance, the tingling) on the vattienti’s legs, but also fosters a mindset of anticipation among the devotees (the wait for



Figure 8. Black flags. Hāndaq al-Ġamīq, 2015. © Simona Loi

the statue to be taken out of the shrine on Wednesday morning, the wait for it to be brought out of the church on Friday evening, the wait for the first *vattienti* to arrive). Everything happens within Saturday's atmospheres:

It is as if the strong ritual reach of the Saturday, the emotional, dramatic, social charge that was expressed during the day, voids the Easter one, delivering it to a suffuse, half-festive dimension. The bells ring incessantly, well-dressed people hasten to church, and most of them linger to look at the cherished, nostalgic haematic traces of a festivity that appears to be already gone. (Faeta 2007, 172; Author's translation)

On the same page, Anderson continues to affirm that atmospheres can interrupt, unsettle, or persecute people (the air/the people that change, the indecision about hitting themselves that persists until the last minute for some), places (the village changes) or objects, and that they express some sense of vagueness, of something badly defined and thus undefined, something that goes beyond a rational explanation and that stops inescapably in front of the door of the inexpressible. All of this harkens back to the



Figure 9. Balconies. Ḥandaq al-Ġamiq, 2015. © Author

persistence of what the author heard reported in the interviews over and over: the indescribable nature of the emotions that were felt, the inability to find the right words to explain them, and the redundant use of adverbs that underlines their uncertainty (“unconsciously”, “probably”, “let’s call it that”, “I do not know”, “I do not know how to explain it to you”, “you will see for yourself”, “you will notice it”, in the interviewees’ words).

This topic also emerged during the interviews realised during the ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author in Beirut during her doctorate research between 2015 and 2018. These interviewees referred to the same concepts listed by interviewees in Nocera, namely the impossibility of expressing what is felt during the period of ‘Āšūrā’ and the entrance into its specific atmosphere:

Three or four days before, everything is adorned in black. Immediately we plunge into the atmosphere, the fervour. There is a lot of enthusiasm, the black colour, you can see that there is sorrow. This atmosphere is beautiful. (Author’s unpublished interview to an employee of a Lebanese telephone company, 19 September 2017)



Figure 10. Black spaces. Hāndaq al-Ġamīq, 2015. © Author

I do not know how to describe the mindset to you. [It is] a feeling that is really impossible to describe. (Author's unpublished interview to an undergraduate student/journalist, 4 October 2017)

You can hear the *laṭmiyyāt*<sup>21</sup> at high volume, you can feel that these are really different days, of spirituality. Bit by bit... we get inside the atmosphere, we prepare ourselves three months prior, or a year before. (Author's unpublished interview to an undergraduate student/photographer, 10 October 2017)

A week before they start with the [black] flags, immediately it is 'Āšūrā' atmosphere. The sadness comes suddenly, by itself. (Author's unpub-

21 These are compositions of mournful music and specific hymns dedicated to the Šī'a martyr, which are listened to during the whole period of 'Āšūrā'. Some young people play them at maximum volume in their cars and the two Šī'a political parties play them on the streets of the quarters they control. Said hymns have the peculiar function of giving rhythm to the ceremony in which the devotees, male and female, hit themselves, loudly and with strength, on the chest, in a sign of grief for the Imam Ḥusayn (this is also called *laṭmiyya*, singular, from the Arabic verb *laṭama*, to beat or hit). They are also called *nadbiyyāt*, from the verb *nadaba*, to cry over the death of somebody, or to make a funeral eulogy for somebody.

lished interview to an insurance agent, 11 February 2018)

Anderson again comes to our aid, returning to the ideas of the phenomenologist Dufrenne in affirming that:

atmospheres are unfinished because of their constitutive openness to being taken up in experience. Atmospheres are indeterminate. They are resources that become elements within sense experience. (2009, 79)

The atmospheres become concrete, then, in the moment when they become an experience (of the senses). The vattienti reach the climax of this experience during the self-flagellation and the voluntary effusion of blood.

The following paragraph will attempt to link the category of atmosphere to that of agency, and in order to do so, will follow a shared path with the Šī'a flagellants of Beirut.

#### **4 When text becomes flesh and flesh becomes text: The flagellants' agency**

As noted above, over the years the religious establishment has always condemned the vattienti's self-flagellation. This conflictual dimension, still relevant nowadays, has surfaced in some interviews; here, the vattienti are seen by the author to be much like the cultural/religious rival of the Church:

It's a matter of anarchy: the vattiente exists separately from the church, from politics, from everything. (Author's unpublished interview to a senior vattiente, 11 April 2017)

We are autonomous, this is the thing that annoys the church the most, that they cannot control us. We escape such control. Besides, it is not like all of them [referring to the vattienti] assiduously frequent the church anyway. (Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente, 11 April 2017)

The same vattiente, a couple of days earlier, affirmed:

I can see that now religious tourism is trendy, that the church is getting closer and closer. I find it annoying that the church is getting closer to the vattienti. The church could never stand them, they declared war on us. And now why do you think they want to get closer? It is again the same old story of evangelising the others, to purify - they want to purify

this ritual from being almost pagan to Christian. (Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente, 8 April 2017)

The Church, sure enough, suspects that the ritual could have pagan oriental origins. In a note, the then-Diocesan Ordinary, mons. F. Palatucci, described the ritual during the period 1971-1975 as follows:

The hardest nut to crack is that it is still a certain procession, performed in Nocera Terinese, on Holy Saturday. It lasts almost all day and is well-known among ethnologists across Europe, who come to study it, seeing in it a testament of the survival of magic pagan rituals to beg, in spring, for the land's fertility. The most off-key note of the procession, besides the excessive duration, with its stops and libations, is the adhering of young 'vattienti', who, each preceded by a red-dressed young man with a little cross wrapped in red on his shoulders (the 'Ecce Homo'), create a commotion throughout the processional parade, in revealing underwear, hitting themselves on their thighs until they bleed with cork discs, which have glass shards attached to them. (Ferlaino 1990, 151; Author's translation)

The 'hardest nut to crack', the 'most off-key note', autonomy, and anarchy. It would seem that a specific dimension of the vattienti is being outlined: they can freely express their agency, defined as the human capacity to act (Ahearn 2002, 18), through self-flagellation. The voluntary effusion of blood can be read as a text, produced by these bodies, which expresses their agency, if the word 'text' can be considered to have a broader meaning:

Such is very clear in all those texts 'in act', 'in situation', which in our perception do not detach themselves from the flow of life but which nonetheless answer to determined formalities, such as, for example, the spatial and architectural complex, or the different 'categories' that make up our daily living: a 'conversation', a 'prayer', a 'match (at any game)', 'making lunch', 'going for a walk', 'doing shopping', participating in an 'event', a 'demonstration', a 'fight'. (Sedda 2006, 51; Author's translation)

But how does this express, essentially, the vattiente's agency? I argue it does so in different but intertwined ways:

1. Satisfying a concrete physical need to hit oneself, as stated by the vattiente during the interview;
2. Expressing a vow and/or following a family tradition (the vow is private and secret, and generally linked to a tragedy, a disease, an accident, a serious personal or family problem; however, there are also those who hit themselves to follow a family tradition from generations past);





Figure 11. Vattiente and parish priest. Nocera Terinese, 2017. © Author

3. Choosing a personal route (all the vattienti have different starting points in the village, depending on the location of the storehouse - where they prepare themselves -and slightly change their itinerary depending on the houses of friends/family that they intend to greet). What surfaces, then, is the agency's geographic dimension, which expresses itself through the choice of additional, unique, and personal stopping places. The vattiente's route establishes permanent and unavoidable stops, but at the same time, he is free to decide the journey time and the itinerary. Crucial is the precise point, at a highly significant place, where each vattiente decides to meet the statue of the Virgin Mary.
4. Resisting and opposing specific religious prohibitions and, sometimes, the intervention of the police forces, elements that are here interpreted as a 'structure' that binds and cages the vattiente's free expression of agency. However, regardless of this, the ritual itself has never disappeared; the vattienti have always reacted to the pressures from above. In this case, then, the agency can be read



- using the lens of the opposition to social prohibitions (the Church and the Police), but also to the reprimands, expressed with concern or with coercive force, of friends and family.
5. Admonishing and punishing invasive observers (very well-known are the stories about some vattienti who have used the rose or the cardoon to turn away the photographers' cameras to prevent them from recording, or who have spurted them with blood).
  6. Leaving haematic signs on the streets, on the churches, on the jamb of some houses, or on the walls, which in dialect is expressed by the phrases *lasciari 'u signu/lasciari 'a cona* (Faeta 2007, 177). Each vattiente decides where to leave his haematic traces: on the doorsteps of the houses, on the walls, on the churches' side or steps, at the entrance of commercial activities and storehouses, on the village convent, on the main entrance of the prison. These haematic signatures follow the vattiente's familial and friendship relationships, creating nets of coalition and generating social and political connections inside Nocera Terinese. Signing little kids or their own partner, moreover, is considered to be a good omen, which can be contrasted with the punishment towards the invasive observer.

To continue to hit oneself means also to affirm the flagellation's innate value, in opposition to those who would want to see this practice flow into (and, so, dilute) blood donations. When the author tried to ask whether it was possible to substitute the voluntary effusion of blood with a donation, the answers all expressed the absolute impossibility of doing so:

It is not the same thing, because it is not the same thing. I am free to give away the blood, to throw it away. (Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente, 8 April 2017)

It goes along with it, but it does not replace it. One donates, and one hits oneself. (Author's unpublished interview to a previous young vattiente, 8 April 2017)

They are two different things with different meanings. That blood is shed for the Virgin Mary, it is different. (Author's unpublished interview to the cardoon builder, 10 April 2017)

There is a thing that I want to state clearly, I am a vattienti's fan. I hear saying: "Why do not they go to donate blood?". Our vattienti are all blood donors, when something happens, they immediately volunteer, if they see news on the phone, or on television, they volunteer. I hear



Figure 12. Blood marks on the Church of Annunziata. Nocera Terinese, 2017. © Author

critics, foreigners, they do not know who they are, how they are living, who are these vattienti. (Author's unpublished interview to a school teacher, 12 April 2017)

The same answers were given to me in Lebanon:

You cannot say that this [blood donation] could be a substitute, there is no connection. [The simple donation] lacks the point, the ultimate purpose. (Interview to a Šī'a imam, 19 October 2017)

It is not a substitute, there is not a substitute. Blood donation does not have any virtue, there is nothing that could be like *taṭbīr*. (Author's unpublished interview to a cook, 6 November 2017)

The flagellation assumes, then, a key importance, both for Nocera's vattienti and for Beirut's flagellants.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, in Nocera, it represents an irreplaceable social and religious occasion, an essential moment that goes beyond the vow's private familiarity but:

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted here that while, in the small community of Nocera, the approval given by society to the vattienti is almost unanimous, in Lebanon the majority of the Šī'a consider themselves averse to the flagellation practices and have at this point accepted blood donation as a substitute practice. For more on this, see Faḡlullāh (2004, 27-51).

allows the flagellant to build, inside a potential circle of friends and allies, a proper net of social relations, ampler and more cohesive, as large and effective as ritual *performance*. (Faeta 2007, 179; Author's translation)

## 5 Conclusions

I close this essay with some final words from one of the ritual's protagonists:

If I donate blood three times a year, the fourth time I should be free to do whatever I want with it, right? (Author's unpublished interview to an elder vattiente, 11 April 2017)

Focussing on the affective atmospheres and on the vattienti's agency has allowed us to describe the latter from a point of view that re-humanises them and gives them back to us as figures who act inside the society from which they come from and which moulds them (society 'makes' the vattiente); as diligent defenders of their ritual, their devotion, their (half-) secret vow, their texts made out of blood and rosemary, and their determination to oppose any prohibition, critic or altered representation that offends them (the vattiente 'makes' society).

In particular, the 'affective atmospheres' well convey the tangle of tensions that goes through the vattiente's body, as well as the labyrinth of emotions and affects that he himself has to go through. They give us back, then, a flagellant who acts with all of his humanity and frailness, who erupts in tears, while he drops to his knees in front of the Virgin Mary's statue and prays in silence. He does not even talk.

The atmosphere is, at first, excited, while in the distance can be heard the 'tac tac tac' of the hits with roses and cardoons on their legs, can be seen the red cross that 'runs' on the horizon, all signs that the vattiente is coming; then the anticipation grows in front of the small patch of asphalt left empty by the crowd and by the palanquin bearers in front of the statue where, finally, the vattiente performs the ritual. No one talks. Everyone observes.

Now the atmosphere is hanging heavy, made of silence, and the ritual appears delicate, respectful, and precise. Not one hit more than necessary. The vattiente stands back up and, in the same way that he came, he runs away. No more violence, no torment of the flesh. The atmosphere deflates.

'The agency', on the other hand, gives us back a vattiente in his full capacity to act, to resist the structure that would dominate and dilute him into a Catholicism purged of the same paganism that stands as its ancestor.

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# **Life Stories and Living Texts**

## **The Political Use of Oral Sources in the Storytelling of Turkey's Past**

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**Abstract** This contribution deals with issues related to the use of oral sources in historical research carried out during times marked by high political tensions and it focuses on the case of contemporary Turkey. Storytelling implies selection and assembly, through which interviewees shape an image of themselves but also of their relationship with others and with the world. The purpose is to analyse the narrative potential of oral sources by examining a sample of biographical testimonies of left-wing intellectuals who actively contributed to the constitution of the 'civil society' during the 1980s. The selected interviews show how contemporary political events deeply affect the relationship with the past.

**Summary** 1. Introduction. – 2 The Roots of Oral History in Turkey. – 3 State(s) of Emergency and Life Stories. – 4 Fragments of the 1980s. – 5. Sociocultural Polarisation and Symbolic Struggles. – 6 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Oral History. Contemporary Turkey. Interviews. State of Emergency.

### **1 Introduction**

Oral history refers to the use of oral sources in historiographical research.<sup>1</sup> It is a field of study and a research methodology that is primarily based on interviews with the purpose to gather memories and statements of actors engaged in given historical processes. Oral history is therefore built on relational sources emerging from a dialogic context in which the researcher and the interviewee give life to a performance. This relationship comes into being at the moment of the encounter and it is structured in three different levels: the level of the historical event, the present level of the tale of the past, and the level of the relationship between them, the latter being a revision of the event through memory (Portelli 2010, 4-5). This

1 Gianni Bosio adopted this definition in *L'intellettuale rovesciato* (1998), quoted by Portelli (2007, 6).

articulated relationship connects the historicity of events and memory to both the public and private dimensions of social space. The outcome of this triangulation is a text that is composite because the author is called to translate the worldview of the source producer, the socio-cultural context of the text production, the circumstances of its production, and the purposes it was supposed to fulfil.

In historical and historiographical research, oral sources can be therefore useful in two ways: first, in reconstructing certain aspects of the past that would be difficult to obtain through other types of sources and, second, in examining the dimension of subjectivity and the forms of memory. Drawing attention to the latter, this article focuses on the historical event elaboration process and on the interpretation that is given when an event needs to be told. More specifically, the purpose of this contribution is to reflect on some peculiar aspects of biographical testimonies gathered in times marked by high political tension. Given that contemporary Turkey provides a particularly emblematic case, this article tackles issues related to the collection of testimonies of Turkish left-wing intellectuals that were active in the 1980s, when the debate of 'civil society' and new social paradigms started to emerge.<sup>2</sup> More precisely, the interviews were conducted with selected representatives of the local intellectual elite since they held leadership positions and played a crucial role in the process of elaboration of new practices and theories of social struggle.

In 1980, the military coup marked the beginning of a process that – in Turkey like in many other countries at the time – led to the implementation of a liberal economy, the collapse of radical left ideologies, and the emergence of new social movements for the advocacy of fundamental rights. Accordingly, many scholars defined the 1980 coup as a turning point in contemporary Turkish social thought (Yerasimos et al. 2000). From that moment on, the cultural sphere has been invaded by social action in the form of identity and civil struggles, given that traditional structures of political opposition such as trade unions, organizations and parties were

2 The development of the Turkish 'civil society' in the 1980s and, more particularly, the definition of the relationship between state and civil society have been widely debated. Within the debate, two are the main positions and they can be summarized by the anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin's critique of the arguments advanced by the sociologist Nilüfer Göle. In an influential article, Göle had written: "the autonomization of civil societal elements from the grip of the centre is a sign of the decline of state power, and constitutes a driving force further fuelling the emergence of an autonomous political sphere outside the realm of the state" (1994, 213). Criticizing Göle's conceptualization of the public sphere for being too ideal, Navaro-Yashin argued its ineffectiveness in showing the omnipresence of the state and its power in the various sectors of the public sphere. Accordingly, Navaro-Yashin wrote: "perhaps there is no autonomization to be observed, but rather what may be called a changing enmeshed relationship due to the various ways in which state – civil society relations are mobilized" (2002, 132). For a more detailed discussion of the debate, see Kuzmanovic 2012.

repressed. According to Nicolas Monceau (2005, 126), this kind of political reformulation did not end up in a decline but rather in a change of the collective political commitment that, from that moment on, involved the dual register of 'civil society' and moral militancy due to the effects of the repression.

During the fieldwork research (September 2016-October 2017), the objectives pursued by the social struggles of the early 1980s and the relative political proposals emerged with them have been harshly hit by the repressive measures that the Turkish government in force has undertaken during the state of emergency it declared in the immediate aftermath of the failure of a military coup attempted in July 2016 with the purpose to overthrow it. Lifted only after the victory of the already ruling party at the 2018 general elections, the state of emergency was repeatedly renewed allowing the repression to expand its targets. Initially, it aimed to suppress the subversive organisations that attempted the coup but it soon started targeting freedom of expression, democratic activism and all the allegedly anti-government forces. The interviews at the core of this article have been therefore conducted in a period when the urgency to struggle to reclaim human rights marked the political agenda of any group engaged with their defence in a way that recalled the socio-political struggles of the 1980s. Actually, the interviews had been initially designed to gather evidence of personal involvement in the political struggles of the past and what they revealed is that contemporary events influence the storytelling of the past. This process occurs in any kind of storytelling - whether politically connoted or not - but this contribution focuses on case that is particularly interesting due to the high-degree of conditioning that present events have on the storytelling of past events.

In the analysis of Michel Foucault's works, David Carlson argues "Self-definition is not a process whereby autonomous individuals freely choose and articulate an identity in a vacuum. Instead, it is process where institutionally specific discourses speak through us, transforming us into particular kinds of individuals" (2009, 181). Therefore, a biographical text must be examined not only for the data it provides in order to understand what it says but also to grasp why certain themes - rather than others - have been chosen and how they have been addressed, i.e. to identify some of the discourses underlying the narration (Carlson 2009, 189). Understood as such, this kind of texts provide information about the period when they have been produced as well as about the period they tell about. In particular, what this case study allows to examine is the complex relationship between the conditions of the present and the use of political memory not only in terms of mutual implication but also in terms of narrative agency of the narration and its ties with the multiple vicissitudes of the contemporary. The body of the interview is therefore considered as a type of 'complex text' that derives from a dialogic performance. As such, it allows us to



more directly reveal the relationship between the text itself, the context from which it emerged, and the fragments of historical-social reality that it contains. Within this perspective, the interviews provide an example of ethnographic study, which contributes to reflect on the relationship between the storytelling and the worldview of the narrator.

## 2 The Roots of Oral History in Turkey

Known as *sözlü tarih* in Turkish, oral history made its appearance in the local academic context in the early 1990s (see Neyzi 2010). Research centers and independent foundations that started applying the novel methods of socio-historical investigation have been pioneering in this field. Next to the enthusiasm sparked in the public sphere, the methodological debate was extended also within universities since the second half of the 1990s, when the first courses of oral history were established by the History Department of the Boğaziçi University of Istanbul under the direction of Arzu Öztürkmen, who has never stopped playing a crucial role in the advancement of oral history research through her studies on the relationship between folklore and nationalism. For instance, she organised the XI Conference of the International Oral History Association (IOHA), which took place in June 2000 in Istanbul (Neyzi 2010, 444). At the end of the 1990s, the Sabanci University of Istanbul established the first oral history courses under the coordination of Leyla Neyzi, who was responsible also for the coordination of the oral history projects initiated by the *Tarih Vakfı* (History Foundation) thus paving the way to the application of theories emerged in the academic context to the reality of independent projects.

In addition to the activities carried out by Arzu Öztürkmen and Leyla Neyzi, the work done by other two women like Esra Özyürek (2006) e Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002) deserves to be mentioned since their efforts to introduce the discipline in the universities were accompanied by significant contributions in the field of memory studies based on the examination of the country's relationship with its past through an anthropological lens. From the brief overview provided so far, it therefore emerges clearly that the academic research in the field of oral history and memory studies related to the Turkish context have been carried out mainly by women. Coming from different academic backgrounds (sociology, anthropology, literature and gender studies), they all contributed to a considerable expansion of the covered topics through the analysis of personal testimonies (Neyzi 2010, 444). The academic career of these scholars was characterized by long periods of research abroad (especially in the study centers of American and European universities) and this particularity must be remarked since it stimulated the internationalization of the academic debate on memory

in Turkey and allowed the construction of bridges for the dissemination of new theories for historical research.

Throughout the Two-thousands, development and refinement of the methodology led to the expansion of the areas of study, which focused on a variety of topics including women rights, ethnic and religious minorities (especially Alevis and Kurds), migration, and urban poverty. Since the early 1990s, this type of studies had however to deal with a problem, namely the strong emphasis on what is proposed as Turkish 'official' history. Strong nationalist rhetoric has always expressed the symbolic construction of national unity thus preventing the legitimation of antagonistic struggles and of any kind of events labelled as suspicious insofar as questioning the centrality of the nation-state. Several are the researches confirming and denouncing how Turkish national history has excluded many events from institutionalization by creating a discrepancy (Neyzi 1999, Öztürkmen 2001, Esra Özyürek 2006). On one side, there is the national official history and, on the other side, there are personal as well as communitarian experiences and memories. Meltem Ahıska describes this paradox in the following way.

[The official truth] suffers from agoraphobia, because it cannot locate itself in relation to a specific time and place; it is everywhere, yet nowhere. It has to be secured against the challenge of the practical and the specific to have a closure. It denies the life of a singular person, while positing a general subject of total institutions - such as the military, the psychiatric hospital, or the prison. The narratives of memory, in contrast - such as in the prison - or can only survive in the intimacy of private places. These metaphorical descriptions can give us a sense of how different registers of truth operate in Turkey. (2006, 24-5)

Nevertheless, many organizations or independent studies have tried over time to save these memories from oblivion. Starting from the 1990s and following the rediscovery of the identity policies started in the previous decade, several were the associations that carried out research in oral history and that, in certain cases, collected precious archival material. Among them, the above-mentioned *Tarih Vakfı* (History Foundation) has played a fundamental role in the translation of texts, dissemination of academic research and archiving of oral sources (cf. Monceau 2007 and De Sanctis 2017). With regard to the research in the specific field of gender studies, *Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı* (Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation) is the institution that has published and disseminated studies on the memory and women's testimonies.

In recent years, there has been an increase in interest in oral history both within universities and within independent foundations. Yet, it must be pointed out that the methodology's shortcomings are still many. At the

methodological level, the theoretical preparation and survey accuracy of many non-academic studies are still problematic, but problematic is also the institutionalization of memories that detach themselves from the official history repertoire and are not given the possibility of carving out an autonomous space (Neyzi 2010, 447). In order to understand how the 'official' history of Turkey has never stopped to profoundly affect the local collective memory, it must be discussed more in detail how specific events of crucial historical significance affected the life of those who lived them and are called to tell them precisely in a period when present circumstances recall them to memory due to the commonalities between different historical contexts.

### **3 State(s) of Emergency and Life Stories**

Until the 1980s, Turkey's history was characterized by three coup d'états (1960, 1971 and 1980). The three respective decades corresponded to specific phases of political militancy. Albeit a certain degree of diversity, the 1960s and the 1970s were marked by a crescendo of ideological radicalization, while the third military intervention cracked down on the far-left organizations that had been protagonists of the political scene in the previous decades. With the coup of 12 September 1980, the military decreed the state of emergency throughout the country declaring that the objective was to protect democracy and defend national unity, but the harsh repression that followed aimed to stop the very violent clashes among far-left and far-right organisations by attempting to eliminate oppositional forces from the political scene, especially left-wings ones. More importantly, the repression was in fact instrumental to the implementation of a wider project of radical redefinition of the social, political and economic life of the country (Nocera 2011, 69).

Nonetheless, censorship, prohibitions and limitations against the associative realm did not succeed in crushing social criticism, which gradually reconstituted itself within a renewed civil context, namely one structured on consensus and oriented towards the respect for human rights. Armed struggle was abandoned leaving space for less violent forms of demonstration and the organisation of lawful associations; the focus of social conflicts shifted from the economic system to the socio-cultural sphere stimulating the organization of projects, initiatives and associations based on principles such as equality, pluralism and democratization (Groc 1998; Göle 1994; Keyman, İçduygu 2003). The expansion of a lively cultural debate was useful to introduce new social paradigms in certain circles of Turkish society. This was in fact the period marked by the emergence of the femi-

nist debate<sup>3</sup> and, more generally, by the emergence of the commitment to the protection of human rights.<sup>4</sup>

What must be highlighted is the peculiarity emerging from the examination of the activities and associations came into being the 1980s: the presence of an elite group of leftist intellectuals who contributed to the development of a strong criticism against the established order and suggested alternative practices that became central to the development of critical thinking in the following years. The process of reconversion of activism practices towards associative practices was in fact marked by the discussion of new topics of social interest through debates, publications and translations. The testimonies of intellectuals who joined the process provide a case study that is particularly interesting since the 20 interviews on which this contribution is based were conducted in Istanbul and Ankara under the state of emergency. The mixed sample of interviews includes 8 women and 12 men born between 1943 and 1955.

The results of the research confirm that the interviewed group of women and men who contributed to the emergence of criticism against the regime's anti-democratic drift and to the introduction of feminism and the universality of human rights into the debate, belong to what Karl Mannheim (2000) defines the same "generation unit". Whether directly involved or not, the interviewees made the experience of radical political struggle during the years of their university studies. In the years leading up to the coup of 12 September, most of them had already started their academic career. Their involvement in civil activism and their participation in protest demonstrations must be then interpreted in the light of this

3 In the 1980s, Turkish feminism developed into what can be actually called a movement organized by women for women. Throughout the decade, the rethinking of the role of women in society and political activism inspired the organization of numerous initiatives. In particular, the various publications played an important role insofar as they sealed the theoretical apparatus of Turkish feminism and its various tendencies. In 1982, feminists decided to present their theories to the public by publishing a daily page in *Somut*, a weekly magazine published by YAZKO. Once this experience ended, others arose. For instance, the publishing house *Kadın Çevresi* 'Women's Circle' dealt with the translation of the major texts of foreign feminist literature. In the following years, the various tendencies of Turkish feminism were brought together through the publication of magazines such as the radical *Feminist* (1987) and the socialist *Kaktüs* (1988). For the history of the Turkish feminist movement, see Tekeli (1995, 2005) and Arat (1994).

4 The Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*, İHD) was founded in 1986 and it paved the way for a democratic approach to the issue: to speak in the name of all people subjected to abuse without political distinctions. The ninety-eight founders were relatives of political prisoners, intellectuals, academics, and journalists who were influential in the public sphere both in Turkey and internationally. The Solidarity Association for the Families and Relatives of the Arrested (*Tutuklu ve Hükümlü Aileleri Yardımlaşma Derneği*, TAYAD) was also founded in the same years but its approach to human rights was more particularistic compared with the one of İHD insofar as the focus was on specific political causes (Plagemann 2000, Kamiloglu 2018).

crucial biographical data, for the repressive measures targeting university institutions in the 1980s deeply influenced their experiences.

In 1981, the YÖK (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu*, Council of Higher Education) was founded as part of the social control plan put in place after the coup of September 12. As such, the aim of the institution was to abolish the administrative and financial autonomy of the universities, which were accused of being the primary place of organisation of the political activism in the previous years. More than two thousand officials and hundreds of university professors who were suspected of being political sympathizers of the radical left and had expressly criticized both the coup and the following policies were expelled with the Law no. 1402 issued in 1983. The repression affecting the university body was precisely what functioned as catalyst in the reconfiguration of the cultural and intellectual field in Turkey (Monceau 2005, 2007). In fact, many of those who had been forced to leave the universities reorganised themselves and gave life to a multitude of activities that radically marked the introduction and diffusion of alternative models of cultural politics.

Over the years, the demands put forward since the early 1980s have become the core of the critique of the status quo and they still continue to have a crucial significance to this day, especially in the denouncing of the authoritarianism that marked the repressive wave following the attempted coup d'état in July 2016. Hence, memories are influenced by a double level of involvement due to the high degree of politicisation of both the past (time of the memory) and the contemporary (time of the interview). The interviews were in fact conducted while the state of emergency declared in 2016 was still being in force, so narrators were called to give account of their lives and personal involvement in past political activities while part of them was being directly or indirectly targeted by the recent repressive measures enforced by the security organs. Albeit the diversity of the repressive policies and their primary targets, both the periods following the 1980 and the 2016 coups have been marked by the harshness of the crackdown on freedom of expression and anti-government thought. Back then just like nowadays, the targets stay in fact the same: universities, petitions, and press.<sup>5</sup>

5 The most common parallelisms emerging from the sample of the interviews examined here concern the attack on schools and universities. In the period of the military junta, the reformulation of the educational system envisaged the implementation of the law n. 1.402 which forbade 1,255 teachers to continue their activity. Today, two years after the declaration of the state of emergency, the number of academics who have been removed from the universities amounts to 5,822 (the number includes also those who lost their jobs as a result of the closure of the entire university). Another practice that unites the past and present periods is the signing of solidarity petitions and denouncing statements. In May 1984, the signatories of the petition *Türkiye'de Demokratik Düzene İlişkin Gözlem ve İstemler* (Observations and Requests on the Democratic Order in Turkey) were 1,256 intellectuals

Generally, interviewees do not show a significant reticence when invited to grant the interview and the same goes when they openly (re)assert their own political standpoint – whether it be past or present. Yet, they react in different ways depending on the type of political commitment carried out in the present. Those who have abandoned the political struggle and the realm of public visibility are generally more inclined to grant more detailed interviews and this is due to two reasons. Questions such as “why are you interested in my story?” and “who advised you to talk with me?” show that it is a matter of self-esteem. In addition to this, the interviews offer them the possibility to tackle certain issues that, by now, some others have relegated to the private sphere. In these cases, the stories reveal in greater depth details about the participation in illegal organizations, the militancy, and the proximity to revolutionary personalities. Instead, those who are still involved in political movements and/or activities show more caution. For them, the risk is greater and it can be therefore argued that degree of popularity, participation in events and media exposure weaken the enthusiasm to issue statements. This second type of interviews is usually less romantic and more focused on the details about the participation in the movements of the 1980s rather than about the previous years.

In addition to these observations, further remarks need to be made with regard to the construction of a trust relationship between researcher and interviewee, namely a process that develops itself during the interview. In the specific case of this research, the intersectional peculiarities of my condition as researcher were important elements that conditioned its establishment. They include: the significant generational gap between the interviewees and me, the condition of being a foreigner, and the condition of being a woman who is therefore potentially sensitive to gender issues. As for the latter, it must be pointed out that it favourably influenced the relationship. In brief, the dialogic performance of the interview was influenced by the peculiarities of my subjective condition in accordance to what is known as reflexivity in social research.

With regard to the position assumed by the interviewees, the attitude to be highlighted is their self-confidence. Unlike many other studies in oral history, the group was composed by intellectuals who are fully aware of their own narrative strategies and, furthermore, who are used to mak-

who denounced the practical and legal limitations to cultural and artistic activities in the country and, accordingly, requested greater freedom of expression. In January 2016, 1, 128 academics signed the petition *Bu Suça Ortak Olmayacağız* (We will not be part of this crime), which criticised the government’s security operations in south-eastern Turkey, where cities are predominantly inhabited by the Kurdish population. When Erdoğan’s threats increased, the number of the signatories also increased (2,212 academics signed the petition). In the 1980s, 59 people were prosecuted. At the present time, more than two years after signing the petition, at least 265 academics from public and private universities in Istanbul are being prosecuted for ‘spreading terrorist propaganda’.

ing statements. Being used to mastering their own speeches, they are in fact aware of the possible techniques to safeguard their privacy both against the possible risks of political nature and against previous alleged accusations concerning their social status. In the case of tense political situations, the establishment of trust is however affected by the greater difficulties marking the context. Hence, even when the discourse seems to flow freely, it is necessary to keep in mind the constant activation of filters when discussing issues collectively recognized as 'thorny'. For the most part, these issues are easily identifiable because the most common indictments and censorship techniques generate a widely shared mapping of what is generally better to avoid declaring both in public statements and in private statements made outside the domestic sphere. Starting from the analysis of selected interviews, it is therefore possible to reflect on the deep connections between the life story and the process of construction of reality. Given this, the storytelling of the 1980s takes on a particular relevance since some of the social and political struggles that continue to play a central role in the construction of a strong oppositional front against antidemocratic tendencies to this day emerged at that time.

#### **4 Fragments of the 1980s**

The model of social antagonism emerged after the 1980 coup was obviously designed and developed in response to the deep complexity of the relative historical and social context. The redefinition of social demands had to deal not only with the violence of the repression of the 1980s but also with the high politicization inherited from the ideological radicalization of the previous years. The coup d'état was in fact a watershed in the contemporary history of the country but it did not succeed in erasing the ideological debate within the Turkish left. The past of the political struggles of the 1960s and 1970s was too close and their legacy was quite strong. Hence, demands related to pluralism, gender issues and environmentalism could not be swept away so easily despite the intensification of repression. The comparison between the past and the contemporary situation included in the excerpt below shows very clearly how the interviewee (a woman who was engaged in the theoretical debate on Marxism in the 1980s) highlights the emergence of ideological scepticism in concomitance with the emergence of the debate on 'civil society'.

At that time [in the 1980s], I thought that fighting against the state from the stance of civil society would hide the discussion of class related issues insofar as civil society is dominated by capital. But I have to admit that in the current situation I became a supporter of civil society. At this point - the point at which we arrived - fighting against the state through

the concepts of 'civil society' is inevitable. Before the Eighties, the trade union movement was very strong and the left was closely connected to the labour movement. After the coup, this connection failed because the left and all the trade union movements were suppressed. This was one of the purposes of the coup and one of his greatest achievements. Thus, part of the left gathered around the human rights movement and the part that instead continued to defend the class struggle could no longer reconstitute relations with the working class. That's why I say that we need to reformulate the critique of civil society and human rights movements. We are in a situation in which the class struggle is rather impossible; human rights are too often violated. This is why I think that civil society is now something extremely interesting. (**Unpublished interview by the Author**, 5 October 2017)

The fragment highlights two of the trends that characterized the left after the coup of 12 September: on one hand, the continuation of the political struggle in the same ideological terms that characterized the previous decades and, on the other hand, the reconstitution of the struggle focused on the defence of human rights and their universality. As it clearly emerges from the above statement, the accusations made against 'civil society' theories by those who continued to maintain a more ideological approach to political antagonism focused instead on the alleged abandonment of class struggle. According to this interpretation, the concept of civil society – defined in Gramscian terms as a domain of the bourgeoisie – concealed the oppression and exploitation intrinsic to its own formulation. In this sense, then, the notion of 'civil society' was considered to be the symbol of liberalization and therefore of the rejection of the revolutionary struggle (Bora 2016, 726). Bringing the discussion back to the contemporary, the interviewee describes her personal change of perspective with regard to the paradigms of the political struggle. The fragment of her story moves in fact from a critique of the assumptions of 'civil society' to the awareness of its importance in denouncing contemporary antidemocratic tendencies. Proximity to human rights issues is told in such a way as to be included within the more general political debate that was set up after the coup also in the fragment below, where the movement for the defence of human rights of the 1980s is presented in terms of necessity as an urgent response to the violence perpetrated by the repression.

In the Eighties, also illegal organizations continued to exist but we wanted to carry on the struggle for human rights and for freedom of expression and thought. Economic and social rights related struggles could come only after that. When first-degree rights are violated, these cannot remain waiting for those of second- and third-degree. They have priority. At that time, the other political demands were not so urgent.



We were fighting for the improvement of prison conditions. There were hunger strikes, they did not feed the inmates, they oppressed them, they tortured them. It happened that some families came to know that their son had died in prison after months spent without getting an answer. There were other groups working and fighting for matters that were more 'political' in the classical sense, from an economic point of view. No, for us priorities were different. First of all there were the right to life and the right to an impartial process. (Unpublished interview by the Author, 5 September 2017)

In this text, the interviewee (also a woman) refers in particular to İHD (Human Rights Association), which was founded in 1986 by intellectuals, academicians and journalists together with some political detainees' relatives. The cooperation with the latter aimed to reach a greater impact in the public opinion in Turkey as well as internationally. In this fragment, human rights activism is proposed as rethinking of the practices of left-wing politics, which was re-establishing itself within a new social landscape that, in turn, was characterized by increased repression. Several of the interviewed intellectuals who contributed to the configuration of a new type of civil activism since the second half of the 1980s joined İHD. Hence, the observations made so far confirm that, in general, stories about the new realm of associations let emerge the difficulties encountered in developing a debate on the issue of the universality of rights within a context highly influenced by ideology and repression (cf. Kamiloglu 2018, Plagemann 2000).

The 1980s was also the period when the second wave (*ikinci dalga*) of feminism emerged in Turkey,<sup>6</sup> i.e. when the small circuits of discussion born in the immediate aftermath of the coup gradually became an actual movement organised by women for women. In the scholarly literature on the 1980s, it is in fact argued that women suffered the repression wave following 1980 coup to a relatively lesser extent (e.g. less arrests compared with men). The reason lies in the fact that they only rarely held leadership positions in the revolutionary organisations of the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>7</sup> so they became free to reappropriate a space for political expression that until then had predominantly remained a prerogative of men thus having the chance to reorganise it devoid of the hierarchy typical of the strongly centralised structures of the traditional radical left (Tekeli 2005, 270). This

6 The first wave, instead, refers to the phase of women struggles in the transit period from the late Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, which was founded in 1923.

7 It must be however specified that the procedural documents relating to the sentences against far-left organizations include many women who had been involved in the revolutionary struggle. The figures of the major trials against the most important left organizations refer to a percentage of around 10%. Data extrapolated from the work by Emel Akal, *Kızıl Feministler: Bir Sözlü Tarih Çalışması* (quoted in Nocera 2013, 51).

shift in the political context is well illustrated by one of the first feminist activists in the following fragment.

[During the second half of the Eighties] I started working for a newspaper and I met a guy who fell in love with me, but I had a husband in prison. I was writing about different things, about literature and philosophy. Until then, I had dealt only with politics. It was a really vibrant period in Turkey. The situation was terrible but many people who were not involved with the political movements were reading and thinking; they were discovering Deleuze, Foucault. And new things were opening, new conversations were coming out. We had time to think, before there wasn't. We believed that the revolution would have happened the next day. [...] It is in this period that the feminist movement began to take its first steps. It was a very nice moment of my life, a rebirth. It was horizontal. (Unpublished interview by the Author, 23 June 2017)

This text also shows that the understanding of the emergence of the feminist movement must take into account the political experiences of the years preceding the coup, which women criticised for a lack of attention to gender issues.

More generally, both minorities issues and issues related to the influence of the Kemalist ideology<sup>8</sup> of the early Republic on the majority of the groups of the radical left of the 1960s and 1970s were at the core of the debate on the definition of new social paradigms. From the 1980s onwards, the strong state-centric model started in fact to show the first signs of weakening. The new social movements began to question the culture of obedient submission to the Kemalist state by rejecting its strong nationalism and by envisaging an alternative model somehow inspired also by the models of the international movements of the time, the European Union, and the system of Western democracies. What the very conformation of feminist, identity-related and pro-human rights politics strongly challenged was precisely the patriarchal and patriotic approach of Kemalism because of its incompatibility with the model of a pluralist and egalitarian society. In this regard, the interviewees distance themselves from Kemalism even more firmly than in the case of other political antagonisms, stressing that overcoming it was – and continues to be – an essential condition for any other political alternative to be possible. This issue is question is well exemplified in the following fragment:

<sup>8</sup> Kemalism is the founding ideology of the Turkish Republic and refers to the political, economic and social principles advocated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It can be synthesized in the six key concepts (“six arrows”) that have been elaborated in 1931 at the congress of the Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP): nationalism, republicanism, populism, statism, secularism, and revolutionism (Bozarslan 2006, 39).

I was in favour of the political representation of the Islamists because, although I grew up in a certain type of left, I have never been a Kemalist. I was not a liberal, I was leftist but there is a strong Kemalist component inside the left. Marxism was very direct at that time, but then you have to deal with the ethnic question, the Islamists, the Kurds and the Alevis. And you must face and accept the reality: there is a group of people struggling against silencing and non-acceptance. That was probably the reason why I got more and more involved with minorities issues and, if you're involved with these kinds of issues, it's really hard for you to become a Kemalist. (Unpublished interview by the Author, 10 February 2017)

As in previous examples, textual analysis requires to take into account the significance of contemporary events in order for the memory's selection process and the choice of specific topics to be understood. In an interview granted to Osman Akinhay and Foti Benlisoy (2008), Sungur Savran analyses the differences between the ideology of the Kemalist Left before the 1980s and the reactionary nationalist position it assumed especially since the second half of the 1990s onwards. Although the analysis of the two formulas of Kemalism shows a continuity confirmed by the persistence of common elements, this sort of reactionary drift of the last decades must be examined within the wider historical context. Accordingly, it must be recalled that religious issues acquired a renewed significance in the 1980s. Tensions arisen as a consequence of the emergence of new political actors aspiring to take power by exploiting feelings of belonging to the Islamic community caused the reaction of Kemalists, who reinforced their traditional position on the question of secularism. In addition to this, Kemalists reinforced also their nationalistic attitude in the approach to ethnic issues and this happened especially following the outbreak of the Kurdish question (Akinhay, Benlisoy 2008, 19).<sup>9</sup> In short, the strengthening of the traditional principles of Kemalism constituted an additional reason why part of the Left questioned not only the Kemalist legacy on the revolutionary organisations of the 1960s and 1970s but also the legacy of those very organisations on the choice of the path that part of Left of the 1980s wanted to embark on in order to change the approach to the controversial issues discussed so far (patriarchy, minorities, and hierarchy of the organisational structures).

9 The Kurdish movement requires separate analysis although it underwent a process of reformulation during the historical period under examination. Unlike the identity politics practices of mobilisations discussed in this article, the PKK emerged in fact as one of the formulas of the armed revolutionary organizations. The first attempts to reintegrate the Kurdish identity in the cultural sphere began in the early 1990s and, from the Two-thousands onwards, they result in the acquisition of a specific space in the field of cinema, theatre and publishing.

## 5 Sociocultural Polarisation and Symbolic Struggles

The interviewed representatives of the intellectual generation of the 1980s strove to find an alternative political model that would guarantee the respect of human rights without neglecting the implications of the sociocultural polarisation marking the Turkish society especially due to the conflict among the various ethnic and religious communities composing it. In order for this task to be accomplished, human rights had to be defined and reclaimed as universal, i.e. regardless of the collective identity of individuals as members of any cultural, social and political group. In this regard, the testimony of one of the most engaged human rights activists in Turkey is particularly useful to illustrate both the debate and its context.

One day a member of the terrorist organization Hezbollah who wrote a letter because he wanted us to help him. He had been tortured and asked for help from us. At that time this organization had killed our friends. To discuss this issue, we held a meeting with fifty-two members of the association and I told them: "My position on the issue is clear but I wait for the decision of each of you". Out of fifty-two people only two refused the proposal for help, the other fifty said we had to help him because we were a human rights organization and we did not have to care about the political thought. The two who refused said: "these people killed our mothers, our fathers, and our brothers. İHD<sup>10</sup> has nothing to do with the torture of torturers". I thanked everyone for sharing their ideas and I told these two people that I did not agree, that we should not have been interested in people's past, and that we should have looked at the current situation. (Unpublished interview by the Author, 15 May 2017)

The perspective of an insider on the debate on the applicability of universal principles is crucial insofar as the text testifies to the high political tension marking the context in which the universality of the reclaimed rights was supposed to be applied. Additionally, the construction of a democratic model for the 'civil society' associations has had to face issues emerged due to the political changes occurred from the end of the onwards.

Social polarisation has in fact grown exponentially following the increasing success of new political actors whose social consensus has been largely built upon the feeling of religious belonging of their supporters: the Wel-

10 The human rights association İHD (İnsan Hakları Derneği) was founded in 1986 and it paved the way for a democratic approach to the issue: to speak in the name of all people subject of abuse without political distinctions. The ninety-eight founders were relatives of political prisoners, intellectuals, academics, and journalists who were influential in the public sphere both in Turkey and internationally.

fare Party (RP, Refah Partisi) first and then the Justice and Development Party (AKP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) under the respective leadership of Necmettin Erbakan and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Hence, the pervasiveness of Islam in the political arena and in the public sphere has become one of the central issues of the symbolic struggles characterising the historical period going from the aftermath of the 1980s up to now. Over time, the different models of interpretation of reality have led to the escalation of the clash of interests between those who have managed to dominate the political sphere and those who have always remained in an antagonistic position. This situation can be interpreted through the theoretical scheme that Pierre Bourdieu proposed to define the social world.

The social world is both the product and the stake of inseparably cognitive and political symbolic struggles over knowledge and recognition, in which each pursues not only the imposition of an advantageous representation of himself or herself [...] but also the power to impose as legitimate the principles of construction of social reality most favourable to his or her social being [...] and to the accumulation of a symbolic capital of recognition. These struggles take place both in the order of everyday existence and within the fields of cultural production, which, even if they are not oriented towards this sole end, like the political field, contribute to the production and imposition of principles of construction and evaluation of social reality. (2000, 187)

The growing electoral success of the AKP intensified conflict at the symbolic level and, furthermore, it required a deep rethinking of consensus related issues since the demands of the proponents and/or advocates of the 'civil society' paradigm stood in sharp opposition to the government's purposes, which instead received the support of a large part of the Turkish population.<sup>11</sup> Beside the disappointment, the left-wing intellectual elite has had to face the facts: the model they proposed has never succeeded in obtaining sufficient consensus in order for it to prevail. The following fragment draws attention to the significance of symbolic struggles by highlighting also this specific aspect of the debate.

[In the Eighties] there was a lot of hope. We were trying to create a better future and we were sure it would have come. Totally different than now. We were sure: it would have been successful. Democracy, associations, leftist groups would have won. We never expected such a thing. When the AKP came to power, I would never have imagined that

<sup>11</sup> In the general elections, the Justice and Development Party got 34.42% in 2002, 46.58% in 2007, 49.83% in 2011, 40, 87% in 2015, and 42.56% in 2018.

this would happen. I read it as a response to Kemalism, neither more nor less. (Unpublished interview by the Author, 26 March 2017)

The interviewee was not the only one thinking that the consolidation of political Islam had to be interpreted as a reaction to the rigidity of the Kemalist secularism. Many shared the same opinion but their position changed as soon as the ruling parties started implementing policies in deep contrast to the political principles inspiring the 'civil society' organisations, whose development has however continued over the years. More and more associations have been in fact established and their activities have increased.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, actors directly involved in their organisation claim a lack of adequate space for democratic discussion not only with regards to the institutional level but also with regard to the political debate internal to anti-government circuits as argued in the text below.

Looking at the present day – if you look at the general situation – democracy is something that intellectuals or left-wing activists and the Kurdish armed movement await. This is really problematic because the left does not pursue a democratic program but a revolutionary one, and the Kurds are still at war with the state. However, we do not await democracy from these two channels and this is a highly problematic factor. There are many limitations and unfortunately there is no democratic culture in the state, in the left, and in the Kurdish movement. Everyone tries to learn how to act in favour of democracy but, for instance, we do not have liberals who talk about democracy, and this is a problem. There is no democratic *agency* in the society [italics added]. (Unpublished interview by the Author, 10 February 2017)

The situation has not improved in recent years. Social polarization has become more intense fuelling the exacerbation of conflict, which expanded from the symbolic level to the everyday level of political practice. As mentioned above, fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and assembly have been in fact increasingly violated with the implementation of a wave of repressive measures that started escalating at the time of the Gezi Park uprising (2013) and reached their peak during the state of emergency following the last attempted coup (from 2016 until 2018).

**12** In the 1990s, these movements flourished, increasing consensus and establishing themselves as civil opposition to government policies. Alongside independent initiatives, various activities were established in what is known as 'third sector' and the process of their institutionalization began in the following years. In the two-thousands, the European Union and other international bodies financed part of the Turkish associative and cultural world, which benefited also from the huge investments of large business families – Koç, Sabancı – and banks – especially Yapı Kredi, Akbank, Garanti – (Nocera 2013, 181).

Definitely, this has crucial consequences on oral history studies since the purpose of spoken memories is not so much to reconstruct an event but rather to understand the interviewees' relationship with that event.

## **6 Conclusions**

The specific function of storytelling is to gather the interpretations of a certain event on the basis of the stories told by a group of people who have been involved in the event. In order to investigate how the contemporary influences the storytelling of the past, this work focused the analysis on the life stories of Turkish left-wing intellectuals who have been invited to tell today about the 1980s, i.e. when they joined the debates on the urgency of defining political practices adequate to construct a democratic model of 'civil society' able to face the challenges of the time and to overcome the unwanted legacies of the past. In the case examined in this contribution, the degree of influence of the contemporary circumstances on the memories is extreme for two reasons. First, the past being told is deeply politically connoted not only because it was in the 1980s that the 'civil society' started organising itself as oppositional front starting from animated debates on issues such as human rights and gender but also because the same intellectuals, who were particularly active within those debates, directly faced the consequences of the wave of repression marking that specific historical period. Second, the current political circumstances are marked by a high degree of repression directly affecting many of the interviewees and some of them may also be under investigation for reasons relating to very recent and/or contemporary political events.

Given this, the analysis revealed how human actions are dialectically connected to the social structure in a way that makes the dimensions of human actions and social structure mutually constitutive. The factors to be taken into account when conducting a research in oral history include: performance of the interview, practices to control the speech, more or less conscious memory selection of certain events rather than others, judgment, evaluation, and expectations. In this regard, the examination of the fragments of the 1980s revealed the need to problematize the conditions of a research conducted within a context of intense repression like Turkey in the last few years, especially during the state of emergency lasted from 2016 until 2018. Among the applied communication strategies, the selection of the memories to be told is particularly relevant since self-protection concerns both the interviewees and the researcher. While the first selects memories depending also on the degree of direct involvement in contemporary political activities, the latter selects the contents to discuss applying filters that vary depending on the choice of facing the risks due to the repression underway during the period of research.

At this regard, it must be therefore remarked that the examined texts were selected for their importance in the understanding of the debate on the 'civil society' within part of Left of the 1980s but they revealed a lot about the contemporary. As for the contents emerging from the selection applied by the interviewees, instead, the contents of the texts include: first, the debate on the willingness to reorganise the Left and, second, the need to create a movement for the defence of human rights of everyone regardless of the political affiliation of the person to be protected from inhumane repressive measure, all the more so as they were violating rights in particularly harsh manner at the time. From the analysis of the texts about the 1980s, it emerges that Kemalism, political Islam and 'civil society' were three of the main paradigms animating the political panorama, causing sociocultural polarisation and leading to symbolic struggles for the acquisition of social consensus. In hindsight, the project of the 'civil society' turns out not to have prevailed and this is why disenchantment and disappointment emerge as the main political affects that the interviewees seem to share based on the examination of the texts and, furthermore, that have substituted the confidence and hope marking instead the debate of the 1980s.

The conditioning of the present on the past emerged also through the request for greater democratization of the political practices precisely because of two reasons. First, the model proposed in the 1980s to defend human rights universally could help to lower the current level of political confrontation characterising the contemporary society, which continues to remain highly polarised. Second, it is necessary to guarantee the respect of human rights including the freedom of expression needed to be able to tell freely about a highly politically connoted past without having to fear the consequences of repression in the present, when the radicalisation of symbolic struggles has reached once again the level of the state of repression and the contemporary deeply affects the production of texts about the past.



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# Artistic Representations of Urban Shamans in Contemporary Japan

## Texts, Inter-actions and Efficacy

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**Abstract** This paper investigates how Japanese urban shamanic actors and their roles are constructed and represented by artists in different texts. Three case studies – writer Taguchi Randy, contemporary artist Mori Mariko, and musician Sugee – are presented to illustrate the processes of re-appropriation of terms and themes in the contemporary narrative on urban shamans. The use of the word *shāman* – with new meanings attached – and the role of connecting humans with other-than-human entities – and especially with nature – are analysed. Moreover, the connection to the so-called ‘new spirituality’ is emphasised.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2. Case Studies. – 2.1 Taguchi Randy: Writing about the Shaman. – 2.2 Mori Mariko: Performing the Shaman. – 2.3 Shaman Sugee: Living as a Shaman. – 3 A Circle of Re-appropriation. – 3.1 *Shāman*. – 3.2 Peripheries of Time and Space. – 3.3 Tsunagari. – 4 Inter-actions and Efficacy.


**Keywords** Shaman. Urban shamanism. New spirituality. Contemporary Japan.

## 1 Introduction

The word ‘shaman’ is one of those terms on whose definition scholars cannot seem to find an agreement. One of the latest definitions is that of Thomas Karl Alberts, who suggests that we describe the shaman as “a person who, while in an altered state of consciousness, engages with spirits with the intention of influencing events and fortunes impacting others, whether individuals or collective groups” (Alberts 2015, 4). The value of this definition lies in the reference not only to the collective group, but also to the individual, at the centre of contemporary shamanic practices. However, as with many other definitions, it remains to be defined what an “altered state of consciousness” is. Moreover, especially when it comes to the practice of neo-shamanism, the shamanic actor – a term that could be more adequate for generally describing the variety of practitioners connected with shamanism in one way or another – does not engage only with ‘spirits’. Therefore, when generalising it would be better to talk about

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2018/01/024

Submitted: 2018-07-06 | Accepted: 2018-09-13

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'other-than-human persons', as Alfred Irving Hallowell has suggested (Hallowell 1992).

In order to understand where the complexity of the term 'shaman' originates from, it is useful to look into its history, which I will briefly sum up here.<sup>1</sup> The term derives from the Tungus word *šamān*. This was introduced into Europe via its German transliteration *Schaman* at the end of the seventeenth century by travellers and explorers (mainly Germans and Dutchmen) who, sponsored by the Russian tsars, were sent to the Siberian region. There they met the *Schaman*, a spiritual practitioner they saw performing unusual rituals that they described once back home.

This can be viewed as the starting point of a long – and in certain cases still ongoing – process of appropriation of the word 'shaman', to which various meanings are attached depending on the period and the aim of those who are using it.<sup>2</sup>

The most relevant step in the history of the word 'shaman' was taken by the Romanian religious scholar Mircea Eliade, who published his monograph *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* in 1951. This became even more successful and influential after the publication of the English version titled *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* in 1964. In this text, Eliade, who never met a shaman, presents a set of characteristics that the authentic and pure shamanism should have, most notably techniques to achieve ecstasy, as the title suggests. This work had an incredible impact on scholars of shamanism and gave rise to a debate about the appropriateness of using such a word to describe different actors and practices found in various cultural and geographical contexts. The main point of disagreement is represented by the sole reference to ecstasy in Eliade's definition: in many contexts, for example the Japanese one, spirit possession is the way used by the shaman to interact with other-than-human entities.

In studies and narratives about Japanese urban shamans, the influence of Eliade's theories appears through two intertwining threads – one from the academic world and the other from the popular world.

On the academic level, this influence first came to be felt with the work of the sociologist of religion Hori Ichirō who, after his encounter with Eliade

1 For a comprehensive overview of the history of the word 'shaman', see Znamesky 2007.

2 During the Romantic period, for example, fascination with what was 'Oriental' brought scholars to look for the origin of shamans in ancient India. They therefore developed the (sometimes still accepted) theory of a link between the Tungus word *šamān* and the Sanskrit *śramaṇa*, a word commonly used to describe Buddhist monks. Then, with the birth of anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century, the word 'shaman' started to be used to describe all those spiritual practitioners who seemed to share similar characteristics with the Siberian ones, regardless of their geographical and cultural context.

in Chicago, introduced the word *shāman* シャーマン, written in katakana,<sup>3</sup> into Japanese academic vocabulary at the end of the 1960s. In 1971 Hori published a monograph that became fundamental for studies on the topic: *Nihon no shāmanizumu* 日本のシャーマニズム (Japanese shamanism). It is especially thanks to this work that the words *shāman* and 'shāmanism' written in katakana started being used by Japanese scholars also to refer to Japanese practitioners, such as *itako* イタコ and *yuta* ユタ.<sup>4</sup> However, in his attempt to show the world that Japan too had 'real shamans', Hori Ichirō had to deal with the fact that Japanese practitioners were of the possession-type, while, as presented above, Eliade regarded as 'authentic shamans' only those of the ecstasy-type. Hori, therefore, stated that in the Japan of his day there were no longer any real shamans: a pure and true sort of shamanism had been widespread in prehistoric Japan but had degenerated in the following centuries, leaving only traces of its presence.

This view and Hori's theories - and, consequently, Eliade's theories too - have been shared by many other scholars, both in Japan and outside the country. The problem of defining who can or cannot be called a shaman in the Japanese context seemed to have found a possible solution in the 1990s, when Sasaki Kōkan defined the shaman as "a specialist technician who is able to associate directly and practically with the world of divine spirits" (Sasaki 1990, 116), without any references to possession or ecstasy.

On the popular level, Eliade's theories influenced the construction of a shamanic role for the contemporary urban context. Starting with the Euro-American counterculture, the interest in shamanism increased among ordinary people, who were looking for alternative forms of spirituality, such as those that could be found in the works of very popular authors like Carlos Castaneda<sup>5</sup> and Michael Harner,<sup>6</sup> both strongly influenced by Eliade's definition of a shaman. The same interest has been shared by what Shimazono refers to as the "new spirituality movements and cultures" (2004, 296-9), and which have characterized the Japanese context especially since the

3 Katakana is a syllabary mainly used in Japanese for the transcription of loan words from foreign languages.

4 In 1974 Hori also translated Eliade's monograph into Japanese.

5 Carlos Castaneda is the author of eleven books in which he allegedly presents the teachings of Mexican shaman Don Juan. The series, starting with *The Teachings of Don Juan. A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, was published between 1968 and 1998.

6 Michael Harner did some fieldwork among shamans in the Amazon, where he tried *ayahuasca*. The visions and knowledge he said he obtained through this experience led him to create what he calls Core Shamanism (<https://www.shamanism.org/workshops/coreshamanism.html>, 2018-04-26). The techniques of this 'universal shamanism' have been transmitted through Harner's books (for example *The Way of the Shaman. A Guide to Power and Healing* 1980) and through courses organized by the Foundation for Shamanic Studies founded by Harner himself in 1979.

1990s. As a result, in contemporary Japan, alongside those actors connected to what is perceived to be the 'shamanic tradition' of the archipelago – especially the *itako* of the north-eastern regions and the *yuta* of the southern islands<sup>7</sup> – a number of urban shamans and other neo-shamanic practitioners is active, especially in big cities. While the former have been deeply investigated during the last few decades,<sup>8</sup> the latter appear to be only of marginal interest to scholars.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a wide range of spiritual healers are presenting themselves using the term *shāman*, which until now had mainly been used by academics. At the same time, the word *shāman* is frequently appearing in the media and in various products of popular culture, reflecting an interest in and fascination with the kind of actor it (vaguely) describes. As the following analysis will make clear, in this process the term is acquiring new meanings that add elements to the still on-going debate about its definition and use, both in the Japanese context and elsewhere. Inevitably, this increases the complexity of the field, a complexity which could be handled by analysing the 'shamans' category as a polythetic class where each member must possess certain characteristics, but none of these must necessarily be present in every member of the class itself (Needham 1975). The problem that still need to be solved is to list such characteristics and find a way to avoid excessively broadening this class by including members that differ considerably from one another.

The role of the various shamanic actors is thus imagined, built and enacted in/through different texts<sup>10</sup> that intertwine and share common elements. In order to reach a fuller understanding of what it means to be a shaman – or to act as one – in contemporary urban Japan, the study of shamanic practices should be integrated with that of narratives and representations, as Lori Meeks suggests with reference to the study of *miko* 巫女 – the classical Japanese shamanic actor – in premodern Japan (2001).<sup>11</sup>

7 For both contexts, a variety of denominations are used depending on the specific region and the rituals that the different actors can offer.

8 For a brief review of the state of the art see Gaitanidis and Murakami (2014) and Rivosi (2016).

9 Relevant exceptions are the works by Anne Bouchy on urban shamans in the Kansai area (see Bouchy 1992) and Ioannis Gaitanidis and Aki Murakami's study of neo-shamanistic practitioners (2014), which demonstrates how frameworks and theories created to explain 'traditional shamanism' can be applied to the study of contemporary shamanistic practitioners, such as spiritual therapists. Shiotsuki's works on Okinawan shamanism, spirituality and the Internet should also be considered. See for example Shiotsuki and Satō 2003.

10 The term 'text' is used here to describe any social and cultural configuration whose meaning can be empirically perceived, as Gianfranco Marrone suggests (2010) and in line with the main arguments of this publication.

11 Meeks suggests that only through a similar approach could it be possible to describe and understand the role of the *miko* in all of its complexity, by disproving at the same time

In order to contribute to the study and understanding of the representation and re-appropriation of shamans in contemporary Japan (and beyond), in this paper I will present and analyse three case-studies from the artistic sphere.<sup>12</sup> With regard to this analysis, two main points need to be considered. First of all, by looking at the emerging common themes in the case-studies presented, it is possible to see and understand which elements are perceived as being essential to the practice of an urban shaman in the contemporary world and which are neglected, and in what ways they are used in the process of re-imagining the shaman. This will be the focus of section 3. A second point, explored in the last section, concerns the place of these representations within a wider context. As will become clear, these cases share certain characteristics not only with modern urban shamanism, but also with the field of the so-called 'new spirituality'. I argue that it is possible to infer that there is a community of people with common interests and knowledge that the various representations contribute to create and nurture. It is also possible to examine the opposite movement: this community produces the representations analysed and is in turn influenced by them. The relationship is thus circular.

## 2 Case studies

The three case-studies chosen are narratives on shamans produced in Tokyo in the past two decades by artists working in different fields. They are therefore relevant ways to focus on the re-appropriation of motives in the representation of the shamanic actor in the metropolitan world. The relevance of the examples presented also lies in the fact that recurring elements emerge and connect the different cases in the same network, although the types of texts produced are very different from one another. For reasons of space other case-studies have been excluded from this analysis but, when taken into consideration, can reinforce the arguments made here.<sup>13</sup>

two common stereotypes: "(1) the idea that Japan has a timeless 'folk religion' comprised of ill-defined superstitions practiced in rural areas, and (2) that this folk religion can be neatly separated from the more intellectual and theoretically systematic traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism" (Meeks 2011, 210).

**12** A similar approach has been adopted by scholars investigating artists re-appropriating shamanic elements in other geographical and cultural contexts. An example is offered by works on Joseph Beuys and Marcus Coates. Cf. Flaherty 1988 and Walters 2010.

**13** Cf. for example Staemmler (2011) on the *manga* series - then transposed into *anime* - *Shaman King* created by Takei Hiroyuki and published in instalments between 1998 and 2004. Cf. also Shiotsuki (2002) for a study of the representation of shamans in Okinawan films and literature, and Okabe et al. (2001) for a study of representations of shamans in Japanese cultural history.



## 2.1 Taguchi Randy: Writing About the Shaman

As a writer, Taguchi Randy first depicted a modern urban shaman in three novels written between 2000 and 2001: *Konsento* コンセント (Outlet), *Antena* アンテナ (Antenna), and *Mozaiku* モザイク (Mosaic).

These are to be seen as a trilogy in which Taguchi presents the problems faced by the younger generation in Japan and outlines the characteristics of the actor able to solve them. In her commentary to the third book, critic and art historian Fuse Hideko defines the trilogy as *denpakei shōsetsu* 電波系小説, that is 'novels about *denpakei*', people who seem to be disconnected from ordinary reality and connected to another kind of reality instead.

The first novel of the trilogy is *Konsento*. It revolves around Asakura Yuki and her struggles to find an explanation for the death of her brother, who was a *hikikomori* ひきこもり 'someone socially withdrawn'. During this process, she comes to realize that she is a shaman and that her role is to purify and heal men by using her body and sexual energy.

In the text one of the characters explains that shamans act as an outlet for the community in which they live,

like holes in a wall, connected to an invisible world so that when you contact them, it is as if you were plugging into them, and in this way they can ensure contact between you and the world of gods. (Taguchi 2000, 168)<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the novel, Yuki goes to Miyakojima, in Okinawa Prefecture, to meet the *yuta* Kamichi Miyo, who acknowledges her to be the new shaman that modern society needs. She also explains that Yuki is a new *miko* sprung from the new urban nature and, since the times have changed, her role should also change accordingly. Therefore, Yuki has to find her own way to be a shaman. Once back in Tokyo, Yuki starts working as a shaman in Shibuya. Her ritual consists in allowing male office workers in their twenties and thirties to have sexual intercourse with her in order to be healed by the powerful energy she has been able to awaken. It must be noted that throughout the text the word used is '*shāman*' written in katakana. Taguchi makes her characters explain what *miko* and *yuta* are by using the same word.

In *Antena*, Taguchi presents the story of Yūichirō's family and its unsolved mystery: when Yūichirō was ten years, old his younger sister, who was sleeping next to him, disappeared in the middle of the night. For fifteen years no one knew what had happened that night; the girl was never found and the family started having various problems. As with Yuki

<sup>14</sup> 「シャーマンは、壁についている穴のほうね。その穴は見えざる世界と繋がっているわけ。そしてね、シャーマンを訪れる人は自分のプラグをコンセントに差し込むわけだよ。そうすると、神様の世界と繋がることができる」。The translation of this and the following extracts is by the Author.

in *Konsento*, in this novel too it is only by accepting his sexual desire that the main character can finally enter a different level of reality, where he is able to obtain the necessary knowledge to restore harmony in his family. The shaman in this novel is Naomi, a dominatrix who will help the main character in his process of rebirth. Presenting herself, she says that she can “heal and rescue by using the power of the imagination” (Taguchi 2002, 102),<sup>15</sup> in line with the definition of ‘shaman’ given by another character: “A shaman is a person who manipulates other people’s fantasies” (Taguchi 2002, 251).<sup>16</sup>

The third book of the trilogy, *Mozaiku*, explores the effects of technology on the younger generations.

The shamanic actor in the novel is the main character, Mimi, who helps people with psychological problems (mainly *hikikomori*) move from their own homes to psychiatric centres. However, as the reader is told at the very beginning of the novel, she has lost Masaya, the fourteen-year-old boy she was trying to help. The whole narrative is about her trying to find him again, while at the same time unexpectedly finding her true self. Mimi’s peculiarity resides in her sensitivity, which enables her to intuitively understand people affected by a disorder of perception. Thanks to her perfect psychophysical balance and her ability to truly listen to others, she can relieve the tension accumulated in the people she comes in contact with, thus helping them to feel better. This is what more than one character praises Mimi for, recognizing her presence as something indispensable to contemporary society (Taguchi 2003, 230). At the end of the novel, before finding Masaya, Mimi experiences a separation between her mind and her physical body and, in this condition, she discovers important truths about her past and the role she is called to play in society.

The role of the shaman as narrated by Taguchi in the trilogy consists in reconnecting people who live in Tokyo with themselves, in such a way as to recreate a lost harmony. To achieve this goal, the shamanic actor takes the role of an intermediary through a flow of energy, light, thoughts and memories; no gods or spirits are involved.

The three novels are not the only texts in which Taguchi Randy’s narrative of a modern urban shaman takes place. Her interest in shamanism – and spirituality in general – is evident also from what she writes online: she is active on her personal blog, on Twitter, Facebook, and in an online community<sup>17</sup> created by some of her fans. Other texts in which Taguchi states the importance of rediscovering shamanic practices and rituals in order to solve the problems of people living in big cities are the

15 「妄想の力で救済している」.

16 「シャーマンってのは他人の妄想を操る人間だな。(中略)」.

17 <http://chita-grandy.demeken.net/> (2018-04-21).

lectures and talks she delivers as an invited speaker at seminars, and the various interviews she regularly gives. Moreover, since 2017 she has also been publishing an online spiritual magazine entitled *Nū* ヌー, a transliteration of the French *nous* 'we'. Taguchi thus went from creating texts concerning the shamanic actors and the role they can play in contemporary society, to becoming herself a sort of living text in which the urban shamanic role is represented. In this perspective, it is interesting to note that writer AKIRA, in his commentary on *Antena*, talks about the novel as a hallucinogen created by the *shāman* Taguchi, who is able to take the reader to a parallel world, just like *ayahuasca* (Taguchi 2002, 359). Another contribution to the perception of Taguchi as a narrator of shamans and a sort of urban shaman herself comes from Kamata Tōji (Kamata, Taguchi 2001) who, as Shimazono Susumu underlines, is a 'spiritual intellectual' who has written several pseudo-scientific spiritual books and is often asked to give public talks on spiritual themes. For these reasons Shimazono writes that he is "commonly acknowledged as a promoter of the Spiritual World movement" (2004, 294). I will return to this connection between representations of shamanic actors and the so-called new spirituality in the last section of this paper.

## 2.2 Mori Mariko: Performing the Shaman

Contemporary artist Mori Mariko's construction of a shamanic actor is not as explicit as that of Taguchi Randy. Compared to the latter, in recent years Mori, who lives and works between Tokyo and New York, has focused more on performing a shamanic role as an artist for people living in big cities.

Her construction of an urban shamanic role can be divided into three phases, characterized by the production of different kinds of text.

The texts from her first phase - that goes from 1996 to the beginning of the new millennium - are videos and photographs. Among these, the most emblematic work for the purposes of this study is a video installation titled *Miko no inori. Link of the Moon* 巫女の祈り。リンク・オブ・ザ・ムーン, created and first screened in 1996. The video, also known by the English title *The Shaman-Girl's Prayer*, shows a cyborg-like *miko* who, by using a crystal ball, interacts with another reality. It has been screened in Osaka's Kansai International Airport, which was chosen because it is built on an artificial island, and thus lacks any trace of nature: it is a purely "technological place", as Mori herself defined it in an interview (Farani, Goretti, Schneider 2011, 55). Commenting on this artwork when it was presented at the Koyanagi Gallery in Tokyo in 1997, Mori said: "We have lost the sense of spirituality in this century. We have to create harmony and peace for the next century" (DiPietro 1997). She believes that this is what her shaman-girl is doing through her prayer.

In her second phase, Mori, inspired by her studies of astrophysics and archaeology – especially in relation to the Jōmon period (ca. 10,500 BC-ca. 300 BC) – created artworks of a completely different kind: acrylic sculptures devoid of any human presence. An example is *Primal Memory*, a circle of acrylic stones created in 2004 and inspired by the stone circle from the Jōmon period to be found in Ōyu, Akita Prefecture. Through these artworks, Mori aimed to make the spectator understand and perceive a link with the past and with a purer form of religion and spirituality that, in her view, was able to truly connect humans, spirits and nature. On the occasion of some exhibitions devoted to these works, Mori offered a ritual performance. Between 2004 and 2006, for example, the installation of *Primary Memory* was accompanied by a performance entitled *Rei-okuri* or *Ceremony of Transcendence*, which Mori explained to be a ritual evocation of the spirits of the dead from the Jōmon period.<sup>18</sup> By means of similar performances, she intended to vitalize her works in order to recreate a connection between humans, nature and spirituality. In this second phase, it is her body that becomes a shamanic text, acting through performances in connection with the sculptures.

In the last and more contemporary phase of her production, the role of ‘performing the shaman’ becomes more prominent. Central to this phase is a new consciousness of the role Mori is called to play in urban society: an awareness she first gained during a trip she made in 2004. The artist travelled to Kudakajima, an island in Okinawa Prefecture, also known by the name of *Kami no shima* 神の島 ‘the gods’ island’. Here she met a *noro* ノロ, a priestess, whose ritual she was able to attend. Mori described this ritual as follows:

It seemed deeply rooted in nature, unchanged from our remote ancestors of prehistoric times. I felt the importance of this heritage and wished to pass this along to future generations by instilling site-specific installations to honour nature. (Di Marzo 2013)

To reach this goal, she founded a non-profit organization called Faou Foundation, with the mission of connecting humans and nature through six artworks to be permanently installed in six natural spots all over the world.<sup>19</sup> The first one is titled *Primal Rhythm* and it is installed in a bay on Miya-

<sup>18</sup> It is not clear where she found information about this prehistoric ritual, since there are no sources on the Jōmon period. Some pictures of the performance held in 2005 at the Hamburger Bahnhof can be seen at: <http://www.zfl-berlin.org/zfl-in-bild-und-ton-detail/items/compulsive-beauty.html> (2018-04-26).

<sup>19</sup> The website of the Foundation states: “The artworks each become an emblem of gratitude to diverse eco-systems and natural resources. Faou wishes to inspire an ethos of ‘one with nature’”, <http://www.faoufoundation.org/> (2018-04-26).

kojima, an island closely connected with Japanese shamanic actors. There Mori carried out what she described as 'ceremonial performances' in front of the sea, also praying with a local *noro* for the successful installation of her artwork.<sup>20</sup> On the occasion of the Olympic and Paralympic Games of Rio, in August 2016, a second installation created with Faou Foundation, *Ring: One With Nature*, was installed on top of the Vêu da Noiva waterfall in Rio de Janeiro State and inaugurated with a ceremonial performance.<sup>21</sup>

Thinking about her experiences on the islands of Okinawa Prefecture, Mori said: "I feel like I'm a bridge to bring those elements [the natural elements] back to the city" (McDermott 2016). In light of these words, it is possible therefore to read the artistic and ceremonial performances of these last years as an attempt by the artist to become a link between people living in big cities, on the one side, and nature and spirituality, on the other.

### 2.3 Shaman Sugee: Living as a Shaman

Shaman Sugee is a *toshi no shāman* 都市のシャーマン 'urban shaman', as he defines himself, and mainly works in Tokyo.<sup>22</sup> Similarly to the above-mentioned cases, the narration of the shamanic role takes place via different media, all intended to offer *yorokobi* 喜び 'joy', *iyashi* 癒し 'healing' and *wa* 和 'harmony'. These are keywords for all his activities and can be summed up by using the word that Sugee recognizes to be central to his practice: *tsunagari* 繋がり 'connection'. Like Mori Mariko, he seeks to recreate a connection between people living in the big cities and nature, a desire and goal he has come to regard as a consequence of certain personal experiences. Particularly revealing have been his travels in Okinawa Prefecture, South-East Asia, Central America and West Africa. In each of these places, he met with those he defines as local 'shamans', namely people able to connect and communicate with nature and gods. By taking part in their rituals, talking with them, becoming aware of their knowledge and role, Sugee realized that the presence of similar actors was exactly what was missing in Tokyo. Once back home, he became aware of the fact

20 Pictures of these ceremonial performances can be found on the website of the Faou Foundation: <http://www.faoufoundation.org/ceremony/2017/5/2/nioo664dixi62ghxbc-ceobd8n9fsbv>, <http://www.faoufoundation.org/new-gallery/2017/5/2/ceremonial-performance-1>, <http://www.faoufoundation.org/new-gallery-45/2sjhyj6hmbjgta75vtfrgi7o0mesb> (2018-04-26).

21 Pictures can be found on the website of the Faou Foundation: <http://www.faoufoundation.org/programs-1/> (2018-04-26).

22 I met him in 2013 and interviewed him three times while I was in Japan. We have kept in contact via e-mail and Facebook.

that Japanese people, especially the young, needed shamanic actors able to help them connect with nature. Only in this way could they re-establish the connection they lost as a consequence of living in Tokyo and spending most of their time at work or commuting to and from their workplace.

The first text through which Sugee has built his shamanic role is music: he is, first of all, a musician who performs solo or with his group, *The Arth*. He learned how to play djembe in Africa and says that by standing between men and spirits and using music he is able to convey messages from one world to the other. According to Sugee, this is the only way to restore harmony and balance inside his listeners.

Every year he attends a *matsuri* 祭り 'religious festival' in Kudakajima, the same island of Okinawa Prefecture where Mori Mariko went. Sugee describes the place as a *seichi* 聖地 'holy place', where shamanism still survives and where he goes to sing, play and pray with local shamans.

A second text that plays a fundamental role in his practice is nature, especially in the form of plants. He has built a large greenhouse outside Tokyo, where he grows succulents and cacti that he sells or uses to perform his role. Along with public performances, Sugee also offers private healing sessions in which he talks, sings, plays the djembe, and uses plants to give relief and joy to his patients.

His narrative of the role of urban shamans also takes shape via other media: every year Sugee teaches a class about the meaning of travel at Jiyūdaigaku, or Freedom University, a non-profit organization in Tokyo. Of the five lessons that constitute his course, at least one is centred on what he believes shamanism and the role of urban shamans to be. He also gives lessons and organizes seminars in cafés, pubs, clubs, and various other venues. There he talks mainly about *kyōsei no shāmanizumu* 共生のシャーマニズム 'the shamanism of symbiosis', to stress the role of shamans in creating a *tsunagari* with others and with nature.

The last group of media by which he builds his image as a shaman and performs his role is represented by the various aspects of online reality. Sugee has a website<sup>23</sup> where all his activities are described; he is also active on Facebook, where he has 1,286 friends and where every day he uploads new pictures and shares his hopes and thoughts. He does the same on his Twitter account, with 914 followers for 6,038 tweets.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, on Youtube, one can find some videos of his performances as an urban shaman and the video of one lesson he gave at Freedom University. One last thing needs to be emphasized: Sugee often collaborates with Kamata Tōji to create events and organize conferences, especially in Tokyo.

23 <https://www.shamansugee.com/> (2018-04-26).

24 Updated on 2018-04-26.

### 3 A circle of re-appropriation

In the above-mentioned case studies – as well as in other narratives of the shamanic actor in contemporary urban Japan<sup>25</sup> – what is to be noted is the process of re-appropriation of terms and themes coming from what is perceived and constructed as a ‘tradition’. At the same time, other different elements are added, following paths similar to those of the new spirituality movements.

In artistic representations, all the re-appropriated elements contribute to the shaping of an urban shamanic role that can be defined by the word *tsunagari*: by using different texts and languages, what urban shamans do is recreate a connection between humans, on the one side, and other-than-human entities, on the other.

The three main common themes characterizing representations of the urban shaman are the focus of the following section. Only by noticing their presence and grasping their meaning is it possible to come closer to an understanding of what aspects are perceived as essential to the practice of an urban shaman in contemporary Japan. This could consequently enable the formulation of hypothesis about the reasons for such a representation and re-appropriation.

#### 3.1 *Shāman*

The first element to be noted is the term used to define the urban shamanic actors: *shāman*, written in katakana. This appears frequently in the narratives and it is possible to assign it a twofold function: to connect with what is perceived as a pre-existing ‘tradition’ while, at the same time, differing from it.

As presented above, the word *shāman* written in katakana has been created by scholars to translate Eliade’s work within the Japanese academic world and it is still used to describe in a general way Japanese practitioners such as *miko*, *itako* and *yuta*. Thus its presence in the narratives just analysed creates a connection between the modern urban shaman and the other shamans active in the archipelago.

At the same time, the use of this word is mainly associated with the academic world: it is rarely understood by common people. It therefore has the power to define and create another actor, differentiating him/her from the ‘traditional’ image of the *shāman*, without ever fully breaking away from it.

A clarification is required: ordinary people who do not understand the meanings of the word *shāman* are generally unfamiliar with the so-called new spirituality, in which there is instead awareness of the set of images and characteristics implied by this word – when used with reference to

25 Cf. note 13.

modern urban actors. An analysis of the new spirituality would exceed the scope of this paper. However, it is useful to refer to Horie Norichika's definition in order to grasp what it is and relate it to the modern urban shaman represented in our case-studies:

Spirituality refers to both belief in what cannot usually be perceived but can be felt internally, and practices to feel it with the whole mind and body, accompanied more or less by attitudes of individualism, anti-authoritarianism, and selective assimilation of religious cultural resources. (Horie 2014, 111)

In the case studies analysed, reference was made – both explicitly and implicitly – to many elements of the kaleidoscopic new spirituality movements, as will also become clear in the following sections.

Therefore, on the one hand, by defining the actors as shamans, the creators of these representations are activating the symbolic capital of the term in order to legitimise what the practitioner is doing inside the field of new spirituality. This appears to be strictly connected to the need for recognition, which is believed to come primarily from the narratives produced by scholars and especially by spiritual intellectuals and authors such as Kamata, perceived as a source of authority. On the other hand, the use of a word written in katakana to describe one's practice to potential clients represents a form of exoticization of the practice itself. At the same time, as already noted, this practice differs from the activities of more 'traditional' shamans, commonly known by emic words such as *itako* and *yuta*.

### 3.2 Peripheries of Time and space

By analysing our case studies, it is possible to trace a circular movement that goes from the centre towards the periphery – in its temporal and spatial dimensions – and then back again.

A permanent feature of this movement is the willingness to rebuild a connection with nature, a common characteristic of new spirituality movements and the defining feature of "modern western shamanism" according to Kocku von Stuckrad (2002).

This need to go back to nature is explained in the narratives as a reaction to life in big cities such as Tokyo, which is thought to cause various problems, especially psychological ones. According to the modern urban shamans analysed, by establishing contact with nature it is possible to re-discover and re-establish a connection with one's own inner self. This will eventually lead to harmony in society as a whole.

In Taguchi's novels, and most explicitly in *Mozaiku*, the shaman acts as a link with Mother Nature. Thanks to this ability, the shaman can access



a source of natural energy that she can then use to restore balance and harmony. Moreover, she can absorb the energy that flows in excess into her patient's body and release it into the earth. The shaman depicted by Taguchi can also enable a connection between her client/patient on the one side, and energy, light, memories, and thoughts on the other.

Mori Mariko has made her goal of acting as a bridge that brings nature back into the big cities explicit. Through her artworks and performances, she aims to promote the development of an environmental consciousness in the urban context, since she believes that this could be the only way to solve problems springing from excessive urbanization. With regard to the artworks she has created and is currently developing with the Faou Foundation, on the Foundation website one reads:

These permanent works promote a deeper understanding of humankind's connection with the natural environment. They serve to help preserve the environments and engage the communities that host each installation. The locations have been chosen based on their pristine natural setting and engaging local culture and history. Through the gifting of six site-specific installations, Faou continues the primal tradition of honoring nature. (<http://www.faoufoundation.org/about-1/>, 2018-04-26)

However, it is to be noted that these artworks are permanently installed in natural places all over the world, thus altering them forever and making one wonder how this can help increase people's awareness of the relevance of nature.

In the third case study, the absolute importance of nature is also evident. Shaman Sugee grows plants, essential for his healing sessions, and stresses the need to recreate a harmonious relationship between people living in the cities and nature. The nature he refers to, though, appears to be 'artificial', 'constructed': it comes from his greenhouse and it is 'made' by humans for humans.

For all urban shamanic actors going back to nature is thus essential in order to harmonize human beings not only with the environment, but also with themselves. However, this is achieved in a utilitarian way: nature is viewed mainly as the source from which one can obtain useful ingredients to respond to individual needs and problems.

Urban shamans find knowledge and elements to recreate the connection with nature in the above-mentioned movement towards the periphery: a specific place where, in their view, it is possible to find what is perceived as essential for the centre in order to react to contemporary reality.<sup>26</sup>

26 In the re-discovery of peripheries and of an 'original' way of living with nature and spirits, we find an echo of *nihonjinron* 日本人論, 'discourse/theories on the Japanese'.

The historical period which these shamanic actors look to is the Jōmon period, the only time in which, according to certain scholars, such as 'philosopher' and spiritual intellectual Umehara Takeshi, 'original' and 'authentic' Japaneseness is to be found. More specifically, since in his view the geographical peripheries of the archipelago seem to have been only marginally touched and modified by contact with continental culture, it is still possible to find 'authentic' Japanese culture there.

Travel to the peripheries is thus a means of searching for a 'tradition' that, once brought back, could help solve the problems of the centre.

The case studies just presented clearly reveal a movement towards the southern periphery of Japan. Two islands in particular are mentioned – Miyakojima and Kudakajima – both related to the presence and activities of shamans in the minds of many Japanese.

In Taguchi's novel *Konsento*, a *yuta* in Miyakojima acknowledges the main character as being the new shaman needed in the metropolitan context. Mori Mariko understood the importance of the relationship with nature after her encounter with a *noro* in Kudakajima and had another one perform a ritual for the artwork she installed in Miyakojima. Shaman Sugee travels to Kudakajima every year to meet the local shamanic actors – as he refers to them.

In these peripheral areas, urban shamans find more than just inspiration for their practice. The other fundamental quest they carry out is that for legitimization: they need to be recognized as 'shamans' and legitimated in their role. The authority required for this is believed to reside in 'traditional' shamans, who are assigned an important role in the construction of shamanism for the centre. It is possible to infer that according to the perspective of modern urban shamanism, peripheries are looked at as places of 'tradition' and power.

### 3.3 Tsunagari

A third element is involved in the circle of re-appropriation characterizing the role of the urban shaman, and it is represented by the term *tsunagari*.

As seen at the beginning of this paper, the ability to connect and communicate with different worlds is what most commonly defines the role of the shaman.<sup>27</sup> Just as 'traditional' shamans mediate between human and other-than-human persons creating – or, in most cases, embodying – a connection between the two, so do modern urban ones, though with some

27 Cf. for example Harvey (2010, 31) "Shamans are persons (human or otherwise perhaps) who learn to communicate across species boundaries within a richly animated world full of persons who deserve respect but who might be eaten and might aggress, and who might control and be controlled".

differences that place them within the sphere of the new spirituality. The association with the so-called 'new spirituality' is evident in Heelas and Woodhead's study on spirituality in Great Britain:

On entering the milieu, one is immediately struck by the pervasive use of 'holistic' language: 'harmony', 'balance', 'flow', 'integration', 'being at once', and 'being centred'. The great refrain, we might say, is 'only connect'. (Heelas, Woodhead 2005, 26)

As suggested by the above-mentioned case studies, very similar observations might be made with reference to the Japanese context. First of all, the entities shamans can communicate with appear to be more 'fluid' than the spirits and gods with which 'traditional' shamans interact: in order to re-establish a *tsunagari* within the patient, urban shamans in the narratives analysed communicate mainly with energy and light. Also, by contrast to 'traditional' shamans, their attention is directed only to the human patient, whose well-being is restored. Moreover, through their performances and rituals, these urban shamanic actors offer healing only to the psychological/spiritual dimensions of their patients, without addressing any physical problem. The emphasis on the individual and his spiritual healing and transformation represent a further link with the new spirituality movements.

As our case studies show, in constructing and performing the shamanic role different kinds of media are used: from the body of the shaman in Taguchi's novels to the author's own words, both online - on her blog, in her virtual community, and through her online spiritual magazine - and offline, via lectures and seminars; from Mori's artworks and performances to her Faou Foundation; from Sugee's music and plants to his website, Facebook profile and Twitter account.

This analysis of representations of the urban shaman in contemporary Japan in comparison with that of 'traditional' shamans could suggest a differentiation of roles and expectations in the imagery surrounding these practitioners. First of all, the 'religious' and the performative aspects of 'traditional' shamanic practice appear to be separated here: the modern urban shaman focuses mainly on the latter, using various artworks and performances to play the role expected of him/her, without mentioning any religious aspect in his/her practice. Secondly, while in contemporary narratives 'traditional' shamans are recognized as being able to perform rituals allowing them to communicate with spirits - mainly in order to obtain answers - the modern urban shaman specializes in the re-harmonization of the individual and in his/her re-connection with nature.

## **4 Inter-actions and Efficacy**

As mentioned before, many elements characterizing the representation of a modern urban shaman are understood mainly by those connected with the new spirituality movements and culture. Therefore, although in the narratives the focus of the shamanic practice is on the individual, it is possible to argue that the different shamanic texts do not only interact in shaping the image of the modern urban shaman, but also contribute to the creation of specific communities. These are constituted by individuals who do not know each other (and will probably never get to know one another) but feel that they are part of a broader formation that shares certain experiences, forms of knowledge and needs, nurtured by the texts themselves.

To better analyse and understand such a community, it might be useful to turn to Birgit Meyer and her aim of studying

the role of religion and new and old media in the emergence and sustenance of new kinds of communities or formations, which generate particular notions of self and others, modes of religious experience, and of being and acting in the world. (Meyer 2009, xii)

Searching for a theoretical approach that could take into account the role of bodies, senses, things and media in the making of religion, Meyer developed the concept of 'aesthetic formations'. She chose the term 'aesthetic' to underline the importance of the body and the senses, and decided to use the term 'formation' because it can refer both to a social entity and to its processes of coming into being, thereby resulting in a more comprehensive theoretical tool.

In this sense, 'aesthetic formation' captures very well the formative impact of a shared aesthetics through which subjects are shaped by tuning their senses, inducing experiences, moulding their bodies, and making sense, and which materializes in things. (Meyer 2009, 7)

Therefore, it is clear that the interaction of the different texts through which the shamanic actor and his/her role are built - and also the texts that are built by the shamanic actor and through his/her role - shapes and sustains aesthetic formations. These aesthetic formations are also supported by the various spiritual intellectuals and they share many elements with other aesthetic formations, namely those that came into being with the new spirituality movements and culture.

Within the larger formation of new spirituality movements, the urban Japanese shamanic discourse and the formation to which it is directed and that it contributes to establishing could be viewed as part of what Joan Townsend defines as 'modern shamanic spirituality'.

Modern shamanic spirituality as a whole is a democratic movement; authority is vested in each individual because sacred knowledge is held to be experiential, not doctrinal. Individuals can create personal belief systems based on information gained from spirits during journeys and from workshops, literature, and other sources. In a movement such as modern shamanic spirituality, it would be almost impossible to limit access to sacred knowledge because of the variety of media and network information systems available, the individualistic nature of the movement, and the fluid relationships between leaders and seekers. (Townsend 2004, 52)

By shedding light on how shamans and their roles are (re-)imagined and represented in contemporary urban Japan through different media and languages, it is therefore possible to trace the characteristics of the shamanic spirituality they contribute to building, thus broadening our understanding of what spirituality is.

In conclusion, this paper has showed how shamanic practices are being represented in contemporary urban Japan by focusing on three main case-studies from the arts. This analysis has brought out some common elements and shown how various texts interact in the representation of the shamanic actor and role, in the construction of the imagery surrounding them and in their efficacy. What clearly emerges in this process is a re-appropriation of themes and elements that contribute to making the shamanic discourse effective. Different interacting texts and the performances of urban shamans build a community and are in turn built by it, as part of the broader formation labelled 'modern shamanic spirituality' and 'new spirituality'.

Lastly, it is important to remember that these representations, alongside other representations including those of spiritual intellectuals such as Kamata and Umehara, create and crystallise a certain image and perception of what Japanese shamanism is that is then assimilated both by Japanese and by non-Japanese people.

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## **Part 2**

### The Strategies of Action



# The Narrative Structure of Ambiguity A Semiotic Analysis of a *Tawriya*-Epigram by Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 794/1392)

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**Abstract** This paper engages in a semiotic analysis of a *tawriya*-epigram by Šihāb al-Dīn b. al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 794/1392). Mamluk literature is renowned for its extended usage of figures of speech, above all the *tawriya*, 'double entendre'. The goal of this article is to shed light on the *tawriya*, taking into account the Arabic classical theory and presenting a new approach based on semiotics. The subject of my analysis is the most flourishing literary genre of the epoch: the epigram. Within the epigram, the *tawriya* plays a pivotal role. Its potential is not limited to a twofold reading of the text but rather goes further and creates a second text out from the first, both of which cooperate with one another and shed light upon their respective meanings. Therefore, the epigram by Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār is a construction of several texts, each of which is mutually linked and deeply-rooted in the social and physical environment depicted in the poem: the *ḥammām*.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 A First Look. – 3 The Isotopy-Disjunction Model. – 4. The Narrative Schema. – 5 Applying the Semiotic Square. – 6 Space as a Text. – 7 Conclusions. – 8.1 Primary sources. – 8.2 Secondary sources.


**Keywords** Tawriya. Epigram. Mamluk Age. Semiotics. Ḥammām. al-ʿAṭṭār

## 1 Introduction

The epigram in pre-modern Arabic literature was a widespread literary genre, especially in the Mamluk age, during which almost every litterateur composed epigrams. Van Gelder defines it as “a short poem with a witty turn of thought” (2012). He also underlines that the Arabic terms for epigram, such as *maqṭūʿa*, *maqṭūʿa*, *qitʿa*, or *muqaṭṭʿa*, derived from the same root, meaning ‘to cut – to cut off’, which suggests, wrongly, that it is a part of a longer poem. Although the nature of Arabic poetry itself permits to isolate a number of verses with self-contained internal coherence and meaning, epigrams were composed as stand-alone poems. In a recent monograph, Talib (2018) provides a coherent analysis of the epigram as a genre, the establishment of which took place by the eighth/fourteenth century. In the analysis of its structure, Talib argues that the operational

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2018/01/025

Submitted: 2018-07-06 | Accepted: 2018-09-12

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logic implied in a *maqṭū'* pl. *maqāṭī'* is the formula premise-exposition-resolution:

most *maqāṭī'* follow a structural formula, and although no classical Arabic description of it survives, it is both distinctive and unmistakable. *Maqāṭī'* begin with a proposition (or premise), which is then developed and fleshed out, and by the end of the poem, usually at the very end (the point), the premise is resolved, often with a witty turn of phrase (resolution). (Talib 2018, 23)

To explain its vast and flourishing development, Bauer (2013a) interprets the epigram as a 'participated text'. In doing so, he posits three main theses as to why the epigram experienced so wide a diffusion. First, it is a literary form which is highly communicative, spurring the participation of the public to the creation of new pieces of poetry. Second, the epigram is based on the cooperation between author and hearer/reader,<sup>1</sup> involving both in an operation of encoding and decoding. Finally, its deep roots in the social context of the enunciation, out from which it arises and takes its motifs. Another characteristic of the literature of this period is the extended use of figures of speech, above all the *tawriya* 'double entendre', which was one of the most common rhetorical devices of the time. It developed as a result of its intrinsic and implied cooperation between author and reader - grounded in the reader's encyclopaedia - according to Eco's theory of the cooperative interpretation outlined in *Lector in Fabula*.

At this point a few questions arise. Taking for granted that the epigram is to be considered as the principal literary genre of the epoch, and that the *tawriya* as a rhetorical figure saw greater diffusion than its counterparts, which level of analysis should be employed to explain how a *tawriya*-epigram works? Moreover, how can we depict its link with the social environment, without which both the *tawriya* and the whole epigram lose the possibility of being interpreted and understood? In this article I focus my attention on the following *tawriya*-epigram by Ibn al-'Aṭṭār al-Miṣrī (d. 794/1392),<sup>2</sup> in which the play concerns (possible) male-male

I want to express my gratitude to Professors Thomas Bauer, Antonella Ghersetti, Syrinx von Hees, and Tiziana Migliore for their precious advices, as well as to all the members of ALEA group. A special thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their remarks, and to Dillon Banis for his constant help.

1 Despite the original oral nature of Arabic poetry, from here out I will address both the hearer and the reader as reader, according to the terms of reception theory. See Eco ([1979] 2006) and also Iser (1980)

2 His full name was Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī Šihāb al-Dīn Abū l-'Abbās b. Šams al-Dīn al-Dunaysirī (also called al-Qāhirī l-Šāfi'ī), known as Ibn al-'Aṭṭār al-Miṣrī. Ibn Taḡrī Birdī (1984,

intercourse in a public bath, a *ḥammām*, but in a private space within it, a *ḥalwa*.

هَيَّاَ الْبَلَّانُ مُوسَى  
قُلْتُ مَا أَصْنَعُ فِيهَا؟  
خَلْوَةً تُخَيِّبُ النُّفُوسَا  
قَالَ تَسْتَعْمِلُ مُوسَى<sup>3</sup>

Hayya'a l-ballānu Mūsà ḥalwatan tuḥyī l-nufūsā  
Qultu mā aṣna'u fi-hā? Qāla tasta'milu mūsà

The bath attendant Mūsà prepared a secluded place, which revives the souls. I said: "What should I do in it?" He replied: "You use a Mūsà/razor!"

Ibn al-'Atṭār's epigram was not the first, nor the last, piece of poetry playing on the name Mūsà; this motif seems to have been an easy and popular pun since ancient times. A perusal of the sources shows that many lines of poetry use the name Mūsà in different ways for different aesthetic goals. Take, for example, puns on the homonymy of Mūsà-razor, which sometimes also play on the names of the prophet Moses and his brother Aaron. To my knowledge, the oldest example is attributed by al-Şafadī (d. 764/1363) to Abū l-'Atāhiya (d. 210-1/825-6):<sup>4</sup>

2:177-9; 1992, 12:99; 1998, 1:85), al-'Asqalānī (1972, 340-2), Ibn Qāḍī Şuhba (1977, 1:434-6), al-Maqrīzī (2002, 1:203-6), Ibn al-'Imād (1992, 8:569), GAL (2:14-5), al-Lahībī (2014, 222-5). The biographers report that he was born in Cairo in 746/1345 and was talented in several sciences. He started composing poetry at the age of thirteen and composed approximately thirty works. He died on 16 Rabī' al-Ṭānī 794/12 March 1392 in Cairo. On the other hand, al-'Asqalānī says that he was born before the year 740 and ascribes to him a lack in the Arabic language, as Ibn al-'Imād also does, charging him with solecism. He was famous above all for his epigrams, but he also wrote a *badī'iyya*, *muwaššahāt*, *ḥamriyyāt*, love poems, and in praise of the prophet. See the given bibliography for the list of his missing and surviving works.

3 This epigram is quoted by al-Ġuzūlī (2006, 2:322), Ibn Ḥiġġa (2001, 3:482; 2011, 226), al-Nawāġī (*Marāṭī al-ġizlān*. Topkapi, TKS. 722, f. 39v; Gotha, Ms. Orient. A 2314, f. 44v; Escorial, 339, f. 48r-v), al-Ḥaymī (1986, 101-2), and al-Lahībī (2014, 245; 261). The editors of Ibn Ḥiġġa's works read *al-ballāna* instead of *al-ballānu*. This has to be considered the *lectio difficilior*. However, in al-Ġuzūlī we read *wa-qāla Şihāb al-Dīn Ibn al-'Atṭār fi ballān yud'ā Mūsà* (Şihāb al-Dīn Ibn al-'Atṭār said about a bath attendant called Mūsà); in al-Nawāġī and al-Ḥaymī we read *qāla fi ballān ismu-hu Mūsà* (He said about a bath attendant whose name is Mūsà). I adopt this *lectio faciliior*, as does al-Lahībī. In *Lisān al-'arab* (s.v. "b l l") only the sense '*ḥammām*' is mentioned, while in *Tāġ al-'arūs* (s.v. "b l l") we find also the sense 'bath attendant' supported by a quotation of two lines attributed to 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd Allāh b. Salāma l-Idkāwī (d. 1184/1770): *hayā li-ya l-ballānu mūsà/ḥalwatan tuḥyī l-nufūsā | qāla mā ta'milu fi-hā/qultu asta'milu mūsà*. I am not able to give a convincing syntactical explanation for the reading *al-ballana*, and I adopt the reading *al-ballanu* which seems to be the only valid on both syntactical and semantic levels.

4 Al-Şafadī 2009, 284. In Abū l-'Atāhiya's *dīwān* the line is not reported, see Abū l-'Atāhiya 1909; also *Dīwān Abī l-'Atāhiya* 1999. This line is also quoted without any attribution in al-Rāġib al-Işfahānī 2012, 3:664; Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī 2004, 61; al-'Alawī l-Yamanī 1914, 2:372; al-Subkī 2001, 2: 386; al-Taftāzānī 2013, 689; al-Suyūṭī 2015, 405; Ibn Ma'sūm 1968-69, 1:219.

وبهارونَ إذا ما قُلِّبَا

حُلِّقَتْ لِحْيَهُ مُوسَى بِاسْمِهِ

Ḥuliqat liḥyatu Mūsà bi-smi-hi

wa-bi-hārūna idā mā qulibā

Mūsà's beard has been shaved  
with his name

and with Hārūn when inverted

The line is quoted as an example of *ġinās* – or *taġnīs* – *al-išāra* or *al-ġinās al-ma'nawī*. This figure is depicted in the first hemistich: it is the use of the expression *bi-ismi-hi*, instead of the repetition of the word *mūsà*, the meaning is thus expressed 'Moses' beard has been shaved with a razor'. The second hemistich presents another word play: an inversion. Al-Siyālkūtī (d. 1067/1657)<sup>5</sup> quotes the second hemistich in another verse and explains that if we invert – *qalaba* – the letters of the word *hārūn* we obtain *nūrāh*, which means razor in Syriac language. Moreover, the long vowel *ā* in *hārūn* is often not written, resulting in the inversion *nūrah* – نورة. This word means depilatory paste – used for shaving –, which is, in my opinion a preferable reading for the second hemistich. What is more, there is still the allusion to the prophet Moses and his brother in the background, even if it does not play an active role in creating these two word plays. Many other examples could be mentioned, in total I could find seventeen of them in a range of time from the fifth/eleventh century until the eleventh/seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār's epigram, however, is a representative example of the use of *tawriya* in a *muġūn* epigram,<sup>7</sup> and its analysis will prove to be fruitful. Nonetheless, my investigation is far from providing a comprehensive and universal theory of *tawriya*-epigrams. My intent is to put forth a semiotic study of a *tawriya*-epigram, which takes into account several relevant theories.

Moving from the premise that "inside every text there is its content, but also the image of its communication (*enunciation*): the principles for its functioning, the criteria of its production and reception, in other words its

Clearly the attribution is not credible, but the quotation in al-Iṣfahānī proves that this line is probably prior to the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century – on his date of death see Rowson, E.K, *EP*, s.v. "al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī".

5 Al-Siyālkūtī 2012, 462.

6 Of course, it is very likely that many more examples could be found enlarging the corpus of consulted sources, and I am planning to address this topic in a future work.

7 "Mujūn is any text or behaviour which is meant or perceived to constitute a breach of ordinary norms of writing or conduct, and which is meant or perceived to be jesting rather than serious" (Szombathy 2013, 308). See this author for a comprehensive study of *muġūn*.

instructions for use [Author's italics]" (Marrone 2014, 86 ), my purpose is to shed light on this functioning, in order to (re)discover the agency of the text on its audience.

To address the topic, I posit a first contextualisation of the epigram and describe its reading and analysis accordingly with the Arabic classical theory of *tawriya* in the first part of this article. The second part moves to a structural analysis of the narrative, by which I compare and highlight the similarities of this epigram with the *histoire drôle* studied by Morin ([1966] 1981). For this, I apply the Isotopy-Disjunction Model. The third portion presents the narrative structure of the epigram, in order to retrace its narrative schema and its actants. The fourth section introduces structural semantic theories, including the application of the semiotic square to the epigram, in order to link it with its social environment and explain the estrangement provoked in the reader. Finally, the last part describes how the semiotics of space applied to the environment of narration is able to explain how the space *ḥammām* is to be considered as a text within texts, all participating in mutual interaction.

## 2 A First Look

Bonebakker (1966) was the first scholar who devoted a seminal work to the study of *tawriya*, a figure of speech which saw such wide diffusion during the Mamluk and Ottoman ages. Basing his analysis on al-Ṣafadī's *Faḍḍ al-ḥitām*, he traces the history of this figure of speech starting with the sources dealing with *tawriya* prior to al-Ṣafadī's time. He then moves to the analysis of the theoretical part of *Faḍḍ al-ḥitām* and concludes his essay with an overview of relevant later sources, which add several details to al-Ṣafadī's system.

According to the accepted definition of *tawriya* – detailed in many sources, the most important of which are al-Ṣafadī and Ibn Ḥiǧǧa (d. 837/1434) – it is a word, or a phrase, with two meanings, the first of them called *al-ma'nà al-qarīb* 'the near meaning', which is immediately understood by the reader. The second, called *al-ma'nà al-ba'id* 'the distant meaning', being the one intended by the author, is not immediately understood.<sup>8</sup>

8 Al-Ṣafadī (2013, 75) quotes al-Sakkākī (2014, 537): *al-ihām huwa an yakūna li-lafz isti'mālān qarīb wa-ba'id fa-yuǧkar li-ihām al-qarīb fī l-ḥāl ilā an yaẓhara anna l-murād al-ba'id* (The *ihām* [i.e. another technical term used for *tawriya*] is an expression which has two common senses, a near and a distant. [The expression] is mentioned to suggest first the near sense, until it becomes clear that the intended sense is the distant). Ibn Mālik (2001, 252) and al-Qazwīnī (2007, 348), give similar definitions using *tawriya* instead of *ihām*, and *ma'nà* pl. *ma'ānī* instead of *isti'māl*. We read in Ibn Ḥiǧǧa (2001, 3:184) *an yaǧkura l-mutakallim lafz mufrad la-hu ma'nayān ḥaqīqiyyān aw ḥaqīqa wa-maǧāz aḥadu-humā qarīb wa-dalālat al-lafz 'alay-hi zāhira wa-l-āḥar ba'id wa-dalālat al-lafz 'alay-hi ḥafīyya fa-yurīdu l-mutakallim al-ma'nà l-ba'id wa-*



To one of these two meanings, one or more 'attributes' can refer: they are the *lawāzim* sing. *lāzim*, i.e. a word or a phrase which can be mentioned before or after the *tawriya*-word. Their role is to help the reader figure out the *tawriya*-word and understand the distant and desired meaning. Depending on the presence and reference of the *lāzim*, Arab theorists classified *tawriya* in four categories:<sup>9</sup> 1) *Tawriya muğarrada* 'bare *tawriya*' presents no attribute related to the meanings of the *tawriya*-word; 2) *Tawriya muraššaḥa* 'prepared *tawriya*' presents one or more attributes related to the near meaning – *al-muwarrà bi-hi* 'the hiding sense' –, which is not intended by the author; 3) *Tawriya mubayyana* 'explained *tawriya*' presents one or more attributes related to the distant meaning – *al-muwarrà 'an-hu* 'the hidden sense' –, which is the one sought by the author; and 4) *Tawriya muhayya'a* 'prepared *tawriya*' presents no attribute related to any of the two meanings. However, in this category, the understanding of the *tawriya*-word is made possible by the presence of another expression – *lafẓ* – which discloses it introducing a context, without being a *lāzim*. As highlighted by Bonebakker (1966, 15), an unequivocal definition of *lāzim*'s nature is not found in the sources. The only difference which can be pointed out is that the *lāzim* refers to one of the two meanings, but its presence or absence does not affect the understanding of the *tawriya*-word as such. On the contrary, the presence in the last category of an expression introducing a context through which a second meaning can be understood is essential for the existence of the *tawriya*. Without it, the *tawriya* is not recognised as a double entendre, and therefore it does not exist (al-Suyūṭī 2015, 331)..

After this brief overview, how could we analyse Ibn al-'Aṭṭār's epigram? The figure *tawriya* is generally, but not always, based on homonymy (*ištirāk*). Al-Ṣafadī (2013) defines homonymy as follow:

*i'lam anna l-ištirāk 'ibāra 'an lafẓa mawḍū'a li-ḥaḳīqatayn aw akṭar wuḍi'ā awwal min ḥayṭu humā ka-ḡālika ka-l-'ayn al-maḳūla 'alā l-ḡāriḥa wa-l-ḡahab wa-ḡayri-himā. (101)*

*yuwarrī 'an-hu bi-l-ma'nā l-qarīb fa-yatawahhamu l-sāmi' awwal wahla anna-hu yurīdu l-qarīb wa-laysa ka-ḡālika wa-li-aḡli hāḡā summiya hāḡā l-naw' ihām* (Is that the speaker mention a single expression which has two proper meanings or a proper and a figurative, the first of which is near and the denotation of the expression is evident; while the second is distant and the denotation of the expression is hidden. The speaker intends the distant meaning and conceals it with the near meaning; the hearer, instead, supposes at once that the speaker intends the near, but it is not the case. This is why this figure is called suggestion [*ihām*]). See also al-Nābulusī (1882, 188) and the versification by al-Suyūṭī (2015, 324).

9 al-Ṣafadī (2013, 75-81); Ibn Ḥiḡḡa (2001, 3:533-45; 2011, 268-76); al-Suyūṭī (2015, 326-30); al-Nābulusī (1882, 188-97); Bonebakker (1966, 9-23). Ibn Mālik (2001, 252-4) and al-Qazwīnī (2007, 248-50) mention only two types of *tawriya*: *muğarrada* and *muraššaḥa*.

Know that homonymy is the utterance of an expression, which has two, or more, proper senses. In this way, a single [expression] is uttered in respect of the two of them [senses], such as 'ayn said about the eye, the gold, and others.

In this epigram the second occurrence of the word 'mūsà' has two proper senses, the first of which being the razor and the latter the name Moses. To understand if the *tawriya*-word is the central point of the poem, an easy test can be made: the commutation. If the word *mūsà* is substituted on a paradigmatic level with another word having as referent the near meaning – such as *šafra* 'razor' – the whole epigram loses its aesthetic value, and turns into an informative utterance, in which a hypothetical customer receives an answer to his question, the answer of which is in accord with common practice within a *ḥammām*, i.e. to use a razor to shave his body and pubic hair off. Therefore, the *tawriya*-word is not a redundant, but rather a fundamental, element without which the literary work is deprived of aesthetic power, i.e. its double reading.

If we turn our attention to the first occurrence of 'mūsà', we see that a *tawriya* is not intended, for this word can only refer to the name of the bath attendant previously mentioned and not to the razor. Nonetheless, this word is not redundant at all. If we try to substitute it with another, or if we just remove it, the *tawriya* in the second line would not be understandable. In fact, it would not exist. In my opinion, *al-ballānu mūsà* in the first line is an example of what Arab literary theorists have called *lafẓ* 'expression' and not a *lāzim* 'attribute', which makes the *tawriya* possible by introducing the context '*ḥammām*' and 'service staff'. This is why, I propose to classify this epigram in the category of *tawriya muhayya'a*.

Once demonstrated that *mūsà* is the turning point of this text, the question to be asked is whether the intended meaning is the razor or the bath attendant himself. Al-Lahībī (2014) prefers to interpret the razor as intended meaning, neglecting the possibility for which the intention of the author focuses on the bath attendant, who, in turn, becomes the object of quest. This interpretation is possible because the verb *ista'mala* can be used and referred to both objects, the razor and the bath attendant. In the first case its meaning is 'to use', like in the sentence 'you use a razor'; in the second case, it acquires an obscene meaning<sup>10</sup> and the sentence 'you use Mūsà' can be interpreted as a resemantization of the verb entailing an objectification of a person, i.e. the sexual use of the bath attendant. The use of this verb in connection with the *tawriya*-word is, in my opinion, an example of *lāzim* referred to the *qarīb* meaning, since the first sense of the verb *ista'mala* refers to an object and it is only after a semantic shifting that it acquires an

10 Attested for example in Dozy, *Supplément*, s.v. " m l".

obscene sense being, thus, referred to a person. In Ibn al-'Aṭṭār's epigram both the *tawriya*-word and the verb are resemantized, i.e. inverting verb meaning and object like in the sentence 'you use Mūsà'. The ambiguity of the whole text is thus generated by the twofold meaning of the *tawriya*-word, which, together with its verb – the *lāzim* – and the first occurrence of *mūsà* – the expression (*lafẓ*) associated with the *tawriya*-word –, engenders a double reading of the epigram, the former connected with the usage of a common object for a common practice; the latter with the 'use' of a person, and focusing the attention on (possible) sexual intercourse.

It should be pointed out that the word *ḥalwa* can be interpreted in a number of ways. When it is found in the context of mystic practice, the sense of 'retirement', 'seclusion' assumes a technical meaning, denoting a period of "isolation in a solitary place or cell".<sup>11</sup> Certainly, this sense is not compatible with the context of this epigram.

Al-Haymī (1986, 102), commenting on Ibn al-'Aṭṭār's epigram, provides an explanation of the word *ḥalwa* based on Islamic law:

*wa-fī qawli-hi tasta'milu mūsà mā lā yaḡrub 'alà al-faṭīn min kināyat l-nikāya wa-qad qaddama la-hā ḡikr al-ḥalwa fī l-bayt al-awwal allāḡī huwa mustawḡibu-hu min al-zawḡ li-l-zawḡa ma'a ṣiḡḡati-hā kamāl al-mahr 'alà mā qarrara-hu aṣḡābu-nā li-l-maḡhab wa-bi-hi qāla Abu Ḥanīfa raḡiya Allāhu 'an-hu wa-l-imām al-Šāfi'ī 'alay-hi l-salām fī aḡad qawlay-hi wa-qad ruwiya fī l-qawl al-tānī al-mašḡūr 'an-hu bi-anna l-ḥalwa l-ṣaḡīḡa lā tūḡib kamāl al-mahr fa-ntabih ayyuhā l-nabīh li-hāḡīhi l-nikāya allāti ramā l-Šihāb al-'Aṭṭār bi-hā hāḡā l-ballān wa-raḡama-hu bi-hā.*

In his utterance "you use *mūsà*" there is what is not difficult to understand for a perspicacious man as an allusion to the outrage. It is preceded by the mention of the *ḥalwa* in the first verse, which is the right, when accomplished, of the wife to receive the whole dower from the husband, as it has been established by the authorities of our law school. It has been said by Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) – may God be pleased with him – and by al-Imām al-Šāfi'ī (d. 204/820) – peace upon him – in one of his two discourses. It has been related, in the second famous discourse, that the *ḥalwa l-ṣaḡīḡa* does not make mandatory the full payment of the dower. Pay attention, oh noble man, to this outrage with which al-Šihāb al-'Aṭṭār accuses and reviles this bath attendant.<sup>12</sup>

This legal sense is related with the consummation of marriage and the involved implications thereof. As a metaphor issued from this sense, the

11 Landolt, H. *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Khalwa". See also al-Tahānawī 1996, s.v. "*ḥalwa*".

12 On the legal meaning of *ḥalwa*, see *al-Mawsū'a l-fiqhiyya* 1983, s.v. "*ḥalwa*".

word *ḥalwa* is thus used to mean a lovers' encounter and, more broadly, sexual intercourse as well as homosexual intercourse.<sup>13</sup>

A third very common sense of *ḥalwa* is 'private room', a room in which one is alone and can there retire for privacy. In the context of a *ḥammām*, this private room is an essential part of the architecture itself, which permits the execution of private practice – e.g. pubic shaving – during which no bath attendant should help the customer (al-Munāwī 1987, 36).

One can interpret this ambiguous word as a *tawriya* too,<sup>14</sup> in which both senses are possible within the narrative frame of the text. Nonetheless, I prefer to interpret the *ḥalwa* as the secluded room within the *ḥammām*. The reasons as to why I choose this translation are three. First, I interpret *ḥalwa* as a space because in this way it enhances the double reading of the *tawriya*-word, central point of the epigram under analysis, i.e. within a secluded room both shaving and sexual intercourse can happen. Second, I tend to give to *ḥalwa* the value of a metonymy, expressing the cause in a relation of contiguity with an intended action. For example, it can be understood as the cause for which an action is made possible, i.e. secluded room > shaving and/or intercourse, since both actions are possible within it and not out thereof.<sup>15</sup> Third, to interpret the *ḥalwa* as a room does not exclude the innuendo made explicit in the second line of the epigram and it does not hide the sense 'intercourse', which stays in the background and participates to the semantic structure of the whole epigram, as we shall see later.

The complementary interpretation of the *ḥalwa* as both a secluded room and intercourse raises the issue of how to interpret the question in the first hemistich of the second verse. In fact, if the existence of a private room within a *ḥammām* is assumed by any customer, and the background sense of intercourse gives already a hint about one of its possible usages, why should one ask about its purpose? I judge this question a rhetorical ques-

13 Dozy. *Supplément*. s.v. "ḥ l w".

14 In fact, it is not a *tawriya*, it is a *tawḡīh*. This last figure of speech, accordingly to its last formulation, is based on the use of a word or phrase which has two meanings, one of which is a technical term of art and sciences: Ibn Ḥiǧǧa (2010, 2:353) *wa-ammā l-tawḡīh 'inda l-muta'ahḥirīn fa-qad qarrarū an yuwaḡḡiha l-mutakallim ba'ḍa kalāmi-hi aw ḡumlata-hu ilā asmā' mutalā'ima šīlāh min asmā' a'lām aw qawā'id 'ulūm aw ḡayr ḡālika mim mā yataša' 'abu la-hu min al-funūn tawḡīhan muṭābiqan li-ma'nā l-lafẓ al-tānī min ḡayr ištirāk ḥaqīqī bi-ḥilāf al-tawriya* (as for the *tawḡīh*, later scholars affirmed that the speaker aims, with a part of his utterance or whole discourse, to use some nouns which have also a technical meaning – such as proper names, or scientific principles, or other names among those in which the arts are subdivided – aiming to match the second meaning of the expression [i.e. the ordinary meaning] without being a real homonymy, unlike the *tawriya*). See also Bonebakker 1966, 20-2.

15 Al-Ġuzūlī (1987, 2:316-7) quotes an anecdote about the *ḥammām* of Šarīf al-Dīn Hārūn b. al-Wazīr al-Šāḥib Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ġuwaynī (d. 685/1286), in which he enjoyed the pleasure of sex in a special *ḥalwa* inside his *ḥammām*.

tion, which is itself an example of another rhetorical figure discussed in *'ilm al-badī'*: *tağāhul al-'ārif* 'feigned ignorance'.<sup>16</sup> This serves to introduce the punning hemistich by providing it with suspense and thus increasing the effect of the *tawriya*-word. The query uttered in the second line opens to the question of whether the bath attendant is or is not knowledgeable of his possible destiny of 'being used' by a longing customer. From a textual point of view, a univocal interpretation is not possible. The fact that he prepared a room can suggest that he could have been both aware and unaware of this possibility, since setting the room is a part of his duties as an attendant. Moreover, the sexual sense in the background pushes the reader to think that Mūsà prepared a secluded room explicitly for sex, intuition supported by the rhetorical question. This last ambiguity gives the reader the chance to exercise his inferential walks (Eco [1979] 2006). That is to say, starting from the text of the epigram – its *fabula* –, the reader has the power to imagine and create possible narrative worlds in which his interpretations could be proved or disproved, if only this epigram did not have an open-ended conclusion.

The sexual interpretation of the text leads us to include this epigram in the specific literary genre of *muğūn*. Bauer provides a categorization of *muğūn* epigrams in three groups, based on their contents. Ibn al-'Aṭṭār's lines fall under the first category, i.e. "poems in which behaviour of questionable appropriateness is displayed, proclaimed, or reported" (2014a, 162), and more precisely in the sub-category "ostentatious violation of norms" (163).

The reasons for which I have chosen this epigram should now be evident. First, even though it represents only one type of *tawriya*, it contains all the elements that have been described by Arab theorists as constitutive of this figure of speech. The *tawriya*-word is a perfect homonym, for its senses are both *ḥaqīqa* and have two concrete referents. There is a *lāzim*, *ista'mala*, related to the *qarīb* sense, the razor. Moreover, the *lafẓ 'al-ballānu mūsà'* in the first line is the expression which makes possible the understanding of the *tawriya*-word.

16 Al-Sakkākī (2014, 537), Ibn Mālik (2001, 111), al-Qazwīnī (2007, 371-2), Ibn Ḥiğga (2010, 2:299-313), Al-Suyūṭī (2015, 366-7), Al-Nābulusī (1882, 43-7). This last scholar gives the following definition: *tağāhul al-'ārif wa-hāđihi l-tasmiya li-bn al-Mu'tazz wa-sammā-hu l-Sakkākī sawq al-ma'lūm masāq ġayri-hi li-nukta wa-qāla lā uhibbu tasmiyata-hu bi-l-tağāhul li-wurūđi-hi fī kalām Allāh ta'ālā wa-huwa an yas'ala l-mutakallim 'an šay' ya'rifu-hu su'āl man lā ya'rifu-hu li-yūhima anna šiddat l-šabah al-wāqi' bayna al-mutanāsibayn aḥḍaṭat 'inda-hu lṭibās al-mušabbah bi-hi bi-l-mušabbah wa-fā'idatu-hu l-mubālaġa fī l-ma'nā* (The feigned ignorance: this denomination was given by Ibn al-Mu'tazz [d. 296/908]. Al-Sakkākī defined it as "the asking about something known like if it was not for a witty effect". He said: "I do not like the denomination feigned ignorance [*tağāhul*] because it is found in the speech of God almighty". It is that the speaker asks about something that he knows already, as a question made by someone who is not knowing, to make believe that a soundness of similarity found between the two resembling objects produce the confusion between the *secundum* and the *primum comparationis*. Its benefit is the emphasis of the meaning).

Second, Bonebakker underlined that

*tawriyas* resulting in two equally acceptable interpretations of the sentence (the true *double entendre*) are of comparatively rare occurrence. The context of the *tawriya*-word usually creates no more than an association with its second meaning, this association being created occasionally through the fact that one of the meanings, if adopted, would result in a paradox. (1966, 10)

Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār’s epigram is an example in which the reading of the text is a perfect double reading, namely in that both meanings of the *tawriya*-word give a correct interpretation of the text, which is, according to al-Nābulusī (1882, 197) also quoted in Bonebakker (1966, 104), a requisite for a perfect and successful *tawriya*. Third, *tawriya* is not the only ambiguity found in this text. The word *ḥalwa* is itself ambiguous and connects two meanings with a metonymic relation, enriching the possible interpretations of the *muḡūn*. This is also made possible by a third figure: a rhetorical question connecting the first and the second line, opening the way to the inferential walks of the reader. Finally, the context of the narrative, its narrative world, is deeply rooted in a social institution: the public bath, the *ḥammām*. The space itself plays a fundamental role in the understanding of the whole text and in its aesthetic success. It permits, thus, a sociological approach, which takes into account several factors strongly related to the text, but not pertaining to the linguistic level.

Is the analysis thus far illustrated all-encompassing or is there still place for a deeper investigation, which considers other aspects of the epigram in question? In the final page of his work on *tawriya*, Bonebakker (1966) highlights that

the Arab literary theorists (in addition sometimes to confusing the *tawriya* with other figures that had little or nothing to do with it) failed to analyze the figure in sufficient detail. In particular they failed to make a distinction between cases where the hearer discovers that the poet is trying to remind him of the two senses of a homonym but has no use for the second sense, and cases where this second sense introduces a surprising new interpretation of the context as a whole. As a result of this the theorists were not completely aware of the artistic possibilities of the *tawriya*. (105)

In his statement, Bonebakker underlines two key factors which should be considered by scholars dealing with *tawriya*-poetry: the role of the reader and the importance of the context.

First, when analysing a piece of poetry – and, in general, any text – it is important to remember that each text is created by an author, who, in shap-

ing his text, takes into account his audience. That is to say that an author takes into account potential expectations and capabilities of hypothetical readers when composing a work, i.e. the Model Reader, as theorised by Eco ([1979] 2006). Taking the role of the reader into account is all the more valuable when considering the aim of poetry, namely its power to communicate, especially in the Mamluk age, as has been pointed out by Bauer (2013a, b).

Second, the study of the rhetorical figure *tawriya* in pre-modern literature is not detached from the theoretical tradition of which it is a part: *'ilm al-balāghā* 'eloquence, rhetoric'. In fact, in the scholastic tradition, *tawriya* is classified in the third part of *'ilm al-balāghā* i.e. *'ilm al-badī'* 'figures of speech' among semantic figures: *al-muḥassināt al-ma'nawīyya*. It is true that *tawriya* has not been first theorised within the scholastic tradition (Bonebakker 1966, 24-43), however, when al-Ṣafadī wrote his treatise – first monograph devoted entirely to *tawriya* –, the inclusion of *badī'* in the scholastic rhetoric was already established.<sup>17</sup> As a part of the tripartite rhetoric, figures of speech rely on the general definition of *balāgha* hinged on the requirements of the situation of the enunciation – *muqtaḍā l-ḥāl*.<sup>18</sup> As underlined by Gherseti (1998), Bauer (2007), and Larcher (2009, 2013), the importance devoted to the situation of the enunciation demonstrates the essential pragmatic nature of rhetoric, namely the relevance of the context – *maqām* – and the audience in the formulation of the utterance. In applying this statement to the work of art – such as, for example, poetry –, we face a twofold value of the context. On the first hand, the external context of enunciation in which a given poem is uttered. On the other hand, the internal context of the poem itself, that is to say its narrative world (Eco [1979] 2006).

In the following sections, I suggest a different approach based on semiotics, which provides a different point of view – among many others possible – on the figure under analysis. I do not claim to amend the theoretical system described by Arab literary theorists. Instead, starting from the classical definition of *tawriya*, I provide a new insight on Ibn al-'Aṭṭār's epigram, which is meant to shed light on the role of two fundamental components responsible for aesthetic value: the role of the reader and the contexts of the enunciation and narrative. In doing so, I propose a method of investigation which can prove to be rewarding when applied to other *tawriya*-texts, in both poetry and prose. As easy as it may seem, we should not fall into the trap of considering this epigram as a simple joke, and consequently underestimate its narrative complexity. Having said that, a similarity between this epigram and a joke can be detected, and the Isotopy-Disjunction Model is informative in attempting to understand this entwinement.

17 Al-Sakkākī 2014; Ibn Mālik 2001; al-Qazwīnī 2007; Bonebakker 1966, 44-62.

18 Al-Sakkākī 2014, 250; Ibn Mālik 2001, 99; al-Qazwīnī 2007, 16.

### 3 The Isotopy-Disjunction Model

Humour, word plays, puns, and jokes have been a theme of discussion and analysis since the Ancient Greeks, e.g. Plato and Aristotle. Many scholars have attempted to define the principles of textual humour from different viewpoints. Ibn al-'Aṭṭār's epigram presents several features in common with jokes and word plays, which allow us to draw a parallel between the structures of these two textual types: the joke and the epigram. In order to better understand this parallel and sketch the internal structure of the epigram, I employ a theoretical system first drawn during the 1960s after the essays by Greimas (1966) and Morin ([1966] 1981), which prove rewarding in the analysis of different forms of humorous texts: The Isotopy-Disjunction Model. This designation is owed to Attardo (1989; 1994), who underlines two key factors of this method of analysis: first, the notion of Isotopy, used first by Greimas (1966), which had several reformulations during the following decades. Second, Morin's disjunction model, which provides us with a first description of jokes structure.

As underlined by Attardo (1994) and Aljared (2017), the concept of isotopy, first formulated in Greimas (1966), has been rethought several times and many scholars applied it in the analysis of texts. In Greimas and Courtés (1982, 163), we read: "as an operational concept, isotopy at first designated iterativity along a syntagmatic chain of classemes which assure the homogeneity of the utterance-discourse". Classemes are contextual semes - i.e. meaning unities which set a particular context of the text - which guarantee a uniform reading of the text by their repetition. Classemes are what Eco ([1979] 2006) calls contextual selections distinct from circumstantial selections:

una selezione contestuale pertanto registra i casi generali in cui un dato termine potrebbe occorrere in concomitanza (e quindi co-occorrere) con altri termini appartenenti allo stesso sistema semiotico. Quando poi il termine concretamente co-occorre con altri termini (quando cioè la selezione contestuale si attualizza) ecco che abbiamo un co-testo. Le selezioni contestuali prevedono dei possibili contesti: quando si realizzano si realizzano in un co-testo.

Quanto alle selezioni circostanziali esse rappresentano la possibilità astratta (registrata dal codice) che un dato termine appaia in connessione con circostanze di enunciazione. (17)

A contextual selection, therefore, records the general cases in which a given term may occur concurrently (and therefore co-occur) with other terms belonging to the same semiotic system. When the term concretely co-occurs with other terms (when the contextual selection is actualised), we have a co-text. Contextual selections foresee possible contexts: when they are realized they are in a co-text.



As for the circumstantial selections, they represent the abstract possibility (recorded by the code) that a given term appears in connection with enunciation circumstances.

Therefore, the co-text – i.e. the actualisation in the linear dimension of the text of a given set of terms pertaining to a specific context – plays a crucial role in the reading coherence of a text. This coherence is what is meant with isotopy, namely “coerenza di un percorso di lettura” (93) (coherence of a reading path), in Eco’s ([1979] 2006) words.<sup>19</sup> In the epigram under analysis, the main isotopy is introduced in the first verse, in which two words – *ballān* and *ḥalwa* – are uttered. They pertain to the abstract context ‘*ḥammām*’ and create a coherent co-text determining a sound reading, permitting to the reader to infer a certain ‘state of affairs’ in which rules and expectations are stereotyped. This is the concept of frame:

when one encounters a new situation (or makes a substantial change in one’s view of the present problem) one selects from memory a structure called a Frame. This is a remembered framework to be adapted to fit reality by changing details as necessary. A frame is a data-structure for representing a stereotyped situation, like being in a certain kind of living room, or going to a child’s birthday party. Attached to each frame are several kinds of information. Some of this information is about how to use the frame. Some is about what one can expect to happen next. Some is about what to do if these expectations are not confirmed. (Minsky 1974)

By setting the frame ‘*ḥammām*’, the author wants his reader to frame his reading in a given context in which rules of decode apply. For example, the reader is brought to interpret the linear sequence in the first verse as a description of common practice in a public bath: a bath attendant preparing a private room for a customer. To this extent, the term *ḥalwa* is in my opinion to be interpreted as ‘secluded room’, instead of ‘private encounter’, ‘intercourse’, being, however, both senses in the background of the narrative. The first isotopy is ‘broken’ in the second line, at the end of which the homonym word *mūsà* is uttered. This leads us to a second isotopy depending from the previous: sexual encounter. By the enunciation of the *tawriya*-word, a different reading strategy should be adopted, i.e. being the frame of the narrative a public bath, its rules have been, in

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of the different phases of conceptualization of the term isotopy and its application to word plays, see Attardo (1994, 60-85) and Aljared (2017, 64-6). To my knowledge, Aljared is the first scholar who applied the Isotopy-Disjunction Model to jokes in classical Arabic in her Master Dissertation, which unfortunately I could not consult. Some of her findings are provided in Aljared 2017.

a certain way, changed, and unexpected actions and practice are introduced in the narrative world. This is due to the fact that the interpretations *mūsà-razor* and *mūsà-bath* attendant have two different contextual selections, for one can use a razor in a *ḥammām* to shave himself but should not 'use' the attendant for his sexual pleasure. At a closer look we notice that the two isotopies – public bath practice and sexual encounter – are coexistent, they are not mutually exclusive, for they enrich the meaning of the text permitting a double reading thereof. In Eco's words they are "isotopie narrative non vincolate a disgiunzioni isotopiche discorsive che generano in ogni caso storie complementari" ([1979] 2006, 100) (narrative isotopies not bound to discursive isotopic disjunctions, which generate either way complementary stories), namely "la permanenza di un'unica coerenza discorsiva fa sì che in questo caso le due isotopie narrative non si annullino a vicenda, *non siano in rapporto di esclusione o alternatività, ma di complementarità* [Author's italics]" (100) (the permanence of a single discursive coherence means that, in this case, the two narrative isotopies do not cancel each other out, *they are not in a relationship of exclusion or alternativeness, but of complementarity*).

How can we describe this isotopy change from a syntactic and semantic viewpoint, allowing us to understand the inner structure of the epigram under analysis?

In an article published in 1966, Morin analyses some jokes, or *histoires drôles*, published in the newspaper *France-Soir*, throughout a six-month period. Her aim was to demonstrate that a joke, as easy and short it may seem, is to be considered a *récit* 'narrative', composed by "une séquence unique qui pose, argumente, et dénoue une certaine problématique" ([1966] 1981, 108) (a unique sequence that poses, argues and resolves a given problem). Moreover, Morin's investigation examines the functions in which the narrative is articulated, and enumerates them as follow:

une fonction de normalisation qui met en situation les personnages; une fonction locutrice d'enclenchement, avec ou sans locuteur, qui pose le problème à résoudre, ou questionne; enfin une fonction interlocutrice de disjonction, avec ou sans interlocuteur, qui dénoue 'drôlement' le problème, qui répond 'drôlement' à la question. (Morin [1966] 1981, 108)

a normalisation function, which puts the characters in a situation; an interlocking function, with or without a speaker, which poses the problem to be solved, or questions; finally, a function of disjunction, with or without interlocutor, which solves the problem humorously, which answers humorously to the question.

When applying these functions to Ibn al-'Aṭṭār's epigram, we obtain the following scheme:

1. The normalisation function develops in the first verse:  
Hayya'a l-ballānu Mūsà ḥalwatan tuḥyī l-nufūsa  
The bath attendant Mūsà prepared a secluded place, which revives the souls.
2. The interlocking function develops in the first hemistich of the second verse:  
*Qultu mā aṣna'u fī-hā?* I said: "What should I do in it?"
3. Finally, the function of disjunction develops in the last hemistich, with the presence of the 'disjunctor':  
*Qāla tasta'milu mūsà* He replied: "You use a Mūsà/razor!"

It is by this last function, that the narrative acquires its characteristic of ambiguity, in which both serious and humorous are present. This is possible thanks to a polysemous term: the disjunctor. Based on the nature of the disjunctor-element, Morin classifies two types of texts: the first is the text in which the disjunctor-element is a sign - *disjonction sémantique* 'semantic disjunction' in Morin's words (109) -, namely its efficacy is to be ascribed to the semantic level of the disjunctor-sign itself. The second disjunctor-element, on the other hand, is a referent to which signs refer - *disjonction référentielle* 'referential disjunction' (109).

From this point of view, Ibn al-'Aṭṭār's epigram is similar to what Morin describes, since it shows a unique narrative sequence, by which a narrative is articulated. The disjunctor is the *tawriya*: the word *mūsà*, which indicates both the bath attendant and a razor, and allows us to categorise the epigram as "récit a disjonction sémantique" (109) (narrative with a semantic disjunction). The word *mūsà* is thus a homonym, which in turn refers to two referents, engendering a double reading of the text, one related to the previously mentioned bath attendant, and the other to the bath tool razor. This is why I adopt Morin's definition of "articulation régressive par homonymie de signifiants" (115) (regressive articulation by homonymy of signifiers).

However, speaking about a mere double reading of the text can be misleading. Morin underlines that these types of narrative present a formal coherence, which is regarded in the two first functions. It is only in the last function, after the enunciation of the *tawriya*-word, that a turn takes place, which leads to a different comprehension of the text, or, better, to two different yet mutually reliant texts. The reason is because *mūsà* in the last verse alludes to Mūsà in the first, connecting the last function to its precedents, forcing the reader to backtrack on a circular way. Morin (116) affirms that we are in front of two texts, one 'normal' - which I call primary - (T<sub>1</sub>) and another 'parasite' (T<sub>2</sub>), the source of the parasite text being the disjunctor, as in the following scheme:

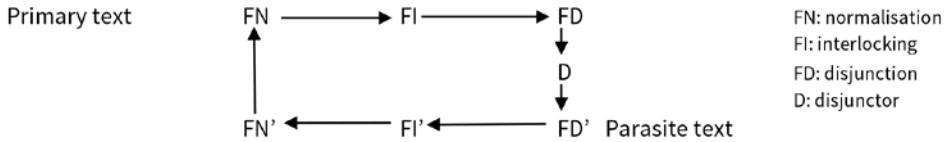


Figure 1. Morin [1966] 1981, 116

We are facing two texts:  $T_1$  has as normalisation function the informative utterance expressed in the first line, which informs us about the existence of a secluded place within the *ḥammām*, specifically set up by the bath attendant named *Mūsà*, followed by the interlocking function, which questions the purpose for which the secluded room has been prepared, and ending with the function of disjunction, by which the disjunctive *mūsà* places us before a fork in the road: one leading us to the conclusion of  $T_1$ , if we understand *mūsà* as a razor; the other to  $T_2$ , in which *Mūsà* is the bath attendant himself. In this case, ‘use *Mūsà*’ is to be interpreted as a sexual use, and therefore as sexual intercourse with the bath attendant. The interpretation of the last function – disjunction – relies upon the understanding of the previous function – interlocking – as a rhetorical question, asked after the information expressed in the first verse by the normalisation function, based on the assumption that the secluded room has been prepared by *Mūsà* for a specific and precise purpose, which should be already known by a possible customer.

But, how can a single text become two interdependent texts? The disjunctive-*tawriya* is not the only source of this duplication, for another fundamental element linked to the *tawriya*-word is involved. As stated above, the element which ‘helps’ the *tawriya* in its working is the verb *ista'mala*, which in my opinion alludes to *al-muwarrà bi-hi* if we consider its common sense – use a razor –, and to the *al-muwarrà 'an-hu* if we adopt its obscene derivation. Indeed, I interpret *mūsà*-razor as the near meaning, since this referent is a common bath tool, and one expects to use it while having being in a *ḥammām*. Even the referred verb does not imply any resemantization. On the other hand, if the referent is *Mūsà*-bath attendant, we face a resemantization of the phrase ‘*tast'milu Mūsà*’, which brings us to the bath attendant uttered in the first verse and changes the meaning of the phrase conveyed to the reader to a ‘sexual use of *Mūsà*’, which is the meaning sought by the author, contrary to al-Lahībī’s (2014) opinion.

Once again, Morin’s analysis is comparable to our *tawriya*-epigram. In her article, she mentions the function executed by a word, which she calls *adjuvant*, as having the function to transfer the disjunctive from a text to the other:

le disjuncteur est transféré d'un récit à l'autre avec l'élément qui le fonctionnalise [...] cet adjuvant fonctionnel consolide la rigueur du formalisme et rend par-là plus éclatante, parce que plus signifiante, la coïncidence disjonctante. (Morin [1966] 1981, 117)

the disjuncteur is transferred from one narrative to another with the element which functionalises it [...] this functional adjuvant consolidates the formalism rigour and thus makes the disjunctive coincidence more striking, for it becomes more meaningful.

Morin's adjuvant is the Arabic *lāzim*; thanks to it, two texts develop in interdependency. This is possible for two reasons. First, the verb is a strong adjuvant with a high power of resemantization; second, it alludes to a referent already mentioned, i.e. a human who is not supposed to be 'used' – uttered in the first line and constitutive element for the existence of the *tawriya*.

As we have seen thus far, this epigram is a complex structure. If at first sight it seems to be a single text, this enquiry has revealed that, in fact, we are facing two texts interdependent of each other, the second a parasite of the first, which, in turn, gains legitimation from its parasite. However, what I have presented so far does not cover fully the potential of analysis of this epigram. Since it is a text – a narrative, a *récit* –, it also possesses a narrative schema, which I outline in the next section.

#### 4 The Narrative Schema

Every text presents a common schema, with which the actions of several 'actors' can be described. In its essence, this epigram is a dialogue, in which an Interlocutor and an Interlocutee act, and where we can recognise an uttered enunciation, which is

only the simulacrum within the discourse imitative of the *enunciative* doing: the 'I', 'here', and 'now' that we encountered in uttered discourse in no way represents the subject, space, or time of the enunciation [Author's italics]. (Greimas, Courtés 1982, 105)

The enunciation is the place within which the instance of the subject of the enunciation takes place, an original act, which produces an utterance. The enunciation itself starts with a fundamental act, which puts into the play the categories of *ego, hic et nunc*, called disengagement. In this view of the enunciation, we can distinguish two types of disengagement: enunciative disengagement and utterative disengagement, the former of which is found in dialogic sequences between an Interlocutor and an Interlocutee.

As underlined by Greimas and Courtés (1982), they are not to be considered as the real subjects or actors of the speech act, of the enunciation, but rather actants thereof:

an actant can be thought of as that which accomplishes or undergoes an act, independently of all other determinations. [...] From this point of view, 'actant' designates a type of syntactic unit, properly formal in character, which precedes any semantic and/or ideological investment. (Greimas, Courtés 1982, 5)

They are abstract elements which stand for a specific function and 'perform' a narrative program, i.e.:

an elementary syntagm of the surface narrative syntax, composed of an utterance of doing governing an utterance of state. [...] The narrative program is to be interpreted as a change of state effected by any subject (S1) affecting any subject (S2). (Greimas, Courtés 1982, 245)

The narrative program is thus the elementary element which describes a function. In a text we can recognise at least two actants: the Subject and the Object, the two of which can be in a relation of conjunction or disjunction. The narrative program's description of the Subject acquiring the Object of quest is thus called performance.

Let us turn our attention to the first verse: "The bath attendant Mūsà prepared a secluded place, which revives the souls". The dialogic sequence starts with a first enunciative disengagement, with which the Interlocutor addresses his Interlocutee. In this verse we can recognise a fundamental actant figure, the Addresser, namely who is going to provide his Addressee-Subject with the modal competence. In particular, the modal competence provided is the knowing-being-able-to-do, actualising modal competence, expressed in the first line with the informative utterance, which informs about the presence of a secluded place, within which a performance can take place, that is to say the conjunction with the Object of value, which is made explicit, in its twofold nature, only in the second verse. At the same time, the first verse is also the place of a virtualising modality, instilling in the Subject the wanting-to-do, earlier unknown and unexperienced. This line is thus the bearer of two distinct modalities, which introduce the possibility of a final performance.

Proceeding to the first hemistich of the second line - "I said: 'What should I do in it?'" -, we are faced with a second uttered enunciation containing the first internal enunciative disengagement, in which the instance of the Subject, here the Interlocutee-Addressee-Subject, is revealed by the use of a verbal form in the singular first person. The question posed by the Subject is nothing, but the expression of the modality wanting-to-know.

Having received the information by the Interlocutor-Addresser about the presence of a secluded place, in which a performance is possible, and having acquired the first actualising competence of being-able-to-do, and its resulting virtualising competence of wanting-to-do, he needs now to acquire the actualising modal competence of knowing-what-being-able-to-do and he can achieve it using the virtualising modality of wanting-to-know-what-being-able-to-do, expressed by the question.

A very last internal enunciative disengagement can be detected in the second hemistich of the second verse: the Interlocutor-Addresser replies to the question of his Interlocutee-Addressee-Subject giving him the information he needed to obtain his knowing-what-being-able-to-do, revealing finally the nature of the Object of quest: *mūsà*.

At this stage we can identify the base narrative program, in which the Subject is disjointed from the Object *mūsà*, making us face an ambiguity of values. According to the interpretation given to the *tawriya*, the value attributed to the Object can be 'to shave', or 'to use the bath attendant', i.e. to have sexual intercourse with him. The instrumental narrative program - namely the narrative program by which the Subject acquires the necessary modalities in order to reach the conjunction with his Object of value - is to be found in the first line and in the second hemistich of the last verse, by which the Interlocutor-Addresser confers the modalities of knowing and being-able to the Subject, since it is the presence of a secluded place that makes the performance possible. At the same time, the Interlocutor-Addresser, by informing his Interlocutee-Addressee-Subject, instils him with the modality wanting. Once these modalities have been provided, and the Object made explicit, we can talk about manipulation, cognitive dimension, from the Interlocutor-Addresser towards his Interlocutee-Addressee-Subject, in becoming the Interlocutor-Addresser-Manipulator. This manipulation allows the stipulation of a fiduciary contract whereby the Object of value will be acquired, under certain conditions.

However, the Object is still unknown to us, or better, we are facing two possible Objects of value, the first being the razor, and the second the attendant. It is up to the Subject, as disjointed of the Object, to give it a value, according to his scale of values, choosing if he leaves the *ḥammām* shaved or sexually satisfied or, maybe, both as the double reading of the epigram could suggest. Another point to which I would like to draw attention is the figure of the bath attendant *Mūsà*, quoted in the first line, who plays an actantial role too. If the Object is recognised as a razor, *Mūsà* represents the actant Helper, i.e. the actantial figure who helps the Subject to achieve his narrative program, arranging a suitable place to perform the performance. On the contrary, if the Object is recognised as the sexual intercourse with the attendant, then *Mūsà* is both the Helper and the Object itself.

We have so far recognised in this text the first two moments of the canonical narrative schema: the first, the manipulation, occurs from the side of

the Addresser towards his Addressee, permitting him to acquire the competence, second moment of the narrative schema. Nevertheless, the text is still suspended, since the performance – the third step of the schema – has not yet been realised, for we do not know for certain what the Object or the values thereof are, nor do we know if at the end the Subject is going to be joined with or disjointed from it. Thus, we have suspense. Since the performance does not take place, the last component of the schema, the sanction by which the Addresser sanctions positively or negatively the performance of the Subject, is also not realised. At this level the text is open, and it is up to the reader to complete it. Firstly, given a twofold Object, the reader has the possibility to make a decision grounded on his own encyclopaedia (Eco [1979] 2006), choosing if the value to be attributed to the Object is ‘shaving’ or ‘sexual intercourse’ or both. On the basis of this decision he is going to sanction, positively or negatively, the hypothetical performance. I must here underline that the value of the Object is not established at the level of textual actants: neither the Addresser nor the Addressee have the power to decide for this is the prerogative of the reader alone. He can complete the text, cooperating, in fact, with its writing and conclusion. This is the pivotal point of this epigram. The presence of the *tawriya* involves the reader in the narrative process, asking for a personal commitment in order to accomplish it, following the traces left by the author who, having chosen as place of the narration a *ḥammām* and using an erotic double entendre, relies on social norms and shared knowledge, which I shall relate in the following pages.

## 5 Applying the Semiotic Square

The *tawriya*, with its charge of ambiguity, opens the interpretation of the text. But how can we understand the aesthetic pleasure ascribed to this epigram? In other words, why is it that reading, or listening, to these verses provokes pleasure? We can identify the answer to these questions if we consider the semiotic square.

In the following investigation I borrow the words of Marrone (2001), who suggests an analysis of the narrative of communications based on the semiotic square, as in this scheme:

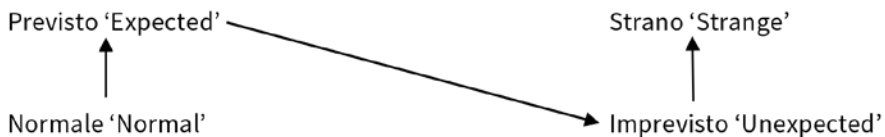


Figure 2. Marrone 2001, 95



The interpretation of this scheme is as follows: the normal entails the expected, which is the negation of the unexpected, which entails the strange. The normal is implied and it is from what is perceived as normal that we can understand why the 'making headlines' of an event considered strange is in fact a normal reaction because of its break from expectation.

We can apply this scheme to our epigram in order to understand the effect of estrangement caused by the *tawriya*. The first line takes us inside a *ḥammām*, where the presence of one or more attendants helping customers is to be considered 'typical'. The presence of a secluded, intimate, place, away from prying eyes, within which the full nude and private practice, such as the intimate shaving, are permitted, is common. In this regard, it can be affirmed that the narration contained in the first line describes a 'normal' environment, since the mentioned people and places are 'expected'. However, the question in the second verse, addressed by the Interlocutee to the Interlocutor, draws and transfers our attention from an 'expected' scenario towards a hypothetical 'unexpected' behaviour, eliciting a doubt contrary to the common expectations: why should one ask about possible actions to be performed within a secluded place, when the existence of the room itself should not arouse any doubt? What is its function?

The answer at the end of the second line is ambiguous. Since the razor is an 'expected' tool, and the act of shaving a common practice in a *ḥammām*, the interpretation of the word *mūsā* as razor does not lead to the 'unexpected' and keeps the text in a 'normal' scenario. On the other hand, if we interpret the word *mūsā* as the name of the attendant, we notice how the change of the referent leads us to a shift from the 'normal' to the 'strange', the latter of which being sexual intercourse. This is all the more so the case given that within a *ḥammām* intercourse is forbidden, not to mention male-male intercourse with the attendant himself.<sup>20</sup>

To better understand how this shifting occurs, I resort to the essay by Greimas and Rastier (1968) describing the system of sexual relations. Considering their example, I draw the scheme of sexual relations, based on the permitted and unacceptable relations according to the social model, as follow:

20 About the prohibition of sexual promiscuity and sexual intercourse see Benkheira 2007, 2008; van Gelder 2008; al-Ḥaymī 1986, al-Munāwī 1987, and the next section of this article.

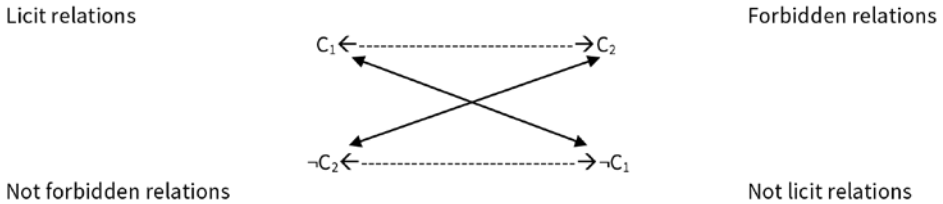


Figure 3. Greimas, Rastier 1968, 93

The relations between  $C_1$  (licit relations) and  $C_2$  (forbidden relations) and between  $\neg C_1$  (not forbidden relations) and  $\neg C_2$  (not licit relations) create contrariety, and that between  $C_1$  (licit relations) and  $\neg C_1$  (not licit relations) and between  $C_2$  (forbidden relations) and  $\neg C_2$  (not forbidden relations) contradiction. Thus,  $C_1$  (licit relations) and  $\neg C_2$  (not forbidden relations) are permitted relations, while  $C_2$  (forbidden relations) and  $\neg C_1$  (not licit relations) are unacceptable.

I then borrow the following scheme to consider the model of individual values:

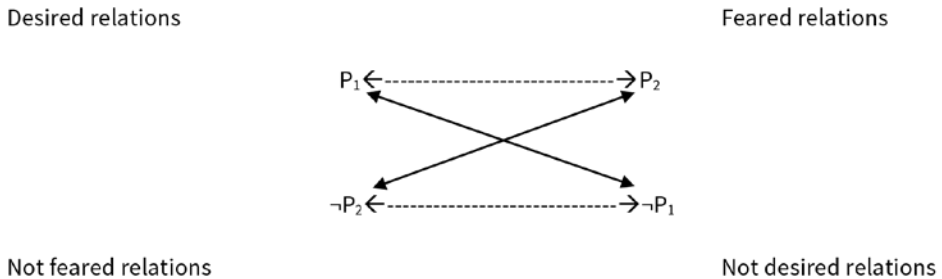


Figure 4. Greimas, Rastier 1968, 96

The relations between  $P_1$  (desired relations) and  $P_2$  (feared relations) and between  $\neg P_1$  (not desired relations) and  $\neg P_2$  (not feared relations) create contrariety, and that between  $P_1$  (desired relations) and  $\neg P_1$  (not desired relations) and between  $P_2$  (feared relations) and  $\neg P_2$  (not feared relations) contradiction.  $P_1$  (desired relations) and  $\neg P_2$  (not feared relations) are permitted relations, while  $P_2$  (feared relations) and  $\neg P_1$  (not desired relations) are unacceptable. The next step is to assign actions and states to the terms of the square.

Let us consider  $T_1$ : from a social point of view, the action of shaving with a razor and depilatory paste in a *ḥammām* is permitted, if not recom-

mended, and therefore it is a licit action that has its room in the semiotic square as  $C_1$  (licit relation). On the level of individual values, the act of shaving can be considered a desired action, and the place  $P_1$  (desired relation) can be assigned to it. Thus, if the relation is  $C_1 + P_1$ , namely a prescription (licit relation) plus another prescription (desired relation), we are facing a balanced relation since it is a "relation between homologous terms" (Greimas, Rastier 1968, 97).

On the other hand, actions and states of  $T_2$  have to be considered accordingly with the notion of male homosexuality. From a social point of view, male homosexuality can be placed in more than a place of the semiotic square. For example, it is considered to be forbidden ( $C_2$ ) being contrary to recognised norms, especially when occurring between two adult men since, as Bauer (2014b) points out, it is in opposition with the received idea of masculinity; nonetheless it can also be considered as not forbidden ( $\neg C_2$ ) in the case that the intercourse occurs between two men, one of whom is not considered an adult yet – e.g. who has not yet a full-grown beard –, thus falling under the place of permitted relations. However, if we consider the place in which the action takes place, a *ḥammām*, we face a repositioning of the action to the level of the not licit relations ( $\neg C_1$ ), even if *Mūsā* is an adolescent. This has to be ascribed to the fact that coitus is strictly forbidden within a *ḥammām* regardless of the sex of the lovers.

Here, I must highlight that in this analysis I am referring to a specific social context, in which poetry addressed to beautiful young was a widespread genre, and in which homoerotic *muğūn*-poetry often depicted male-male sexual intercourse. Szombathy (2013) clearly specifies the difference between norms and real behaviour:

the norm could not be clearer: homoerotic lust is dangerous and must never be indulged; sodomy is an abomination, a sin and a crime. Anal sexual congress between two persons of the same sex is under all circumstances illicit and subject to punishment. This was the unanimous opinion of all Muslim jurists, which also correspond to the popular assessment of the phenomena. [...] Homosexual sex – especially with slave-boys and other low-status youngsters – was widely available in Middle Eastern cities, nor was it uncommon for men to try to seduce adolescents or buy and keep slave-boys for sexual gratification. (9-10)

The fact the real behaviour could have been contrary to the recognised norm is not a sufficient statement to prove the lawfulness of this practice. Accordingly to Szombathy (2013, 138), *muğūn*-texts "were clearly designed to be as provocative as possible, [...] the theme of homosexuality was chosen and elaborated for its shock value, out of a simple *Effekthascherei*". Nonetheless, it is true that "medieval Muslims, like members of many other societies, viewed the act of penetrating a man as a sin, but

a sin that did not lessen the virility of the active partner, while it all but destroyed the honour of whoever played the passive role" (135). This is why I have assigned to intercourse the position  $C_2$  (forbidden relation), in respect to the violation of recognised norms; and  $\neg C_2$  (not forbidden relation) in consideration of the social reception which sees Mūsà as an adolescent. It is not a full licit relation ( $C_1$ ), but a kind of relation – expressed in a given literary genre – that could be accepted under certain conditions – e.g. with a young bottom slave – not damaging the virility of the active partner, although being a sinful practice, contrary to the recognised norm. However, as stated above, the place in which the action takes place brings us to consider the relation as a not licit relation ( $\neg C_1$ ), even if Mūsà is an adolescent.

From the point of view of individual values, I will at first assign to the will of a sexual intercourse with Mūsà the place of a desired relation ( $P_1$ ), but it can also be considered at least as a not feared sexual relation ( $\neg P_2$ ).

Let us now verify the structure of the relations described so far: assuming the normative viewpoint, I consider as invariant the forbidden social relation ( $C_2$ ), and as variant the desired relation ( $P_1$ ) and the not feared relation ( $\neg P_2$ ).

If the relation is ( $C_2 + P_1$ ), namely an interdiction (forbidden relation) plus a prescription (desired relation), the result is a conflictual relation, that is to say that we are facing a conflictual relation between two contrary terms, which creates a strong conflict. If the relation is ( $C_2 + \neg P_2$ ), namely an interdiction (forbidden relation) plus a non-interdiction (not feared relation), we are facing once again a conflictual relation, but in this case between two contradictory terms, which poses a less serious conflict. The relation depicted in the opposition of two contraries represents the will to make a prohibited wish – which is not accepted from a normative point of view – to come true. Thus, it represents a form of deviance. On the other hand, the relation depicted in the opposition of two contradictories – opposing an interdiction to a non-interdiction – describes a state which is weaker than the opposition of contraries. Thus, it represents a transgression. In both cases there is a primacy of the individual to the normative.<sup>21</sup>

To review what we have seen so far, we have two texts:  $T_1$ , when it is ap-

21 What about if we consider intercourse from a 'social' point of view? The result does not wander from the given analysis, since we need to consider the role played by the place in which the action takes place. Considering as invariant the not licit social relation  $\neg C_1$ , and as variant the desired relation  $P_1$  and the not feared relation  $\neg P_2$ , the result of the combinations is as follows:  $\neg C_1 + P_1$  and  $\neg C_1 + \neg P_2$ . If we consider the first combination, namely a non-prescription (not licit action) plus a prescription (desired action), we are facing a conflictual relation, since they are two contradictory terms on the basis of the contradiction of prescription. The second combination is a union of a non-prescription (not licit action) plus a non-interdiction (not feared action), and thus it is a conflictual relation between two contrary terms, weaker than  $C_2 + P_1$  above mentioned.

plied to the semiotic square, shows us a narration which does not exceed the bounds of the common expectations, it reaffirms them. On the other hand,  $T_2$  turns over the common expectations, taking the reader towards the unexpected, within which the *tawriya* can engender aesthetic pleasure. To understand the unexpected perceived by the reader, we need to pay attention to the non-performed performance and interpret it in view of the social relations expressed through the semiotic square. In doing so, it can be affirmed that the unexpected is engendered by the deviance or by the transgression, which go beyond the norm.

Nonetheless, the use of the semiotic square has shown that in order to assign actions and states to the correct position within the square, we have to consider another instance, which only superficially could be considered as an outside and insignificant element of the narrative: the place in which the action takes place.

## 6 Space as a Text

I have already demonstrated how this epigram contains in fact two texts. Now, I wish to draw the attention to what I call the third text, already mentioned, but not considered in its importance yet: the space, the *ḥammām*.

To speak about a *ḥammām* in pre-modern Arabic society is to open a trunk full of meanings. To retrace the history of this institution is not the aim of this contribution, this is why I limit myself to underline a few aspects, which are essential for the analysis of the epigram.<sup>22</sup> Benkheira (2007, 2008) underlines the fact that the hot bath existed before the advent of Islam. The Roman and Byzantine habits were embraced by the Arabs. However, Islam posed several questions about the lawfulness of this practice. First of all, within a *ḥammām* it was prohibited to pronounce the name of God and recite the Quran. Promiscuity between sexes had been forbidden, as well as full nudity (al-Munāwī 1987, al-Ḥaymī 1986). Benkheira (2007) stresses how this prohibition dates to the beginning of Islam, quoting several Prophet's traditions – although controversial – and also traditions and orders ascribed to the caliphs 'Umar (d. 23/644) and 'Alī (d. 40/661). In general, the frequentation of *ḥammām* was a practice accepted by jurists, since the benefits of a hot bath were recognised from several points of view: religious, for it makes possible the ritual purity; therapeutic, since its ben-

<sup>22</sup> The birth, development, and (near) death of the *ḥammām* have caused rivers of ink to flow. It is not possible within the limits of this article to consider all these aspects, and I refer to the bibliography given at the end.

efits were recognised in case of illness,<sup>23</sup> to the extent to which even women could frequent the *ḥammām*; and recreational, giving space for amusement and public relations.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the promiscuity between customers, even if they were wearing a loincloth, was seen as a potential temptation towards 'homosexuality', in particular among youths. In this regard Benkheira quotes an anecdote ascribed to Sufyān al-Ṭawrī (d. 161/777-8):

un jour que Sufyān Ṭawrī était au ḥammām, un jeune garçon, au beau visage, pénétra. Sufyān s'écria: "Ôtez-le de ma vue!" On fit sortir le bel enfant. Le grand juriste de Kūfa expliqua: "Si chaque femme est accompagnée d'un démon, chaque jeune garçon l'est par dix démons!". (Benkheira 2007, 364)

One day, when Sufyān Ṭawrī was in a *ḥammām*, a young boy with a beautiful face entered. Sufyān exclaimed, "Take him out of my sight!" The beautiful boy was taken out. The great jurist of Kūfa explained: "If every woman is accompanied by a demon, every young boy is accompanied by ten demons!".

Shaving, with the help of a depilatory paste called *nūra* (al-Ḥaymī 1986, 48-53; al-Munāwī 1987), obtained the consensus of (almost) every authority, both, religious and political: "une des raisons pour lesquelles le ḥammām a été adopté par les musulmans et accepté par la majeure partie des oulémas est que l'on s'y épile, notamment le pubis" (Benkheira 2007, 363) (one of the reasons as to why the *ḥammām* has been adopted by Muslims, and accepted by most of the jurists, is because one shaves himself off, especially the pubis) (Grotzfeld 1970, 75-7). To support this affirmation, Benkheira quotes several sources, among them jurists and caliphs.<sup>25</sup> What I have summarised so far describes the received view about permitted and prohibited *ḥammām* practice. Later sources – Mamluk and Ottoman – do not introduce any remarkable change to this 'dos and don'ts' framework, as can be seen, for example, in al-Ḥaymī (1986).

<sup>23</sup> About therapeutic aspects of the *ḥammām* see al-Munāwī 1987, Koetschet 2014 and Denoix 2014.

<sup>24</sup> "L'historiographie confirme nettement cette conclusion. Prétendre que les musulmans n'ont adopté le bain public que parce qu'il leur permettait de satisfaire aux rites de la purification est une méprise évidente. Or c'est à peu près pour les mêmes raisons que les Romains et ensuite les Byzantins fréquentaient les thermes" (Benkheira 2007, 327) (Historiography confirms clearly this conclusion: to claim that the Muslims adopted the public bath only because it allowed them to satisfy the rites of purification is an obvious mistake. But it is about the same reasons that the Romans and then the Byzantines frequented the public baths).

<sup>25</sup> For an in-depth discussion about sources, see the bibliography, in particular Benkheira 2007, 2008 and Melchert 2014.

After these preliminary remarks, a question arises. How does the conception of how one uses a *ḥammām* play into the understanding of this epigram?

Let us consider first a classification of spaces. Marrone (2001) lists and describes different spaces as pre-ordered, semi-determined and informal. The first type of spaces is set in view of a particular usage, at which the user is supposed to comply; the second type allows to the user a semi-freedom, allowing a resemantization of the space depending on his wishes; the last type is supposed to be flexible, apparently set without any rule, allowing a complete freedom to the user. Considering these typologies, I propose to consider the *ḥammām* between a pre-ordered and a semi-determined space, namely a place built for precise usage, but at the same time subject to resemantization by its user. David and Mounif (2014), speaking about the hot baths in Aleppo, underline how the *ḥammām* has to be considered a path accompanying the customer from the first and external part of the building to the inner part.<sup>26</sup> If we adopt the Syrian terminology, we define the first cold room *barrānī*, usually the biggest room, in which customers undress themselves before entering the hot rooms, as well as relax themselves at the end of the bath experience. Following the path outside > inside/cold > hot, the second place is called *wasṭānī*, a lukewarm place preparing the entrance to the inner part, the hot room, called *ḡuwwānī*. Inside the hot room, one or several secluded rooms, *ḥalwa*, permit customers to perform intimate practice, such as shaving themselves. If we observe the plans reported by David and Mounif (2014, 804-15), we notice that every *ḥammām* was built to be a pre-ordered place: the path that the customer was supposed to follow to have access to the places was inscribed in the architecture itself. A first big room has the function to permit to the user to prepare himself, undress and wear a loincloth; later a medium lukewarm room introduces the customer to the pleasure of the hot bath, here both hot and cold water are available, but the room is not completely heated; finally, the last step is to enter in the hot room, usually smaller than the others, completely heated with the access to private rooms and/or steam rooms. Considering this path and looking at the architecture of a *ḥammām*, I can affirm that the way which takes customers inside the bath is pre-ordered, since the architecture proposes a series of rooms following each other, between which there is only one opening, a threshold, which directs and forces the client's way. It is like a

26 al-Ġuzūlī (2006, 2:312-4) and al-Munāwī (1987, 61-3) describe the *ḥammām* as sequence of rooms, in which the heat raises gradually: the first and cold room is called *maslah*, then the progression from cold to hot follows the progression of the rooms, from *al-bayt al-awwal* until *al-bayt al-ṭālīṭ*. This path is also described in a medical work dating back to the beginning of tenth/sixteenth century written by al-Qūṣūnī, chief of the physicians of Egypt. On this point see Denoix (2014, 1028-33). This nomenclature was used also in modern Egypt, as pointed out by Pauty (1933, 23-41) in his description of the *ḥammāms* in Cairo. Also, Grotzfeld (1970, 26-44).

ritual developing itself from outside to inside. However, even if its path is pre-ordered, the *ḥammām* presents a certain degree of flexibility too. This is true above all regarding the external places compared to the internal nucleus. There, different activities can be performed, especially at the end of the bath experience. This is why being pre-ordered in its path, the *ḥammām* is also semi-determined in its usage, with an increasing degree of 'pre-orderedness' growing as we access the inner part.

Thus, we must consider the *ḥammām* a space strongly invested of cultural and social values. These values play an important role in each literary representation, becoming an essential element of the narration. First of all, for they represent the encyclopaedia of both the model reader and the empirical reader of the work (Eco [1979] 2006). Secondly, these values, being a part of common acquaintances, act in the text and play an essential role in the understanding thereof, bringing a key to interpretation. It follows that the space itself, with its values, is to be considered a text in its own. This epigram is a text within a text within a text. Given that the space is a text too, and not a mere circumstance, we should be able to analyse it detecting the actantial roles and the narrative schema. What is the actantial role which can be assigned to the *ḥammām*?

Greimas proposes a classification of spaces in either topical, namely "the place where the transformation in question takes place" (Greimas 1988, 82) - i.e. the narrative program, the conjunction between Subject and Object -, or heterotopical, namely "the preceding and following places enclosing it" (82). The topical space is in turn to be divided into utopian, which is the space in which the performance is performed, or paratopical, in which the subject acquires the competences in order to be able to achieve the performance. The space of the manipulation is the paratopical space. The whole *ḥammām* described in this epigram is, at the same time, the heterotopical and topical space. As we have seen above, the bath is commonly divided into several places, in general three, corresponding to particular uses. If we imagine the scene depicted in the epigram, the external part of the *ḥammām* is the place in which the contract between Addresser and Subject is drawn up, the space in which the manipulation from the Addresser takes place. Following the path towards the innermost of the *ḥammām* the Subject acquires the competence, the Object in its ambivalence is revealed, the Addresser provides the Subject with the modality of knowing, while the Subject acquires the wanting-to-do. The space of the performance, the utopian space, in which the conjunction between the Subject and the Object of value is possible, is the *ḥalwa*, the innermost of the *ḥammām*, a part thereof, but contemporaneously separated, a place of modesty or debauchery.

On closer inspection, we notice that the narrative trajectory of the Subject develops within the space following the pre-ordered path determined by the structure of the *ḥammām*. Thus, I can affirm that the narrative tra-



jectory is made possible especially thanks to the spatial structure of the site in which the Subject acquires the necessary virtualising and actualising modal competencies and acts to obtain the conjunction with the Object of value, following a path on the axis outside > inside. The Space is itself a narrative trajectory. The places crossed from time to time are limits, as per the definition given by Hammad (2004), namely they are established on a contractual basis. Considering the topical space of the performance – i.e. the secluded place –, its own architectural structure shows us how it can be accessed only after the crossing of a threshold, this being crossed only after having acquired an ‘authorisation’. Hammad (2004) underlines that the granting of an ‘authorisation’ to cross a threshold is referred to a third actantial role – a third Subject ( $S_3$ ) –, who is not the Subject neither the Object,<sup>27</sup> but in our epigram, things become complicated.

In  $T_1$ , the Subject aspires to the conjunction with the Object of value ‘shaving’. In this case such an intimate practice can only occur within a room, which allows one to not expose the nude body publicly, the room of which was prepared on purpose by the attendant Mūsà. The access to the room is controlled by the attendant himself, the actor who plays in the narrative schema of  $T_1$  the actantial role of the Helper, while in  $T_3$ , he plays the actantial role of  $S_3$  who controls the threshold space and allows its crossing. In  $T_2$ , the Subject acts in order to be joined with the Object ‘sexual intercourse’ identified in Mūsà. Thus, in the narrative schema of  $T_2$  Mūsà is not the Helper anymore, but the Object of value himself, and he plays also the actantial role  $S_3$  in  $T_3$ , allowing the Subject to cross the threshold of the room in which the performance can be performed. In both cases, as Hammad (2013) pinpoints, the space is not a mere circumstantial element, rather it is possible to analyse it using the actantial categories. In this specific case, the secluded place, utopian place, is in both  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  the spatial actor who plays the actantial role of the Helper, since the performance is possible in it, but not outside it, the room-Helper provides the Subject with the modal competence being-able-to-do and assists the Subject in performing his narrative program.

27 Hammad (2004) describes the limit as a space which implies seven actantial roles. The limit divides two Spaces ( $E_1$  and  $E_2$ ) in which two Subjects act ( $S_1$  and  $S_2$ ), the threshold between them of which is the place in which one of these Subjects expresses the will to cross it and join himself with the other space. The modality being-able-to-cross is provided by another actant Subject ( $S_3$ ) – it does not matter if the actors coincide –, while the threshold itself is to be considered as a share of Space ( $E_3$ ), different from  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ . Hammad identifies the Spaces  $E_{1,3}$  as Object with which the Subject is joined or disjointed, and the crossing of the threshold as the wanting-to-be-joined with another Object. Since two spaces are divided by a threshold and it is the only way to have access to the other space, another division between the two spaces, uncrossable, has to be considered. For example, a wall which prevents the access from  $E_1$  to  $E_2$  is an uncrossable limit, but it is neither  $E_1$  nor  $E_2$ , and cannot be the threshold itself  $E_3$ , thus it is another actantial role:  $E_4$ .

Consequently, if the space is a text, with its charge of narrative schema, I agree with Marrone (2001), who highlights the presence for each given space of a model user,<sup>28</sup> just like the Model Reader (Eco [1979] 2006). This is why if we consider the Object in  $T_1$ , taking place in  $T_3$ , the action of shaving conforms to the expectations of a model user, who enters a *ḥammām* having the intention to shave himself. On the other hand, in  $T_2$ , taking place in  $T_3$ , the Object 'sexual intercourse' does not conform to the expectations of a model user, given that coitus in a hot bath is not only forbidden, but also considered dangerous for health. This violation of social, medical, and ethical norms involves a resemantization of the whole  $T_3$ .

This causes an effect of estrangement, which can be better understood considering the two different perspectives in the definition of 'discrete unit of space', a topos. Hammad underlines how the definition of topos as "une portion d'espace, découpée dans le continuum spatiale, identifiable par ce qu'une action s'y accomplit" (2013, 9) (a share of space, cut out in the spatial continuum, identifiable by the action that happens in it) is not totally satisfying. Instead, he suggests that one consider what can be made of and with the space, rather than within, since the space can change its function on the basis of its final users. In other words, "la valeur de l'espace intermédiaire ne provient pas de ce qui s'y passe [...], mais du programme ultérieur qu'il permet de réaliser" (12) (the value of the intermediate space does not come from what happens there [...], but from the further program which allows to realise). From this starting point, Hammad describes two perspectives: the internal perspective "ou l'homme inséré dans l'espace physique" (15) (or the man inserted into the physical space), and the external perspective "ou l'espace physique pris en charge par l'espace social" (15) (or the social space which takes charge of the physical space). According to the internal perspective, in  $T_1$  the form of the action 'shaving' ( $A_1$ ), which relates the Subject (S) and the Space (E) - the secluded room -, is  $A_1(E, S)$ , i.e. the secluded room permits to someone to shave himself. In the external perspective the topos is brought in circulation among several Subjects, and its form can be described as  $A_1(S_1, E, S_2)$ . The topos *ḥalwa* is architecturally designed for the action of shaving, being permitted from a social point of view. Its function is thus recognised and the topos can circulate among Subjects. On the other hand, in  $T_2$  the action is 'having a sexual intercourse' ( $A_2$ ) and the form  $A_2(E, S)$  expression of the internal perspective cannot permit any circulation of the topos as in the form  $A_2(S_1, E, S_2)$ , since there is no social recognition of the action which takes place in it.

28 "Questi ultimi sono figure narrative previste in anticipo nella struttura degli spazi, i quali si fanno carico di quelle forme di comportamento che i luoghi implicitamente richiedono" (Marrone 2001, 321) (The latter are narrative figures foreseen in advance in the structure of the spaces, which take charge of those forms of behaviour that the places implicitly require).

## 7 Conclusions

At first glance this epigram seems to be a mere funny pun, nothing more than a joke. However, in my analysis I tried to demonstrate how these two lines, perceived as a singular text, are in fact a twine of texts due to the presence of the *tawriya*-word. To use a metaphor, the epigram is like a play of Chinese boxes, since the text perceived at the first reading ( $T_0$ ) contains in itself other texts ( $T_{1-3}$ ). The first explanation to this 'embedding' is found in the power of the *tawriya* to play the role of the disjunctive, being the point of departure of a second reading entailing a second text based on and legitimised by the first – i.e.  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  –. The effectiveness of the disjunctive relies on the competence of the reader, who, in turn, should be able to understand both meanings of the *tawriya*-word in order to perceive both texts in their relationship with one another. Here the reader enters the ring, and faces a significant choice: razor, bath attendant, or both of them? We discover the importance of this choice when taking into account the narrative schema. In every narrative, the actantial figure of the manipulatory Addresser provides the Addressee-Subject with the modal competencies and values permitting him the performance. However, the Object indicated by the manipulatory Addresser is ambiguous, thus the completion of the actantial role is to be attributed to the reader, who is able to assign a value to the Object by his choice. Moreover, the performance does not take place and consequently the actantial figure of the judicatory Addresser is not expressed in the textual level. Once again, it is the reader who expresses this actantial role, since he is in charge of the final sanction depending on the Object of value and the hypothetical performance. In turn, the final sanction depends on the social norms shared by the reader. According to the Object, the performance is a transgression or a deviancy on the basis of the conflicts described with the help of the semiotic square. These conflicts depend on the perception of the action within the space in which it takes place. That is why the space *ḥammām* plays an essential role in the definition of the aesthetic success of the epigram. Every action, real or hypothetical, should be considered in the frame of the common knowledge about what is permitted and forbidden in a *ḥammām*. The space, therefore, can be analysed as a narrative too: it is a third text ( $T_3$ ), which has its own narrative schema and actantial figures. The narrative schemas of  $T_{1-3}$  merge together and concur in the decode of the whole  $T_0$ . It is therefore clear how the role of the reader is essential to complete the narrative trajectory of the Subject towards his Object of value, integrating himself in the narrative schema. Far from being merely an easy joke, this epigram mirrors the whole encyclopaedia of a common reader about *ḥammām* practice and social norms related to it. Texts are powerful. They 'act' the reader and anticipate his interpretation. But a question remains: could we apply the tools of semiotics towards a general

redefinition of *tawriya*-poetry and aesthetic taste during the Mamluk age? What I have outlined so far anticipates such an application, which would, in my opinion, prove to be fruitful in the analysis of such “open works” (Eco [1979] 2006).

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# The Imported Culture: Who Is the Dummy? Considering 'Agency' in the Circulation of Chinese Books in Europe during the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries

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**Abstract** Between the 17th and 18th century the European 'Republic of Letters' was characterised by a great interest in the 'Other' and the fascination with different, 'exotic' cultures. In this cultural environment, the Jesuit missionaries in China acted as a 'bridge' between the two continents exchanging information and books from each side. This paper discusses the use of the concept of 'agency' as applied to Chinese books, analysing how they were subjected to actions and, in turn, were capable of action, in this specific European context. The aim of this paper is to reflect how the agency of these texts conflicts and coincides with the agency of other actors connected with this trans-cultural process.

**Summary** 1 Introduction: Interpreting Agency and Text. – 2 Actors in the Migration of Books. – 3 Agency in Translating: 'do ut des'. – 4 Agency on Value, Mutability of Things in Recontextualization. – 5 Agency in Constructing the Chinese Image: the Influence of Books. – 6 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Jesuits. Chinese Book Collections. Republic of Letters. Cross-cultural transfer. Imported Culture.

## 1 Introduction: Interpreting Agency and Text

The term of 'agency', used by scholars in every field of research, is full of ambiguity, stemming from several interrelated factors and definitions (Emirbayer, Mische 1998, 962).

Coming out of the late 1970s,<sup>1</sup> the usage of this word grew from the reflection on how human actions can influence and be influenced by society, to a shift to a non-anthropocentric point of view and attribution of the same capacity to 'act' in inanimate objects.

When we analyse 'agency' in books, then, what do we want to express?

1 For a brief introduction to 'agency' and its history, see Ahearn 1999.

For Cooren (2010, 32), the concept of 'agency' applied to textual studies, implies the awareness that any kind of text has a relative autonomy, or better, has a 'life of its own', because it can continue to function in other contexts, even in the absence of its producers. This is particularly evident in the case of Imported culture, where books that are transferred from one place to another, severing ties with the habitat of production, are still 'living' on their own, acquiring new value and influence that differ from those for which they were created. Malafouris stated that:

while agency and intentionality may not be properties of things, they are not properties of humans either: they are the properties of material engagement, that is, of the grey zone where brain, body and culture conflate. (Knappett, Malafouris 2008, 22).

Agency then, does not reside completely in humans or things, but stays in between, and is connected in the most concrete way with the interrelationship of the two, inside the framework of society, culture, and history in which they are living.

Books are a product of society, that is interacting with it and its inhabitants, which allow us to say - using the metaphor of ventriloquism coined by Cooren - that books are puppets that

*make us do things* (we are then their dummies while they are our ventriloquists) as much as we *make them do things* (in which case, they are our dummies while we are their ventriloquists) (2010, 90).

This definition of 'agency' does not deny the property of actions to humans, but simultaneously recognizes to things their own way of acting through their use, as an infinite swirling Dervishes' dance, in which the performer, the dress and the tradition behind it all work together in order to be admired by the audience, that is also a part of the performance.

Starting from these interpretations of object agency, we will reflect on how texts can act and influence a society, and at the same time, be acted upon by it. As a case study, we will analyse the particular situation of books written in Chinese that arrived in Europe and were collected there between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To simplify, we can say that the role of 'puppeteers' in this process of cultural migration was taken by the Jesuits, and books became their 'dummies'.

Nevertheless, as should be done in every show, we need to consider the full cast in order to ponder critically the result of this performance.

## 2 Actors in the Migration of Books

In this process of cross-cultural consumption, we can identify at least six worthy agents: 1) the Chinese cultural consumers and producers; 2) the books; 3) the Chinese regulators of the cultural exportation; 4) the Jesuit missionaries who supervised this market until arrival, re-elaboration and distribution by the West; 5) the readers inside the Church institutions; and 6) the final European intellectual consumers.

The first four actors had a prominent role in the preliminary phase of the culture exportation.

1. The Chinese readers exercised their agency influencing (indirectly or more directly) the selection of works which need to be exported. In fact, the Jesuit missionaries who followed the steps of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China, embraced his 'accommodation policy'<sup>2</sup> and tried to spread Christianity inside the Great Wall, through an intercultural process based on the study of Chinese customs and culture. In order to accomplish this, they started reading the most relevant and widespread literature, choosing the same texts of scholars with which they had the possibility to enter in contact.<sup>3</sup> But also, Chinese booksellers gave them advice, indicating the books *sine qua non* that needed to be purchased in their collections. This is still possible to see in booklists, documents belonging to Jesuits and preserved in European Libraries, as the one provided by Mr. Hu, from the bookshop Shiyètáng in Xihéyán, in Beijing, to the Jesuit Jean-François Foucquet (1665-1741), entitled *Xihéyán shiyètáng Hú shì shūpù shūdān* 西河沿世業堂胡氏書舖書單 (Booklist from the Bookshop Shiyetang of Mister Hu in Xiheyang), today preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with the collocation Borg. cin. 357.1.<sup>4</sup>

2. The books themselves were predominant actors in this cultural exportation; the material characteristics of the book, as with its price and availability, greatly influenced its selection or not.

Furthermore, different areas and bookstores provided different kinds of literature. Jianyang was the premier publishing site from eleventh to seventeenth centuries and produced a wide range of texts, including also books for scholars (Brokaw 2007, 264); in the eighteenth century the primary source shifted to the bookstores in Sibǎo's area 四堡, with more

2 "The accommodation of Christianity to indigenous elements of a foreign culture" (Mungello 2009, 19).

3 For a brief overview of the Chinese books collected by the Jesuits, and the possible influences on the purchase, see Dudink 1996, 156.

4 For more information, see Standaert 2015.

poorly produced works designed for a non-elite audience; and with the late Ming<sup>5</sup> came a bloom of urban publishing houses, in particular in the biggest cities of Jiangnan 江南 area, as Nanjing 南京, Suzhou 苏州, Hangzhou 杭州, Yangzhou 扬州 and Jianyang 建阳 (Fan Jinmin 1998). Books printed in Jianyang and other areas in Fujian province were notorious for their inferior quality and printing mistakes, although in Nanjing and Suzhou could be also found books of better editions (Chow 2004, 81-3).

Under the Qing 清 dynasty (1644-1912), the largest publishing centre was moved north to the Imperial capital Beijing 北京 (Brokaw 2007, 265), where due to the high concentration of officials and literati, there was a high presence of bookstores with the possibility to find rare and refined editions (Chow 2004, 79). Consequently, the provenance of the book already influenced its quality and content. Choosing a book was already a choice of which culture to import, and the power of choosing was more in the hands – figuratively speaking – of books than the real acquirer. A Westerner, with limited freedom to go around China, unless in the permitted areas,<sup>6</sup> was conditioned by the presence of neighbour bookshops or, when on occasion, by official gifts, to create his own book collection.

3. In this book trade, from China to Europe, it is necessary to consider also the restriction and regulations that were imposed by the Chinese government during the late Ming and first Qing dynasty on foreign markets and Christian missions. As can be seen in the widely translated and spread *Historia de la China*, written by the Augustinian friar Juan González de Mendoza, first published in 1585, where he talked of more than a hundred books purchased by the Provincial Herrada:

y trajera muchos mas (segun dijo) porque avia grandissimas librerias y valian apoco precio, si el virrey y nos elo estorvara: q temiendo se por ven-

5 The particular social situation during the Ming 明 dynasty (1368-1644) is well explained in Chen Baoliang 2014.

6 Even if the Christian missionaries were tolerated at the beginning, their presence in China was dependent on the Imperial authorization; in *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China*, translated in English as *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China and the Situation Thereof* (hereafter abbreviated as *Historia*), after a written request of Augustinians to stay in China to do their mission, it is said that: “Il Vicerè la lesse, & rispose, che ne darebbe aviso al Rè, come haveva detto lor prima, & che dove dimàdavano, ch’i frati restassero nel Regno à predicare, diceva non poter farlo senza còsenso, & liceza del consiglio reale” (The Viceroy read it and replied that he would inform the Emperor, as he said before, and about the request that the Friars could stay to preach inside the Kingdom, he couldn’t give an answer without the Imperial consensus and authorization; the English translation is made by the author) (*Historia* 1586, 211). In the early eighteenth century, China had altered her previously tolerant attitude to Christian missions, and in 1724 an Imperial edict decreed the expulsion of all the foreigners from China, but not the Jesuit scientists that were working at the court. For more information see Brockey 2008.

tura que por medio de ellos nose supiesen los secretos del Reyno (cosa que con gran cautela procuran en cubrir a los estrangeros) les invio a dezir, nolos comprasen. Lo qual despues nocumplio: Opor la razon ya dicha, o, quiza por olvidarsela. (Mendoza 1585,115 )<sup>7</sup>

and he would have brought a great number more, as he said, because they have found great libraries, and at a very cheap price, if the Viceroy had not forbidden it, who perhaps suspected that those books might be a means to know the secrets of their Kingdome, (which they try to keep hidden to strangers with great effort) and sent to tell him and his companions, that they must not buy any books, because they would give them the ones which they had wanted. If then, they did not observe the promise, maybe it was for the cause I said, or maybe, for oblivion.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Dà Míng huìdiǎn* 大明会典 (The Collected Statutes of the Ming Dynasty) printed in 1509, in fact, is already mentioned the adoption of restraining measures on doing business with foreigners, as is proved by the embargo, *hǎijìn* 海禁:

弘治十三年令、官民人等、擅造二桅以上违式大船、将带违禁货物、下海、入番国买卖、潜通海贼、同谋结聚、及为向导、劫掠良民者。正犯处以极刑。全家发边卫充军。<sup>9</sup> (*Da Ming huidian* 1587, juan 132, 98)

Embargo:

In the XIII year of *Hongzhi* Reign (1500) it was decreed that officials and citizens, without authorization create boats bigger than a two-masted ship, carry goods violating the ban, put out to sea and enter foreign countries in order to do business; who secretly do piracy, who conspire together, as well as be their guide, who loot loyal subjects. For the principal criminals, the sentence will be a death penalty, and their family will be banished to the frontiers.

In the *Dà Qīng huìdiǎn*, the jurisdictional canon compiled during the beginning of the Qing dynasty, it is possible to find edicts talking about punishment in the case of *weijìn* 违禁, violation of the ban regarding foreign merchandise, and in the *Qīndìng dà qīng huì diǎn zé lì* 钦定大清会典则例 (Imperially Endorsed, Collected Administrative Statutes and Precedents

7 The full original text in Spanish is available at [http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/fs1/object/display/bsb10178450\\_00005.html](http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/fs1/object/display/bsb10178450_00005.html) (2018-04-28).

8 All translations in this paper are made by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

9 《大明会典》卷一百三十二. The text is available at <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=706630&remap=gb> (2018-06-09).

of the Great Qing) written in the Qianlong period (1736-1796), were listed many goods that were prohibited to be sold to foreigners, in which also books of history were included.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the exportation of goods had always been regulated by the central authority which became stricter with the passage to the Qing Dynasty.

4. Despite the difficulties, the Jesuit missionaries were one of the most actively acquirers of Chinese books, in part for their personal necessity to get to know Chinese in order to improve the result of their religious mission, in part for the path taken as cultural mediators between Europe and China. Until the suppression of the Order in 1773, collections of Chinese books were carried on inside Jesuit Libraries not only in Europe, but also in China (Golvers 2010). Jesuits interest and agency on importing Chinese culture is particularly evident in their way of dealing with the translation of texts; the religious education received in College, and the humanistic philological studies led their interpretation of Chinese culture. In some cases, the reading of texts was carried out with a specific purpose, as is possible to see in some French Jesuits who adopted 'Figurism', a particular system of interpretation of Chinese texts, aiming to find in them traces of Christianity. For example, the 'Ykingnistes', as they were called by the Jesuit missionary Joseph-Marie Amiot (1718-1793), were a group of Jesuit missionaries, who regarded the *Yijing* 易经 (The Book of Changes) as a prophetic book which contained the mysteries of Christianity (Mungello 1989, 309-10).

The final receptors of this Imported Culture were 5) the readers inside the Church institutions, and 6) the European citizens of the *Respublica literaria*.

The Roman Church was interested in the Chinese books as proof and first source of their work in China, but also because books permitted an investigation into the territory in which the mission was carrying on, and consequently, to control, evaluate and act in order to change the strategies applied to the territory.

European intellectuals, on their own, were fascinated by Chinese culture and tried to find inspiration for their idea (e.g., Voltaire, Rousseau, Leibniz, and Condorcet are just a few of the *philosophes* who paid attention to the study of China history and thought).

It is possible to identify three steps (translation-reception-influence) in order to analyze how the agency of Chinese books conflicts and coincides with the agency of other actors in this trans-cultural circuit.

10 See *Qinding Da Qing huidian zeli*, juan 94, 《钦定大清会典则例》卷九十四, 礼部.

### 3 Agency in Translating: 'do ut des'

Praeco sum, seu relator, & non author doctrinae, quam palàm facio. Credo, & amo antiquitatem, ex quâ studiosè suffuso, & excerpo quae ad rem meam; imitatus in me ipso famosus illum senem Pùm

This is how Jesuits in 1687 translated the passage in the *Lunyu*<sup>11</sup> 述而不作, 信而好古, 竊比於我老彭. in which Confucius affirms that "I transmit, I do not create"<sup>12</sup> to indicate his role as spokesman of the past. But is it really possible to be a complete passive reader without interfering with the text? As Umberto Eco stated otherwise, the text is a 'lazy machine' that makes other people do part of its job (Eco 1979), giving an active role to the reader in the process of dealing with and interpreting texts. If also the statement of Confucius could create enough reasonable doubt about how it is possible, philologically speaking, to truly transmit and not change the texts of Chinese cultural heritage, then, in the case in which they imported books, transporting them from one cultural and linguistic context to another, changing the receptor reader and knowledge background, the doubt would become even more obvious: is it still possible to be a faithful transmitter and not a creator? If the reader changes, can the meaning and consequently the agency of the text still be the same? According to Derrida

à la notion de traduction, il faudra substituer une notion de transformation : transformation réglée d'une langue par une autre, d'un texte par un autre. (1972, 31)

In fact, it is more realistic to talk about transformation than translation, because in the case of importing books, the dealer is not sharing the same cultural heritage, and his interpretation is influenced by different factors and actors that cooperate in changing the perception of the books, a condition that is more evident in the case when dealing with the translation process where there is a religious order such as that of the Jesuits.

As we said earlier, behind their translation works there were, firstly, a strong ideological connotation, which influenced the choice of words and final result of the translation, and, secondly, they were driven by interest inside the Jesuit Order itself. That is why to the 'transformed' translation we can also suggest the implication of the adjective 'interested'.

11 See Meynard (2015, 245) for the complete Chinese text and its translation in Latin.

12 The complete translation of the passage *Lunyu* 7.1 can be consulted in the Italian version, provided by Attilio Andreini (2017, 7) (Trametto non creo: credo negli antichi, li venero e, nel far ciò, oso paragonarmi al Venerabile Peng) and the English translation of Burton Watson (2007, 48) (The Master said, A transmitter and not a maker, trusting in and loving antiquity, I venture to compare myself with our Old Peng).



The first attempts at translating Chinese books are those related to the study of the canonical books of Confucianism – *Daxue* 大学 (The Great Learning); *Zhongyong* 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean); *Lunyu* 论语 (The Analects); *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius) – that materialized at the end of the sixteenth century with the Jesuit Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), then Matteo Ricci with his lost translation – in 1595 he sent a copy of his translation of the *Four Books* to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Claudio Acquaviva, but, unfortunately, the manuscript has been lost (Standaert 2001, 863) –, and then arrived at the first team-work translation, such as that coordinated by the Portuguese Jesuit Inacio Da Costa in 1660-1662 with his group of four Jesuits (Prospero Intorcetta, Christian Herdtrich, François de Rougemont and Philippe Couplet): *Sapientia Sinica*, containing the Chinese-Latin bilingual translation of the *Daxue*, the first half of *Lunyu* and a four-page biography of Confucius. The project was followed by the translation of the *Zhongyong* supervised by Intorcetta and published as *Sinarum Scientia politico moralis*, also containing a more expanded *Vita Confucii*. Then, in 1687, Couplet, with the support of the King of France Louis XIV, published *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus, sive scientia Sinensis* (Confucius, The Philosopher of China, or the Chinese learning; abbreviated hereafter as *Sinarum Philosophus*), the first complete translation of *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, *Lunyu*, and *Vita Confucii* (Meynard 2015, 18).

Focusing on the edition of the *Sinarum Philosophus*, we can analyze how the text becomes a clear means of agency. In fact, the publication of this translation was generated by a particular political need of the Order: to achieve consensus on the evangelical strategy they had adopted in China; that is – in the process of evangelical immigration in a different culture – to reach forms of integration and compromise with other types of local worship. This attitude was subjected to great criticism and unleashed, inside the Roman Church, the Question of Rites: is it possible to tolerate cults if they prove to be antithetical to the Christian creed, such as rituals towards the personality of Confucius, and not be obliged to oppose them? The translation of the Confucian texts was to serve precisely to demonstrate how the thought of Confucius was not dissimilar to Christian ideology, and to justify the Jesuit tolerant politics. It is not by chance that in the *Sinarum Philosophus*, Confucius is clearly portrayed as a Christian *ante litteram*.<sup>13</sup>

13 The expression can be deduced by the following passage dedicated to the biography of Confucius: “virtutem sane fuisse Philosopho, non meram speciem fucumque virtutis. Quid? Quod nostris temporibus haud defuerint è Litteratorum ordine, qui vel amplexi jam Religionem Christianam, vel hujus integritate sanctitateque probe saltem perspecta, non dubitanter affirmarunt, sperari posse Philosophum sum, si quidem vixisset aetate nostra, primum fuisse futurum, qui ad Christi legem transivisset.” (the Philosopher had true virtue, and not a mere appearance, or mask, of virtue. Why? Because, in our present time, there is no lack of people among the literati who, either having already converted to Christianity, or at least having honestly understood its soundness and holiness, do not hesitate to affirm

Furthermore, the politic agenda inside the translation of Confucian texts was clearly made explicit affirming:

A careful reader will understand from all these things that the authority of this man will be greatly useful to missionaries, since the Chinese are still devoted to their Master and his books. It would be possible to use his authority to confirm the Christian truth, in the same way as in the past we saw the Apostle of the Nations [St Paul], using the authority of the Greek poets among the Athenians. (Meynard 2015, 613)

This statement summarized the 'propaganda' agency of the Order also in the reverse direction, from West to China, which consists in making the Christian message more appealing, translating – or better, transforming – it in combination with existing texts, terminologies and images from well-established and authoritative tradition to explain and spread their Christian belief.

A striking example is the case of *Guanyin* or *Avalokitesvara*, a Bodhisattva, belonging to the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism (Cheng 2000, 421). *Guanyin* translated in Chinese as 'the Lord who hear the sounds', the listener of prayers, is an intercessor full of compassion for all troubled beings whose image, entering in China, undergoes a process of feminization as early as the eighth century. The common iconography of *Guanyin* when Jesuits arrived in China was as a woman with a white dress, able to grant the grace of childbirth and so frequently portrayed with a baby next to her; because of this iconographic resemblance, often the cult for *Guanyin* was used by Jesuits as a metaphor of the Holy Mary, Mother of Christ.

However, there is a case in which the Jesuits themselves, in some way, became the object of ventriloquism.

Going back to the Chinese texts that were exported from China and arrived in Europe, in the University Library of Genoa,<sup>14</sup> which preserves the original Jesuit College Library, there is a section of books written in Chinese. In this collection there is a volume, catalogued in Latin as *Prayer to the Virgin Mary*;<sup>15</sup> but if you read the Chinese book, you find that it is a perfectly preserved printed version of *Gaowang Guanshiyin jing* (Sutra of the Great King Avalokitesvara), with no connection whatsoever to Christian belief. So, who is the dummy?

If, in part, the books were the victim of translation, understood as a combination of the Latin action of *tradedo*, being transported from the context of

that, if their Philosopher had lived until today, he would certainly be first to want to cross over to the Christian faith) (Meynard 2015, 607).

14 For more information on the College of the Jesuits in Genoa, see Cosentino 1982.

15 The annotation on the title was later removed on the book with a different calligraphy.

origin to a different one, and *transverto*, transforming the meaning of the text to meet receptors' needs, it is also true that the books themselves were the protagonists of a diffusion never conceived as possible in a continent totally alien to them, in a sort of almost fair exchange *do ut des*, giving to receive between puppet and puppeteer.

#### 4 Agency on Value, Mutability of Things in Recontextualization

With the transfer of the text from the context of export to the different one of import, its value and the following perception mutates.

The objects, in themselves, are constituted by some specific physical-material characteristics, which involve properties, functions, uses of objects, and end up constituting their identity; but at the same time, objects are also changing entities susceptible to redefinitions which means a "mutability of things in recontextualization".<sup>16</sup> So, in the case of Chinese books, how were they received in Europe?

As it had happened for other Chinese objects, once translated into the European collectors' hands, the majority of the books were 'westernized', changing their traditional Chinese bookbinding into a Western book format, with the addition of a hardcover and end sheet (realized sometime with marbled paper, not used in Europe until the middle of the seventeenth century, or watermarked paper);<sup>17</sup> a lot of Chinese books still preserved in European Libraries faced the problem of undergoing a western bookbinding that resulted in the loss of their original cover and first pages, with in some cases the consequent deletion of important information as to dating, publisher and title. In some cases, the books are made incomplete, because a single or few *juan* 卷 'scroll' or 'fascicle' – term used as a counting unit for Chinese books, corresponding in general to one chapter – were bounded as a distinct book, so only parts of the text have been transmitted to today.

Even if books were mutilated and changed, they still could acquire new meaning and in some way act on their readers.

And it is precisely this peculiar mutability of things in their social recontextualization that made researchers go beyond the idea of a mere static object, the puppet we mentioned at the beginning, and consider it as a living actor, whose biography it is necessary to study, because it was able to re-adapt to new contexts.

16 The concept "mutability of things in recontextualization", also used in the title of the paragraph, comes from Thomas (1991, 28).

17 To get an idea of the peculiarity modification of Chinese books in Western collections, see IFLA website (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions): *From China to Cambridge: modification of rare Chinese printed books within Cambridge College libraries*. URL <http://library.ifla.org/1692/1/088-richard-en.pdf> (2018-04-28).

In this sense, a clear example is the case of Chinese encyclopaedias collected in Europe: the *riyong leishu* 日用类书 (Encyclopaedias of daily use). These books were not used by scholars as an aid to study for the exams, but as a summary of practical knowledge for readers with a basic literacy. The encyclopaedias were full of pictures, and were produced with a large print run, characterized by the presence of numerous simplified characters and misprints.<sup>18</sup> Even the *riyong leishu* encyclopaedias that are still visible today in some European libraries show the same low quality press as the versions widely circulating in China at that time; but in that case the book's agency is changed drastically; from 'popular'<sup>19</sup> text, produced in large quantities in China appealing to non-elite readers, to elitist object once transferred in Europe. From the Westerners' point of view, the *Riyong leishu* became a source to know Chinese culture, even if it was not born as the product of the literate class, and it was more representative of *laobaixing* 老百姓, the average people, rather than intellectuals. In *China Illustrata*<sup>20</sup> published in Amsterdam in 1667 by Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), some pictures were copied from the encyclopaedias as the chapter on the history of characters. In the Ambrosian Library of Milan (one of the earliest public libraries in Europe, founded by Cardinal Federico Borromeo in 1609), is preserved as a treasure the fragment of just one page (in reality, two pages wrongly bounded together as one),<sup>21</sup> proving how the agency of imported books changes, redefining the value and the role of the text itself.

But what precisely was the Chinese imported culture that spread to Europe?

The summary list, based on surveys of preserved Chinese book collections in the Jesuit libraries that are still possible to consult today, basically contains Confucian texts, Buddhist texts, *Ben cao gang mu* 本草纲目 (Compendium of Materia medica), various encyclopaedic works as *Riyong leishu*, *Sancai tuhui* 三才图会 (Illustrated compendium of the Three Powers), astronomy books on observation of planets, constellations, on the eclipse phenomenon or calendar. Regarding the translated books, principally they are focused on Confucian texts, *Mai Jing* 脉经 (The Pulse Classic), discussion on *Yijing* 易经 (The Book of Changes), studies on the flora, *ars medica Sinensis*, and astronomy. In this list we did not consider the

18 For a complete description of the type of Encyclopedias in China, see Bauer 1966 and Sakai 2011.

19 For the definition of 'popular', see the debate in Brokaw (2007, 266-74), in which is analysed the question of the readers of *riyong leishu* encyclopedias.

20 The complete title is *China monumentis qua sacris qua profanis, nec non variis naturae et artis spectaculis, aliarumque rerum memorabilium argumentis illustrate*.

21 Milano, Ambrosiana, 12.S.Q.VIII.15/5.

books written in Chinese by the Jesuits, because these books are not representative of the Chinese culture, but a product of the missionaries' work. However, due note should be taken on this production and its presence in all the Jesuit libraries, which contained a Chinese books section; these books were widely circulated as well as greatly influenced the cultural and scientific debate in late Ming and early Qing China.<sup>22</sup>

## 5 Agency in Constructing the Chinese Image: the Influence of Books

The last stage of this analysis of the means of action of imported culture, is its influence.

Those books that are still visible today in the collections of many European libraries have not only been the subject of translation but with their very presence – or absence – have acted on the formation of the Chinese image in Europe.

First, books had a deep impact in portraying China to the West; the Chinese texts produced attraction, fascination, and contributed to create in European intellectuals' minds a certain idea of China, mysterious, ancient and wise.

Et puisque j'ai commencé de vous dire ingénument ce que je pense des livres canoniques & des caractères Chinois, j'ajouterai ce que je crois qu'on doit supposer comme une chose très certaine, savoir que les uns & les autres sont beaucoup plus anciens que les Chinois mêmes, & que ce sont des monumens fideles de la tradition lae plus ancienne que les Peres communs de toutes les nations ons laissées à leurs descendans, & que les Chinois ont conservé plus soigneusement que les autres. (Kortholt 1734,79)<sup>23</sup>

22 This is another type of 'agency', connected to the work of Jesuits in China and the circulation of Chinese books, but acting in the reverse direction of the one chosen as a case study for this article, so it will be not further analysed although the extreme importance of the phenomenon; there were many translations carried out under the control of the Jesuits from Western languages to Chinese, as the partial translation of the *tractatus* of Andrea Pozzo, *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, translated by Nian Xiyao 年希尧 under the guidance of Giuseppe Castiglione SJ (Corsi 2010, 93-100), or the production of books in geographical, astronomical field under the request of Chinese emperors (Golvers 2012).

23 The epistolary correspondence of Leibniz and Bouvet is collected in *Recueil de diverses pièces sur la philosophie, les mathématiques, l'histoire, etc., avec II lettres où il est traité de la philosophie et de la mission chinoise envoyées à Mr. de Leibnitz par le P. Bouvet, Jesuite à Pekin* (1734), Paris, BNF, Z-23579. The digitalized version is available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k110509c> (2018-04-28)

And since I have begun to frankly tell you what I think of the Chinese canonical books and Chinese characters, I would add what I believe should be granted as something very certain, that both the one and the other are much older than the Chinese themselves, and that they are the faithful monuments of the most ancient tradition, which the Fathers common to all the nations have left to their descendants, and which the Chinese have preserved more accurately than the others.

This is how the French Jesuit Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730) in a letter written in Beijing the Eighth of November, 1702, responded to the question about China that the German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) previously asked him.

Leibniz, interested in Chinese philosophy, in 1697 published *Novissima sinica, historiam nostri temporis illustratura*, on the basis of the information he acquired through his epistolary correspondence with Jesuits and the translations they procured to him. In this book's preface, he argued:

Quod si ita pergitur, vereor ne mox omni laude Sinensibus inferiores simus: quæ non ideo dico quod illis lucem novam invideam, cum gratuler potius; sed quod optandum sit vicissim nos discere, quæ magis adhuc in rem nostram essent, usum maxime Philofophiæ practicæ, & emendatiorem vivendi rationem, ut de aliis eorum artibus nunc nil dicam. Certe talis nostrarum rerum mihi videtur esse conditio, gliscentibus in immensum corruptelis, ut propemodum necessarium videatur Missionarios Sinensium ad no mitti, qui Theologiæ naturalis usum praxinque nos doceant, quemadmodum nos illis mittimus qui Theologiam eos doceant revelatam. Itaque credo, si quis sapiens, non formæ Dearum, sed excellentiæ populorum judex lectus esset, pomum aureum Sinensibus daturum esse (Leibniz 1699, 16-17)

But going on like this, I am afraid that soon we will be inferior to the Chinese in every field: certainly I do not say this because I envy them this new light - rather I rejoice for it - but because it will be better that We learn from Them those things that so far could be more advantageous for us, especially the use of Practical Philosophy and a more honest kind of life, not to mention now their other arts. To my opinion, is it clear that our condition, with corruption that is spreading immeasurably, is such as it's almost necessary sending Chinese missionaries to us, to teach us the use and practice of Natural Theology, as we send them our Missionaries to teach the Theology of Revelation. Therefore, I believe that, if some wise man had been chosen capable of judging not the beauty of the Goddesses but the excellence of the peoples, they would give the Golden Apple to the Chinese.

Leibniz can be interpreted as the biggest success of Jesuits agency on European intellectuals, because through the imported Chinese culture he saw in this philosophy a sort of Platonic-Christian conception of the universe.

The information on Chinese culture was a common reference among the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, whose aim was to reform Europe; is it possible to say that China, indirectly, had contributed to the reconstruction of the Western world.

In fact, the influence of Chinese literature on Enlightenment philosophers had also an unexpected outcome. The image of China that transpired from the imported culture was a land of harmony and the model of the perfect state, admired as an inspirational country while Europe was criticized instead (Shi 2007, 93-111).

Another influence of the imported Chinese culture was the awareness of the existence of an ancient developed country, in which studies on philosophy, medicine and astrology were carried on for a long time, and the books that arrived in Europe were concrete proof of it. Such information was transformed into the instrument, for some intellectuals, to confute the Jesuit thesis of a worldwide shared religious belief, negating the *consensus gentium* on the existence of God. China became the myth of a society free from religious imposition, without the rooting of Church inside the power institutions, and was used as the stimulus to pursue atheistic beliefs, with a completely different result in comparison to how Jesuits intended to manipulate Chinese culture.

To sum up, analyzing the actors' agency on the imported Chinese culture, we can say that the intention of Jesuits to use books and culture as a tool to obtain Christian conversion in China, and contemporary with this, to get consensus for their missions from European readers, did not obtain the targeted result.

From one side, after the questions of rites arrived to China, provoking the response of the *Kangxi* Emperor 康熙 (1654-1722) and his interdiction of missions in China without Imperial authorization,<sup>24</sup> the dream to see a Christian China became more unrealistic than ever. From the other side, the papal bull *Ex illa die*,<sup>25</sup> issued by Clement XI in 1715 against the accommodation policy inspired by Ricci, decreed the failure of their strategies and later, the complete end of the Order in 1773.

The Catholic Church, for its part, between the late Seventeenth and twentieth century, had tried to bypass the Jesuits intermediation and the

24 The ban on Christianity within China was transformed into an effective law by his successor, the Emperor Yongzheng 雍正 (1678-1735), in 1724.

25 Full title: *Confirmatio, et innovatio constitutionis incipientis: Ex illa die: a Clemente Papa XI*. It is possible to consult the complete text at [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_FRwb-c9xWYHQc](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_FRwb-c9xWYHQc).

patronage systems of the Crowns of Portugal and Spain over the Far East missions. The papal Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide), based in Rome, sent its missionaries through pathways offered by different rival powers, such as France or Britain (Menegon 2017, 27). As a result, the intention of the Church to restore its direct power of action in China failed with the total closure of China to Western religion.

It seems that just two actors emerged as the winner of these conflicts: the Chinese imported books and its new readers. Although mutilated, changed and translated, books still had the power to become part of a history to which they didn't originally belong, entering the libraries of European intellectuals who collected and looked at them.

If we consider also the censorship that operated in the choice of which books needed to be exported, and which not, then a question arises: who influenced the choice of books, which to send overseas and which not to? The texts in Europe today are the result of the independent choice of the Jesuits, addressed exclusively to the objective of their mission, even at the cost of subterfuge - and therefore an even more calculated and important choice - or are they the result of another agent? On the basis of the texts, the Chinese image was formed in the common European imagination, so understanding what and who influenced the choice of the Imported culture is a question of great interest.

## **6 Conclusion**

Pondering the 'agency' of a text implies different problems, especially if it is an imported text that needs to be interpreted; where does the agency reside, in the reader, in his society, or in the object itself? The relationship between the actors is so deeply bound, that a separation does not seem possible, in an infinite game of ventriloquism between them.

If, moreover, the early reader is a Jesuit missionary, the problem becomes even more complex: for a strictly structured religious order as the Society of Jesus, that controlled every movement of its members, everything must proceed in response to the norms of the institution and acting in accord with it. A control that starts from the formation of its members, based on the *Ratio Studiorum* (1599),<sup>26</sup> the text dedicated to the structure and content of the Jesuit educational programme, and takes concrete form with the efficient long-distance network connecting all the Assistances and

26 On this topic see Donohue 1936.



Provinces of the Society with the Generalate Archive, located at Rome,<sup>27</sup> that collected all the information from abroad as in the *Litterae annuae*. Therefore, also the reading of Chinese texts was moved by a particular 'control'. Not without reason, the translated and disseminated Chinese texts was mostly the result of a team work, and not of a single independent author, supervised and confirmed by the Father General. Behind the reading of the texts was hidden a strong 'agency', intended as an intention to act on the texts in order to obtain a precise result: support for their mission in China.

However, the corresponding results did not fit in with the anticipated action-effect chain: the information on Chinese culture, language and philosophy, its influence in the secular audience, caused some ostracism in the religious environment.

It seems that the willingness of the creator of the transformed text is not enough to control the effective impact, as if the books by themselves, despite having been translated, interpreted and modified, have an autonomous life regardless of the intention of its producer, by acting on their own.

We have described the different actors and how they interacted in this process of importing Chinese texts in Europe; many interests move the pawns on this chessboard and the consequences that this game causes are also various.

It would be interesting to carry forward further investigation on who was the principal leader in the choice of books and the motivation behind which one to import or not. In this regard, it will be necessary not only to do a reconstruction of the Chinese book collections in the libraries between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but also to do a reconstruction in 'negative', that highlights which books were not selected and why.

Nowadays, China is trying to construct outside its border a national reputation, through different projects (e.g. establishing more Confucius Institutes<sup>28</sup> abroad and promoting cultural/economic international programmes, as *One Belt One Road*,<sup>29</sup> just to name a few). The aim behind these investments is to build outside of China, an own image of China itself,

27 ARSI, (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu), the Archives of the General Government of the Society of Jesus.

28 The Confucius Institute, *Kongzi xueyuan* 孔子学院, is a non-profit public educational organization affiliated with a department of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, Hanban 汉办, whose aim is to promote the learning of Chinese language and culture, establishing the Institute's schools and facilitating cultural exchanges. See Paradise 2009, 647-69.

29 *Yi dai yi lu* 一带一路; The 'One Belt, One Road' concept was first presented during Xi Jinping's visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013; the aim of this project is "to connect China, Asia and Europe in terms of trade and economic interaction via a land route ('the belt') as well as a maritime route ('the road')" (Brødsgaard, Koen 2017).

without any foreign (mis)interpretation or interference. Is it possible that at the end of Ming and beginning of Qing dynasty, there was already a willingness to build a Chinese cultural image outside the borders, using books as tools to control what foreigners could know about China and what not?

Studying the history of Chinese books and documents preserved in Europe can help us reconstruct the complicated policy and strategies which moved this trans-cultural process of imported culture, looking from both sides.

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## **Doing Things with Metaphors in Contemporary China**

### **Analysing the Use of Creative Metaphors in the Discourse on the Chinese Dream**

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**Abstract** The 'Chinese dream' sums up China's goals in the twenty-first century. Since its first appearance in 2012, the concept of the Chinese dream has been the core of Xi Jinping's "new thoughts, new ideas and new arguments". At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China it was elevated as one of the guiding principles of 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era', which represents the latest effort towards the Sinicization of Marxism. This paper aims at casting light on whether the discourse on the Chinese dream carries new contents or is based on old concepts 'camouflaged' as new. To do so, it will analyse the ideological implications of those 'creative metaphors' that compose the discursive mosaic of the Chinese dream as used by Xi Jinping in his political speeches. Drawing on the studies on conceptual metaphors and frame analysis, this study analyses those metaphorical expressions that are purposely outlined in the transcription of the speeches with the aim of signaling the originality of "Xi's language style". The final aim is to provide insight into what these 'creative metaphors' are doing in contemporary China. Results show that 'creative metaphors' in the discourse on the Chinese dream are meant to set the agenda on revitalising morality within the Party as well as 'unifying' values in today's Chinese society, and most of them are far from being new in Chinese political discourse.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Background: Xi Jinping's Power and His Political Communication. – 3 Why Metaphors Matter: Metaphors as Framing Devices. – 4 Case Studies and Method. – 5 Creative Metaphors in the Political Speeches of Xi Jinping: Framing Values. – 5.1 Problem Definitions and Evaluations. – 5.2 Remedies. – 6 Conclusion: the Ideological Implications of Xi Jinping's Use of Creative Metaphors.

**Keywords** Chinese dream. Xi Jinping. Chinese official discourse. Frame analysis. Metaphors.

## 1 Introduction

The concept of *Zhōngguó mèng* 中国梦 ‘Chinese dream’ – or ‘China dream’<sup>1</sup> – sums up the Party-state’s goal for China in the twenty-first century, while signaling a departure from previous political slogans and concepts: the concept of the Chinese dream not only represents the last manifestation of *yǔ shí jù jìn* 与时俱进 ‘keep abreast of the time’ by the Chinese political discourse (Chen Rudong 2017), but also offers a very optimistic image for the future of the country (Scarpari 2015, Lavagnino 2017).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the current generation of Chinese leaders led by Xi Jinping chose the metaphor of the dream as a novel way to revitalize an old goal pursued by China since Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), i.e. *Zhōnghuá mínzú wěidà fùxīng* 中华民族伟大复兴 the ‘great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’.<sup>3</sup>

In the big metaphorical “metanarrative” (Fasulo 2016, 13) of the Chinese dream, other metaphors have been put forward by Xi to shape China’s past, frame the present and project the nation towards its future. This paper concerns the use of creative metaphors as a means of setting the agenda, defining issues and framing social reality in today’s China. From this perspective, metaphors have the potential of ‘doing things’, echoing Schoenhals’ (1992) seminal work, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies*. In his study, the Swedish scholar analyzes *tífǎ* 提法 (formalized political expressions) as “perlocutionary acts” (Schoenhals 1992, 5) and therefore as a form of power in China. By doing so, Schoenhals sheds light on the role of language in the process of ideological creation and imposition.

This paper follows in the footsteps of Schoenhals’s (1992) study and attempts at contributing to the research on actions performed by linguistic acts as constitutive of ‘agency in and of language’ (Duranti 2004) in

1 The official translations opt for ‘Chinese dream’ in order to provide the nuance that this is a goal pursued by the Chinese people rather than by the Party-state alone. However, ‘Chinese dream’ sounds like an imitation of the ‘American dream’, in Chinese *Měiguó mèng* 美国梦. This study decides upon ‘Chinese dream’, because it agrees with Fumian (2013) in seeing the Chinese dream as an attempt to borrow “the language of the other superpower in order to look similar and at the same time different to its new superpartner”.

2 This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Doctoral Seminar *Inerzia e Solerzia del Testo* (5-6 December 2017, Ca’ Foscari University, Venice). I would like to thank Prof. Patrick Heinrich for his observations and suggestions. Special thanks also to Prof. Fiorenzo Lafirenza, Prof. Maurizio Scarpari, Prof. Pohl Karl-Heinz, Prof. Sean Golden, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their comments on the first draft of the paper.

3 As Yan Xuetong – cited in Callahan (2014) – explains, “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” has been employed by previous Chinese leaders in order to mark the beginning of a new historical era. However, Xi Jinping’s concept of rejuvenation is different in that he points out people can achieve this goal within their lifetime.

Chinese official discourse. Drawing upon the notion of frames (Goffman 1974) and conceptual metaphors (Lakoff, Johnson 2003), this study will analyze the use of 'creative metaphors' in contemporary Chinese political discourse and their ideological implications in today's China. In other words, the aim of this research is to examine the use of metaphors deemed as 'new' and that are meant to underpin the discourse on national rejuvenation for 'a new era'. The final objective is to cast light on whether they convey new thoughts or are merely another way of "manipulating the form rather than the content of discourse" (Schoenhals 1992, 21).

## 2 Background: Xi Jinping's Power and His Political Communication

In October 2017 *Xí Jìnpíng xīn shídài Zhōngguó tè sè shèhuì zhǔyì sīxiǎng* 习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era', abbreviated as *Xí Jìnpíng sīxiǎng* 习近平思想 'Xi Jinping Thought', was officially enshrined in the Pantheon of Chinese political ideology. One year before, in October 2016, Xi was elevated to *héxīn* 核心 the 'core'<sup>4</sup> of the collective leadership and, soon after putting forward his 'thought', Xi has been labelled *lǐngxiù* 领袖 'leader', which

means more than just a leader. It is often bestowed to a leader who enjoys the highest prestige, who is the most capable and who is widely recognized by the entire Party. (Bai Tiantian 2018)

Much has been written about the political power acquired by Xi Jinping due to his ideological contribution entering into the Party's Constitution, alongside Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, 'The important thought of the Three Represents' and the 'Scientific Outlook on Development' (Miranda 2017; Buzzetti, Spalletta 2017; Wo-Lap Lam 2017). Before Xi, only Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping had their names written in the Party's constitution, and only the Great Helmsman saw his 'thought' written in the constitution while he was still in power. Therefore, 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' marks a departure from the previous political procedure and Xi Jinping stands out for the great accumulation of power in his hands.

This power paves the way for Xi to stay in office indefinitely. The Central Committee of the CPC asked for an amendment of the country's constitu-

4 Concretely speaking, being a core leader does not imply anything. Symbolically, however, it has much importance, at least within the Party. Xi Jinping's predecessor, Hu Jintao, did not enjoy the same prestigious status.



tion, which was to remove the limit of serving a maximum of two terms (Xinhua 2018a) and that was set up in 1982. Therefore, it is likely that Xi will keep his leading role even after 2023, the year settled on for the end of his mandate.

This status of *'primus super pares'* – as opposed to *'primus inter pares'* – was achieved through five years of strong anti-corruption and 'mass line' campaigns, a massive concentration of power held over the party, the state and the military fields, enforcement of discipline among Party's members at all levels, as well as a revival of ideological control over the academia, the communications media and the social media. All this has been accompanied by populist propaganda work focusing on Xi Jinping's skills in political communication, aiming at highlighting Xi Jinping's ability to shape China's *guójiā xíngxiàng* 国家形象 'national image' (Li Weihong 2017, 40).

Xi Jinping's speeches delivered both at home and abroad are described as having a *jí qiáng de huà yǔ lì* 极强的话语力 'strong discursive force' (Liu Jin 2013, 569) and have been the object of many newspaper articles, academic papers as well as books.<sup>5</sup> *Xí shì yǔ yán* 习式语言 'Xi's language style' has been described as having a *yōuliáng wénfēng* 优良文风 'refined speech style' (Ma Zhong, Li Shuanggen 2014), a *Zhōngguó wèi* 中国味 'Chinese taste' (Dong Weiwu, Cheng Yin 2014, 10) as well as being *kǒuyǔ huà, jiēdì qì* 口语化、接地气 'colloquial and down-to-earth' (Zhang Haifa, Hu Zhongbing 2014) and, therefore, a *fànběn* 范本 'model' for officials and cadres at all levels (Yao Lijun, Li Chunmei 2016).

Entire volumes have been dedicated to gathering the rhetorical devices most used by Xi. Two volumes edited by *Renmin ribao pinglun bu* are devoted to Xi Jinping's literary references (2015; 2018a) and another to anecdotes (2017). For this latter volume, a version has also been published for kids (2018b).

Moreover, Chen Xixi (2014) compiled twenty-five metaphors, twenty popular sayings and seventy quotations from the Chinese classical literature used by Xi in speeches delivered in the aftermath of the eighteenth Party's National Congress until May 2014 in both domestic and international contexts. Surfing the wave of the success of this book, as stated in the editorial notes (Liu Zhihui 2017, 1), Liu Zhihui collected twenty metaphors, nineteen popular sayings and twenty quotations from Chinese classics, employed by Xi in those speeches dealing with *guófáng* 国防 'national defense' and *jūnduì* 军队 'armed forces'. In addition to these

5 It is worth noting that in the cross hairs of the Party's propaganda are not merely the so-called popular masses, but also the academia. As a matter of fact, the study of Xi Jinping's speeches has been a well-founded field of research since 2013 (Huang 2014) and continues to be a pillar of propaganda work even after the nineteenth Party Congress with the creation, in universities, of special research centers devoted to Xi Jinping Thought (Bandurski 2017).

books, drawing upon the *chéngyǔ* 成语 – *píngyǔjìn rén* 平易近人 ‘plain and simple’ – in the title of Chen Xixi (2014) and Liu Zhihui (2017), Xinhua dedicates a section of its website to Xi Jinping’s language and rhetorical devices, including metaphors, calling it *píngyǔ jìn rén* 评语近人 ‘comments close to people’. For instance, just before the *liǎnghuì* 两会 ‘two sessions’ held in March 2018 – National People’s Congress and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference – the news agency Xinhua had published an article collecting the metaphors employed by Xi in his speeches at the ‘two sessions’ that had been held over the past five years (Xinhua 2018b). The same metaphors are then translated into English and arranged in a colourful slide-show by *China Daily*, in its section called “Xi’s Moments” (*China Daily* 2018).

The use of metaphors is not limited to domestic politics but involves China’s foreign policy as well. Many metaphors have been put forward to shape the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): an editorial by *People’s Daily* selects ten metaphors used by Xi to outline the principles guiding the project (Renmin wang 2017).

In conclusion, Xi Jinping’s political communication has been defined as a *xīn de guānhuà* 新的官话 ‘new official language’ in contrast to the *kōnghuà*, *tàohuà*, *fèihuà* 空话、套话、废话 ‘empty talks, formulaic language and superfluous words’ that characterize the old kind of official language (Gao Shan 2015). In other words, it seems that Xi Jinping is closing the rift between ‘ganbunese’ and ‘baixingese’, using Thøgersen’s (2006) labels for political language and the code spoken by common people respectively. The rift between official language and the one of everyday life is by no means a feature of the Chinese context, since it can be found all over the world. What is interesting here is that Xi’s ‘new’ kind of political communication is deemed to be the key index of Xi Jinping’s *xīn sīxiǎng*, *xīn guāndiǎn*, *xīn lùnduàn* 新思想、新观点、新论断 ‘new thoughts, new ideas, new arguments’ (Peng Longfu 2015). The great importance attached to these publications focusing on Xi Jinping’s communication skills or gathering of his speeches was upheld by the fact that all these books and volumes occupied the shelves of many bookstores in Beijing for the nineteenth Party’s National Congress held in October 2017 (Wang Zhen 2017).

### 3 Why Metaphors Matter: Metaphors as Framing Devices

Metaphors are a hub where many fields of research cross with each other: many authors in the fields of philosophy, rhetoric, linguistics, aesthetics, semiotics, psychology, etc. have written about metaphors. In recent years, a new wave of interest in metaphors has arisen especially in the aftermath of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff, Johnson 2003), whose basic claims can be summed up as follows: a) the pervasiveness of metaphors

in human language and thoughts; b) the cognitive nature of metaphors, i.e. metaphors structure our thoughts, helping us grasp abstract matters by means of familiar and accessible concepts based on bodily experience. Metaphors are therefore defined as the interaction between two conceptual domains. That is, an object, an event or an issue – the “target domain” in Lakoff and Johnson and the “tenor” in Richards (1936)<sup>6</sup> – is another object, event, or issue – the “source domain” (Lakoff, Johnson) and the “vehicle” (Richards).

Setting aside the debate on the cognitive function of metaphors, what this paper is interested in is the pragmatic view on metaphors, that is how metaphors “achieve particular communication goals” (Charteris-Black 2004, 247). In other words, the focus is on how metaphors can do things in social and political reality.

Metaphors imply not only a semantic mapping between the two entities, but also evaluative connotations attached to the tenor – the “direct application” in Ottati et al. (2013, 189) and the *xiūcí gōngnéng* 修辞功能 ‘rhetorical function’ in Chen Rudong (2014, 195). In other words, vehicles carrying positive connotations raise positive evaluations of the tenor; whereas negative vehicles yield the opposite effect. So, for instance, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when human beings were labelled as animals, they were also treated accordingly. As Lu Xing explains:

by using terms, such as ‘parasites’, ‘blood suckers’, ‘vermin’, etc., China’s class enemies were treated as less than human, and the extreme measures taken against them were deemed morally justified. (2004, 69)

However, it is worth pointing out that sometimes the ‘direct effect’ is not so ‘direct’:

direct application does not necessarily produce an effect on attitudes toward the communication target that is congruent with the overall valence of the metaphor source (vehicle). (Ottati et al. 2013, 189)

It is possible that only some of the features of the vehicle are attached to the tenor. To explain this, Ottati et al. (2013) provide the example of the metaphor “government is a baby” (190) claimed by the American President Reagan. In this metaphor, only the negative features of babies are attributed to the government, even though the general evaluation of babies is positive.

A second important implication is that metaphors foreground some

6 Richards’ view on metaphors and the metaphorical nature of thought is linked to his understanding of cognitive processes, which allow to refer to a category or a class by moving from a set of features of an individual and specific phenomenon.

features of a perceived reality, obscuring others. This is called the “highlighting and hiding” in Lakoff and Johnson (2003, 22-5) and the “selective processing” in Ottati et al. (2013, 190-2). This principle was applied to political communication by Edelman even before the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, in his oft-cited passage:

each metaphor intensifies selected perceptions and ignores others, thereby helping one to concentrate upon desired consequences of favored public policies and helping one to ignore their unwanted, unthinkable, or irrelevant premises and aftermaths. Each metaphor can be a subtle way of highlighting what one wants to believe and avoiding what one does not wish to face. (Edelman 1971, 67)

In line with the Metaphorical Framing Model proposed by Ottati et al. (2003) – though never quoting any of Ottati’s works – Burgers et al. (2016) offer an integration of the literature on figurative language from the field of cognitive linguistics with the communication-scientific literature on framing. The authors rightly point out that, by considering the conceptual nature of figurative language, metaphors fulfil one or more of the important functions of framing in communication as distinguished by Entman (1993). Indeed, drawing on Goffman’s (1974) notion of frame, Entman suggests that

to frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described. (Entman 1993, 52; emphasis in the original)

Commenting on frame analysis conducted by some scholars in the aftermath of Entman’s contribution, Reese (2007) replies that many works that label their approaches as frame analysis on media texts are actually content analysis, overlooking that “it is precisely *the way* that certain attributes come to be associated with particular issues that should concern framing analysis” (Reese 2007, 152; emphasis in the original). In response to this, the present paper, in agreement with Burgers et al. (2016), sees metaphors as framing devices<sup>7</sup> and suggests that the analysis of figurative language can help to shed light on the way that some features are

<sup>7</sup> Burgers et al. (2016) suggest that metaphors are both framing and reasoning devices. However, in light of the definition of frames and framing in the literature, such as the one above provided by Entman, it is clear that the notion of frame contains in itself the nuance of reasoning. Therefore, Burgers et al. (2006), while being right in integrating the two approaches, seem to overlook the role of frames in discourse.

attached to specific events and issues. In particular, the present paper seeks to delve into the ideological implications of the creative metaphors used by Xi Jinping in the context of his speeches delivered at home that apparently manifest Xi Jinping's new political communication.

#### 4 Case Studies and Method

The data to be analysed is a corpus of Xi Jinping's political speeches collected in the volumes *Xí Jìnpíng tán zhìguó lǐ zhèng* 习近平谈治国理政 *The Governance of China* (Xi Jinping 2014a, 2014b) and *Xí Jìnpíng tán zhìguó lǐ zhèng dì èr juǎn* 习近平谈治国理政第二卷 *The Governance of China II* (Xi Jinping 2017a, 2017b).<sup>8</sup> The former volume gathers Xi's talks and writings addressed between 15 November 2012 and 13 June 2014, while the latter those from August 2014 to September 2017. Among all the speeches collected in these two volumes, this study focuses on those contained in the chapters on "Socialism with Chinese characteristics", "The Chinese dream" and "Culturally advanced China" in *The Governance of China* (Xi Jinping 2014b), and "Socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Chinese dream" and "Cultural confidence" in *The Governance of China II* (Xi Jinping 2017b).

The choice of focusing on the talks and writings contained in these chapters has been made for two reasons. The first one concerns the concept of the Chinese dream and the structures of the two volumes. Indeed, while in the first volume, this concept was treated separately from the political ideology defined as Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the second volume (Xi Jinping 2017b) it was reframed and linked to the political ideology that guides the country. This is the reason why both chapters in the first volume were included for the analysis of the use of creative metaphors in relation to the discourse on the Chinese dream.

The second reason is tightly bound to the role that Chinese culture has acquired in contemporary China since Xi took the reins of the Party and the Country (Scarpari 2015, Ambrogio 2017). The key part played by traditional culture in the discourse on the Chinese dream is clear from the title of the chapter devoted to Chinese culture. Indeed, the title *Jiànshè shèhuì zhǔyì wénhuà qiángguó* 建设社会主义文化强国 (Building a Strong Socialist Cultural Nation) (Xi Jinping 2014a, 155) recalls the need to enhance the cultural soft power of the country as a must for realizing the dream of a 'strong nation'. In the work report pronounced in October on the occasion of the nineteenth Party Congress, Xi once again emphasizes the tight bond

8 For the English translations, the official translations in Xi Jinping (2014b, 2017b) will be used including also the title of these two volumes. When the source of the English translation is not indicated, translations are by the Author.

between what is defined as the fourth self-confidence,<sup>9</sup> i.e. *wénhuà zìxìn* 文化自信 'cultural confidence', and the realization of the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation':

文化兴国运兴，文化强民族强。没有高度的文化自信，没有文化的繁荣兴盛，就没有中华民族伟大复兴。（Xi Jinping 2017c）

Our country will thrive only if our culture thrives, and our nation will be strong only if our culture is strong. Without full confidence in our culture, without a rich and prosperous culture, the Chinese nation will not be able to rejuvenate itself.

Therefore, it could be argued that the discourse on revitalizing the role of culture in China is of particular importance within the metanarrative on the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Based on this consideration, this study takes the talks and writings contained in the above-mentioned chapters as case studies for the analysis of how creative metaphors in the discourse on the Chinese dream are ideologically creative.

Before commenting on the methodology, it is worth noting that the speeches and writings included in these chapters are mainly delivered in domestic contexts but are not limited to a single and specific audience. This has two implications: first, the Chinese dream works as a metanarrative mainly for the domestic context. Indeed, although Xi Jinping has promoted international versions of the Chinese dream, such as an *Yàzhōu mèng* 亚洲梦 'Asian dream', a *Yàtài mèng* 亚太梦 'Asia-Pacific dream' as well as a *shìjiè mèng* 世界梦 'World dream', the Chinese discourse abroad is mainly dominated by the one on the *yīdài yīlù* 一带一路 'One Belt, One Road' – recently renamed 'Belt and Road Initiative' –, which nonetheless share many common ideological assumptions with the discourse on the Chinese dream held at home. Second, the fact of not having a specific audience for the speeches dealing with the Chinese dream underpins the role of the discourse on the Chinese dream as a metanarrative, functioning for both the Party and Chinese civil society.

Regarding the method, in general, for the individuation of both conventional and creative metaphors, the criterion of incongruity is useful (Lu, Ahrens 2008). That is, the incongruity between the literal sense of an expression and the context when it occurs guides the individuation of metaphorical expressions. This criterion can be applied for both conventional and creative metaphors, i.e. respectively those that are no longer

9 Initially, there were three 'confidences' – *dàolù zìxìn* 道路自信 (confidence in our road), *lilùn zìxìn* 理论自信 (confidence in our theories) and *zhìdù zìxìn* 制度自信 (confidence in our institutions). The fourth confidence was added later by Xi (Feng Pengzhi 2016).

perceived as metaphorical expressions and those metaphors that require more mental processing to be understood (Goatly 2007, 22). Specifically, for creative metaphors, Müller (2005) distinguishes six strategies for using them in political speeches and, among these strategies, “make the audience aware of a metaphor” (59) by markers and hedges is the one chosen in this paper for the individuation of Xi Jinping’s creative metaphors. Indeed, in the original texts creative metaphors are usually closed by inverted commas to highlight their originality. The present research aims at pointing out whether these expressions can be considered to be original. To do so, the phase of analysis consists of three steps: 1) classifying metaphors into cognitive frames as their source domains; 2) understanding whether the metaphors can be considered as new or not; 3) pinpointing their discursive function by placing them in relation to the wider discursive landscape shaped by the goal of realizing the Chinese dream.

## 5 Creative Metaphors in the Political Speeches of Xi Jinping: Framing Values

In all the speeches analysed, a total amount of twenty-two creative metaphors have been found. Although these metaphors are employed in different contexts, there is a common thread linking all of them, except for one. This common thread is the goal of setting the agenda on the need to revitalize the role of political ideology and morality among the members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and ‘unifying’ values in Chinese society. Only the expression *niúbízi* 牛鼻子 (Xi Jinping 2017a, 23) literally meaning ‘the nose of an ox’ is used in relation to the necessity of attending to general plans while solving crucial specific problems. Whereas all the other metaphors are meant to stress the need for solid moral foundations shared by the various parts of the Chinese society.

Nonetheless, these metaphors pursue this goal in different ways. For the analysis, it is useful to draw upon the framing functions pointed out by Entman (1993): problem definitions, causal interpretations, evaluations and remedies. Problem definitions and evaluations are treated together, because metaphors themselves carry evaluations, while causal interpretations are skipped by Xi’s use of creative metaphors. In the following pages representative examples are illustrated and explained.

### 5.1 Problem Definitions and Evaluations

Given the role of boosting common values through these creative metaphors, it is not surprising that many of them belong to metaphorical as-

sociations that structure the discourse on the ongoing anti-corruption campaign. In their study on a corpus of twenty-one official documents, including some of Xi's speeches, party statements and newspaper reports, Jing-Schmidt and Peng (2017) identify four main conceptual metaphors framing the discourse on corruption under Xi Jinping. These are: 'corruption is disease', 'corruption is vermin', 'corruption is a weed' and 'corruption is slovenly'. No one of these metaphors is new in Chinese political discourse. All of them can be trace back to the Maoist era.<sup>10</sup> Many creative metaphors individuated in Xi Jinping's speeches belong to these metaphorical associations. For instance, starting with the most famous catch phrase in Xi's anticorruption discourse, i.e. *lǎohǔ cāngyíng yīqǐ dǎ* 老虎苍蝇一起打 'catching both tigers and flies', the metaphors *lǎohǔ* 老虎 'tigers' and *cāngyíng* 苍蝇 'flies', for corrupt powerful officials and corrupt local cadres respectively, belong to 'corruption is vermin'. Animals in general carried negative connotations in Chinese official discourse during the Mao years (Link 2013, 269) and some of them still do as is the case of tigers and flies. In particular, the metaphor of 'tigers' in the discourse on anticorruption in China is nothing new: for the two anticorruption movements known as Three-Anti Campaign and Five-Anti Campaign launched in 1951, those accused of corruption were called 'tigers' (Lu 2017, 194).

In addition, three creative metaphors belong to the domain of disease: *quē gài* 缺钙 'lack of calcium'; *ruǎngǔ bìng* 软骨病 'osteomalacia' and *jī wú lì* 肌无力 'myasthenia'. For the disease metaphors, the expressions 'lack of calcium' and 'osteomalacia' were indeed used by Xi for the first time in relation to party members in his speech at the first group study session of the Political Bureau of the eighteenth CPC Central Committee:

对马克思主义的信仰,对社会主义和共产主义的信念,是共产党人的政治灵魂,是共产党人经受住任何考验的精神支柱。形象地说,理想信念就是共产党人精神上的'钙',没有理想信念,理想信念不坚定,精神上就会'缺钙'就会得'软骨病' (Xi Jinping 2014a, 15)

Belief in Marxism and faith in socialism and communism are the political soul of communists, and the spiritual pillar enabling them to withstand all tests. Put figuratively, the ideals and convictions of Communists are the 'marrow' of their faith. Without, or with weak, ideals or convictions, they would be 'deprived of their marrow' and suffer from 'osteomalacia'.

As Jing-Schmidt and Peng (2017) point out, the disease metaphor lies on the well-established metaphor of the body politics, according to which

<sup>10</sup> See Jing-Schmidt and Peng (2017, 12) for the explanation of the Maoist origin of the metaphor 'corruption is disease'; Lu (2017, 193-8) for Maoist legacy in Xi Jinping's rhetoric; Link (2013) for the use of health (254) and animal metaphors (269).



'an institution is a human body'. This metaphor helps to conceive state institutions and political parties as one single body. The metaphor of the body politics is by no means Chinese specific – Musolff (2004) states for the political discourse in Europe that it has “a long tradition in political discourse and thought” (83). To prove the persistence of the body politics in Chinese discourse, in the excerpt above, besides the metaphorical expressions marked by inverted commas, also *línghún* 灵魂 ‘soul’ belongs to the same domain stressing the spiritual dimension of this body politics.

The disease metaphor in its use of framing the need for reaffirming values is not only addressed to party’s members, but also to other parts of the society. Indeed, the expression ‘lack of calcium’ appears again in Xi’s speech addressed to students on the anniversary of the May Fourth Movement (Xi Jinping 2014a, 50). In addition, *jī wú lì* 肌无力 ‘myasthenia’, belonging to the disease domain too, is employed to emphasize the ‘Chinese characteristics’ that social sciences and philosophy need to have. In his speech at the Seminar on Philosophy and Social Sciences held on 17 May 2016, Xi Jinping stressed the need for academia to “put forward subjective, original theories and views on the basis of studying Chinese conditions, and structure disciplinary, academic and discourse system with our own features” (Xi Jinping 2017b, 370). Being ‘subjective’ and ‘original’ here stands for foreign theories, especially European or America. In other words, it is less a matter of originality, and more the need to abide by those ‘Chinese characteristics’ defined by the Party-state. The discourse on ‘Chinese characteristics’ for the academia and intellectuals corresponds to the other side of the coin, which sees the war against ‘western values’ worsening under Xi Jinping. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the disease metaphors, specified in the expression ‘myasthenia’, are used in relation to the need for ‘innovative theories’, or better said, theories with ‘Chinese characteristics’, in the academia:

如果不能及时研究、提出、运用新思想、新理论、新办法,理论就会苍白无力,哲学社会科学就会‘肌无力’。(Xi Jinping 2017a, 342)

Without the creation and application of new thoughts, concepts and methods through timely study, theories will be impotent in the face of reality, and philosophy and social sciences will suffer from ‘myasthenia’.

The ideological weight of the disease metaphors in official discourse lies in three main implications. The first one is the direct effect of metaphors (Ottati et al. 2013), that is the negative connotations of a disease are directly attached to an issue, in this case the lack of morality within the party and the society. Second, the disease metaphors also come in very handy in hiding the cause of this issue. Indeed, while the lack of ideals and convictions are taken for granted as being the cause of a possible dis-

ease, no mention has been made of what causes this lack of morality. This is precisely because a debate for possible causes of the lack of common values in contemporary Chinese society may flow into a bigger discussion on the legitimacy of market-oriented reforms in a country led by a communist party. A third ideological implication of the disease metaphor is suggested by Fairclough (1989, 120): “disease metaphors [...] tend to take dominant interests to be the interests of society as a whole, and construe expressions of non-dominant interests as undermining society *per se*”. In this case, non-dominant interests are all those that do not belong to the Party-state led by Xi. Moreover, as was the case of animal metaphors, disease metaphors are by no means new in Chinese official discourse (Lu 2017, 195-6; Link 2013, 254-5).

However, the three ideological implications effective for disease metaphors cannot be applied to the metaphor *sīrén jùlèbù* 私人俱乐部 ‘private club’ employed by Xi on 13 February 2017, at a study session on implementing the decision of the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eighteenth CPC Central Committee, which was attended by officials at the provincial and ministerial levels. In reaffirming the guiding role of the CPC Central Committee, Xi says:

如果党中央没有权威 [...] 党就会变成一盘散沙, 就会成为自行其是的‘私人俱乐部’, 党的领导就会成为一句空话。(Xi Jinping 2017a, 21)

If the CPC Central Committee had no authority [...] the Party would have become fragmented and become a ‘private club’, turning the Party’s leadership into empty voices. (Xi Jinping 2017b, 20-1)

‘Private clubs’ have no negative connotations *per se*. It acquires a negative tone within the context of discourse. Put differently, it is the metaphorical association between a political *dǎng* 党 ‘party’ that is called *gòngchǎn* 共产 ‘public’ and a *sīrén jùlèbù* 私人俱乐部 ‘private club’. The opposition between the *gòng* 共 ‘public’ and *sī* 私 ‘private’ has a long history in China and the preference for the former over the latter is a cardinal principle in Confucianism (Cui 2007).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, here the negativity arises from, first, the association in and of itself, that is the one between a ‘private club’ and a communist party, and second from the unity-disunity duality. This second can be explained as follows: if the Party is a ‘private club’, it is separated from the rest of the community, which in turn would not listen to his commands. This unity-disunity duality is enhanced by the idiom *yī pán sǎn shā* 一盘散沙 ‘a sheet of loose sand’, which recalls Sun Yat-sen’s famous passage:

11 I would like to thank Prof. Sean Golden for these points.

the Chinese people have only family and clan groups, there is no national spirit. Consequently, in spite of four hundred million people gathered together in one China, we are in fact but a sheet of loose sand. We are the poorest and weakest state in the world. (Sun Yat-sen cited in Wells 2001, 23)

Being a 'sheet of loose sand' made China at that time the subject of foreign imperialism. Therefore, this *chengyu* unavoidably triggers a negative evaluation.

In this case the link between restoring discipline and values within the Party and the metaphor may appear not as direct as it was for the other metaphors discussed above. However, to understand the deep implications of this metaphor, it needs to be considered in light of the process of regaining legitimacy that the anticorruption campaign has. Indeed, only if the Party is strong and united internally can it exercise power over the society. This meaning is conveyed by Xi also in 2015 at the fourth Plenary session of the eighteenth CPC Central Committee:

不全面从严治党，党就做不到‘打铁还需自身硬’，也就难以发挥领导核心作用。(Xi Jinping 2017a, 24)

Without strengthening Party's discipline, the Party will not be 'a good blacksmith to forge good tools', and it will be difficult for the Party to play its role as the core of the leadership. (Xi Jinping 2017b, 24)

## 5.2 Remedies

Remedies consist first of all in boosting the *shèhuì zhǔyì héxīn jiàzhíguān* 社会主义核心价值观 'core socialist values'.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the expression *kòu kòuzi* 扣扣子 'do up the buttons' is employed in the speech at the seminar with students and professors of Peking University on 4 May 2014, in which Xi dedicates ample space to the promotion of these 'core values'. This expression 'do up the buttons' can be connected to the slovenly metaphor pointed out by Jing-Schmidt and Peng (2017) and mentioned above. This is precisely because, although it is not used in relation to the anticorruption campaign – as in Jing-Schmidt and Peng (2017) –, it nonetheless aims to cast a negative light on the consequences of a lack of values in youth:

12 These values are: *fùqiáng* 富强 'prosperity', *mínzhǔ* 民主 'democracy', *wénmíng* 文明 'civility', *héxié* 和谐 'harmony', *zìyóu* 自由 'freedom', *píngděng* 平等 'equality', *gōngzhèng* 公正 'justice', *fǎzhì* 法治 'law-based governance', *àiguó* 爱国 'patriotism', *jìngyè* 敬业 'dedication', *chéngxìn* 诚信 'integrity', *yǒushàn* 友善 'friendship'. For the translation of *fǎzhì* 'law based governance', this study follows the official Chinese choice (Golden 2015, 3).

“young people should ‘button right’ in the early days of their life” (Xi Jinping 2014b, 192) implying that ‘core socialist values’ should be inculcated in the mind of people since youth.<sup>13</sup>

Promoting these common values is also the link between the expressions *zuidà gōngyuē shù* 最大公约数 ‘greatest common denominator’ (Xi Jinping 2014, 168) and *zǒng kāiguān* 总开关 ‘main switch’ (Xi Jinping 2017a, 44) which, apparently, do not have anything in common and do not share the same domain. However, considering in the linguistic contexts in which they are used, it appears that both are meant to lay emphasis on uniting values within the Party and in today’s China at large. ‘Greatest common denominator’ is another metaphor employed in the speech at Peking University for the anniversary of the May Fourth Movement in 2014, while ‘main switch’ addressed to Party’s members at the ceremony marking the ninety-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the CPC.

每一名党员干部都要 [...] 拧紧世界观、人生观、价值观这个‘总开关’。(Xi Jinping 2017a, 44)

Each Party’s member and official should [...] hold the main switch of the right worldview, outlook on life, and values.

我国是一个有着 1.3 亿多人口、56 个民族的大国，确立反映全国各族人民共同认同的价值观 ‘最大公约数’，使全体人民同心同德、团结奋进，关乎国家前途命运，关乎人民幸福安康。(Xi Jinping 2014, 168)

China is a big country with 1.3 billion people and fifty-six ethnic groups. Upon the recognition of the values with the ‘greatest common denominator’ by the people of all ethnic groups, they work with one heart and one mind to strive in unity. (Xi Jinping 2014b, 187)

However, although both metaphors, ‘greatest common denominator’ and ‘main switch’, are meant to set values at the center of the socio-political agenda, there is a slight difference in the way in which they perform their functions within the party and within Chinese society. In the first case, that is in the speech addressed to the Party, the ethical dimension of individual Party’s members and officials is stressed, by saying *měi yī míng dǎngyuán gàn bù* 每一名党员干部 ‘each Party’s member and officials’ instead of, for instance, simply *dǎngyuán gàn bù* 党员干部 ‘Party’s members and officials’.

In the second case, ‘greatest common denominator’ wants to merge values by creating a collective identity embodied in ‘the people of all ethnic groups’. Indeed, among the many terms used to designate the Chinese general population – *lǎobǎixìng* 老百姓 ‘common people’, *rénmín* 人

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly enough, this speech is full of quotations from Chinese classics. For a deeper explanation of the relation between intertextuality and ideology, see Magagnin 2017.

民 ‘people’, *qúnzhòng* 群众 ‘masses’, *gōngzhòng* 公众 ‘public’, *gōngmín* 公民 ‘citizens’ – Xi chooses the one which carries a specific political connotation. All these expressions are by no means “‘neutral’ words and forms” (Bakhtin 1981, 293),<sup>14</sup> but rather they belong to the languages of diverse social groups, carrying the nuances of different professions, generations, political tendencies and worldviews. For the word ‘people’, during the Mao era, it used to designate the members of those social classes that *zànchéng, yǒnghù hé cānjiā* 赞成、拥护和参加 ‘support, uphold and participate in’ (Wei Chuanguang 2016, 40) the construction of the socialist system, as opposed to the *dírén* 敌人 ‘enemies’. It goes without saying that, although in the aftermath of reforms and opening up it has been seen as a synonym of citizen, ‘people’ still carries positive connotations and a strong political ‘taste’.

The political “taste” (Bakhtin 1981, 293) of ‘the people’ is even stronger in a context in which ‘the people’ should be, according to Xi, the referential object for literature and arts:

人民既是历史的创造者、也是历史的见证者，既是历史的‘剧中人’、也是历史的‘剧作者’。文艺要反映好人民心声，就要坚持为人民服务、为社会主义服务这个根本方向。(Xi Jinping 2017a, 314)

The people are both the creators and observers of history, and both its protagonists and playwright.

This is an extract of Xi’s speech at the Forum on Literature and Art held in Beijing on 15 October 2014. The metaphors *jù zhōng rén* 剧中人 ‘protagonists’ and *jù zuòzhě* 剧作者 ‘playwright’ are meant to outline the political function of literature and art. Both in content and language, Xi’s words evoke Mao Zedong’s discourse at the Yan’an Forum, during which the Great Helmsman outlined the functions of art and literature as serving the people and pointed out that artists and writers must represent the everyday life of the working and peasant masses (Mao Zedong 1942). On one hand, Mao’s call for revolution has been replaced by Xi’s stress on the realization of the ‘great rebirth of Chinese nation’; on the other hand, it remains the central task of art and literature to serve the people and socialism. For the aims of this research it is worth noting that, although the two metaphors signaled by inverted commas, i.e. ‘protagonists’ and ‘playwrights’, were not used by Mao Zedong in his speech in 1942, *chuàngzào zhě* 创造者 ‘creators’ directly quotes Mao’s term, when he defined the people as *zhègè rénlèi shìjiè lìshǐ de chuàngzào zhě* 人类世界历史的创造者

14 Bakhtin coined the expression ‘heteroglossia’ to describe the social diversity of codes within any language at any given moment of its historical existence. For Bakhtin, within a language, different varieties coexist and each of them bears the traces of their historical developments and contexts of use.

'creators of the history of the human world' (Mao Zedong 1942), and the two expressions *wéi rénmin fúwù* 为人民服务 'serve the people' and *wèi shèhuì zhǔyì fúwù* 为社会主义服务 'serve socialism' leave no doubt about the political tones of Xi Jinping's words. In this case, therefore, metaphors are indirectly connected to the goal of 'unifying values' in today's China.

## 6 Conclusion: the Ideological Implications of Xi Jinping's Use of Creative Metaphors

This study attempted at analyzing the ideological implications of 'creative metaphors' in the discourse of the Chinese dream as used by Xi Jinping in his political speeches. In particular, it has found that, first, a call to restore discipline and morality within the Party as well as unifying values within China's borders at large is the common thread linking various metaphors that apparently do not share any traits. In this way, these creative metaphors set the agenda in today's Chinese politics and society. More specifically, some metaphors are used to define the problem and trigger an evaluation of it, while others are mainly employed to propose a solution. Second, some of those metaphors that are seen as original and a feature of 'Xi's language style' are by no means new in Chinese political discourse. This is the case, in particular, of animals, disease and slovenly metaphors, which can all be traced back to the Maoist era. However, it is worth pointing out that Xi's use of Mao's language is much more a matter of *auctoritas*, rather than a coming back of Maoist China. This consideration is for two reasons: first, today's Party-state, the Chinese society and China's international relations are completely different from those of Mao's era, and hence metaphors necessarily acquire a different meaning. Second, even though these metaphors are used for the same purposes as in Mao's talks, especially revitalizing morality among Party's members, Mao's legacy is not undermining Beijing's approach to economic development. So, as Golden (2015) compellingly argues, "perhaps Xi is 'talking the Mao talk' but 'walking the Deng walk'" (4). One of the aims of 'talking Mao's words' may be just safeguarding 'Deng's walk' from the extreme left-wing voices inside the Party and in the PRC at large – the so-called neo-Maoist – who are particularly critical of economic reforms and market economy.

For the ideological implications of these creative metaphors, the analysis is multilayered, since it needs to take into account not merely the ideologies conveyed by metaphors *per se*, but also those sustained by the publications focusing on Xi Jinping's political communication. For the first level of analysis, it may be useful to move from van Dijk's definition of ideology, according to which ideology functions

as the part of the socio-cognitive interface between social structures (conditions, etc.) of groups on the one hand, and their discourses and other social practices on the other hand. (van Dijk 2006, 117).

Metaphors are a way of doing things by manipulating the socio-cognitive interface. They can do so by changing the perspective when looking at an issue that people have in mind. For instance, the disease metaphors directly attach a negative evaluation to something.

However, in the case of Xi Jinping's use of these metaphors, the action performed by metaphors is two-pronged and not limited to the framing actions performed by metaphors *per se*. The second action made by these 'creative metaphors' is a passive one, since they are re-framed as being 'new' with the aim of making evident the originality of Xi's political communication and therefore of his governmental style. This process of reframing is the same one that the concept of the Chinese dream went through: starting from being framed as a goal pursued by the whole country, the Chinese dream has then been conceived as a political ideology and therefore as a tool to bring together the different parts of today's Chinese society.

This process of re-framing leads to the second level of ideological analysis. The publications on creative metaphors, as well as on other rhetorical devices mentioned above aiming at highlighting the originality of Xi Jinping's language style underpin a kind of charismatic-leader centred ideology: Xi has become both the political speaker and an object of study. In this way, he has become imbued with a special authority, by means of moulding his image as 'a man of the people', more specifically 'the man' who leads the country towards its rejuvenation.

In conclusion, entering into the debate on agency, Duranti (2004) suggests that a type of agency performed by language which is often overlooked is 'ego-affirming': "it is language *per se* as a human faculty rather than the meaning of its words that is sufficient for agency as ego-affirming to be at work" (Duranti 2004, 455). That is, the simple fact of speaking, independently from what has been actually said, is a form of action: "language already does something by *being*, before *doing*" (emphasis in the original) (Duranti 2004, 455). Applying this aspect of agency to Xi Jinping, it can be said that the kind of agency performed by publications around Xi's political communication is 'authoritative-affirming': it does not matter what meaning is conveyed in these publications focusing on Xi's speeches, the very fact of being collected is a form of action.

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## **Part 3**

### The Outcomes of Action



# The Italian Opera Culture in Constantinople During the Nineteenth Century

## New Data and Some Ideological Issues

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**Abstract** Among the Turkish lyrics of Giuseppe Donizetti there are texts of singular modernity that exalt the Christians' and Muslims' brotherhood and accurately manifest the *Tanzimat* ideological value. Donizetti and other Italian composers took part in a *metissage* project also involving the Levantine community but above all the Constantinopolitan Armenians who managed the theatres and edited noteworthy translations of *dramma per musica*. The Italian composers, moreover, in writing Ottoman lyrics with Latin letters, apparently only to simplify the singer's reading, actually paved the way to the literacy process of modern Turkey. This essay aims to re-evaluate Italian opera's role in the Westernist aspiration context of 19th century Turkey.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Role of Donizetti Pasha during the Tanzimat. – 3 "Rimembranze del Bosforo". Angelo Mariani's Three Year Stay in Constantinople. – 4 Constantinopolitan Developments in Other Italian Composers. – 5 First Conclusions and New Perspectives of Research: the Sacred Metastasian Dramas Translated by Hovannes Yeremian

**Keywords** Constantinople. Tanzimat. Italian Opera. Multi-confessionalism. Armenian-Turkish.

## 1 Introduction

The facts I will try to describe and analyse in this essay concern, I believe, that meaning of culture suggested by the preliminary topics of the seminar *Inerzia e Solerzia del testo. Genesi, Mezzi, Esiti dell'Agire Testuale* (organised by Ph.D. students of the Department of Asian and North African Mediterranean Studies)<sup>1</sup> through these words of Gianfranco Marrone:

la cultura è un intreccio di testi e la società è il luogo dei flussi discorsivi delle diverse realtà testuali e culturali. (Marrone 2001, xxviii)

culture is a weave of texts and society is the venue of streaming conversation in the different cultural and textual realities (Transl. by the Author)

1 Venezia Ca' Foscari, 5-6 December 2017.



I believe I can associate this notion of culture to a place in which “a weave of texts” is at work: this place is Constantinople. As it is well known, this metropolis in the early nineteenth century was already pervaded by a strong multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious component. By a specific and necessary material approach of history’s sources, in this present essay (born from the proceedings of the above quoted seminar) I will deal with a relevant factor of cultural encounter that, starting from the first two decades of the nineteenth century, acts on this polyhedric reality. I would like to call this factor ‘opera’, or else the main product of the Italian musical tradition, but considered in its wide meaning: vocal and instrumental styles, of course the theatrical sphere, chamber or sacred music, and, last but not least, military music (which plays an important role in *melodramma* during the early nineteenth century). The concept of opera I am referring to is a plural and a social project in its productive system (represented by composers, librettists, singers, scenographers, translators, impresarios and publishers) eagerly desired and allowed by the new ideological policy of the sultanate, both in its relations with the West and with the minorities, in particular the Armenians.

## 2 The Role of Donizetti Pasha during the Tanzimat

Following the unsuccessful Italian uprisings of 1821, many Italians decided to move to Constantinople and with their own competencies and technocracies actively contributed in heading up the modernisation attempt of the Ottoman empire known as *Tanzimat* (1839-1876). The first radical and unavoidable provision in this re-organisation process was made in 1826 by the sultan Mahmud II (1789-1839) with the abolition of the Janissary order, whose members had maintained for centuries military power but at that time represented an obstacle to the empire’s reform.<sup>2</sup> It necessarily followed a new organisation of the army carried out thanks to the adoption of Western instructors and Westernised Ottoman officials, amongst whom stand out the Italian refugee Giovanni Timoteo Calosso (Turin 1789-Constantinople 1859) who achieved the elevated rank of chief of the Ottoman cavalry, receiving also the title of *bey*<sup>3</sup> conferred upon him by Sultan Mahmud II. (De Leone 1967, 41-57; Türk 2007)

2 One of the cornerstones of the *Tanzimat* was the guarantees for life, honour and property equally granted before the law to all the subjects whatever their religions. For further studies on *Tanzimat* period see Costanza (2010) and the fundamental studies of Zürcher (1995; 52-79). For an extensive view on the socio-cultural transformations during the *Tanzimat* and the relationships between the religious communities see Braude, Lewis 1982.

3 The Turkish title *bey* was a noble title for chieftain, traditionally applied to the leaders or rulers of various sized areas in the Ottoman Empire but the term later came to use to indicate a financial or military administrator of a district such as Bey of Tunis. Finally the term became a simple appellative of respectable man. Gabrieli (1966, 139-142) Redhouse (1968, 164).

As Calosso (1857) himself remembers in his *Mémoires d'un vieux soldat*, he suggested to the sultan the idea of introducing an Italian musician to teach Western music to the newly modernised band following the replacement of the music of the *mehter*<sup>4</sup> 'Ottoman band' traditionally combined with the Janissary military order. So thanks to the mediation of Vincenzo Groppallo, first minister of the Sardinian Delegation, the composer Giuseppe Donizetti was appointed, a choice which may have been influenced by a previous shared commitment with Calosso, as they both fought for the Savoy and Napoleonic army. In autumn 1828, following the sultan's invitation, Giuseppe Donizetti (Bergamo 1788-Constantinople 1856), the brother of the famous opera composer, arrived in Constantinople where he carried out his duty as music instructor until his death achieving the title of *pasha*, the highest rank of the Ottoman military hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Donizetti was welcomed into the sultan's palace and received the great benevolence of Mahmud II: the sultan, in fact, was himself a musician and even a skilled composer. It is known that Mahmud II inherited from his uncle Selim III, sultan from 1789 to 1808, both the reformist ideology and love for the music.<sup>6</sup> Mahmud II was the author of a repertoire of thirty compositions, amongst which a *divân*,<sup>7</sup> twenty-five *şarki* 'love songs' and a *tāvşânca* 'dance of the rabbit' (music for a folk, maybe seductive, dance). Whereas as a member of the religious confraternity *mevliiveyye* Mahmud II dedicated himself to the playing of the *ney* 'end-blown flute' typical of Ottoman classical music.<sup>8</sup> Alongside to this classical, elite tradition, Otto-

4 In musicology this term indicates the band as a whole but the renowned dictionary by the Capuchin father Angelico da Smirne (1955, 594) provides the meaning of "single musician" of the Janissary band.

5 Giuseppe's intention to accept the role of music teacher offered by the sultan was initially criticised by his brother Gaetano, as witnessed by Gaetano's letter to his father Andrea dated 5 December 1827, in which he records his disagreement over the position taken by his brother and his hope to dissuade him not to make such an uncommon and risky choice at that time. For the details of the letter see Fornoni 2010, 142-3; Zavadini 1948.

6 Sultan Mahmud II received the appellation of *Maḥmūd 'Adlī*, with the meaning of 'Mahmud the Fair' for his dedication to recovering the empire's social justice. According to legend he was son of Aimée de Rivery, cousin of Giuseppina de Beauharnais, captured by barbarian pirates and sold as a concubine to Sultan Abdülhamid I's (1774-1789) harem. Hence she would become the guiding principle for the son's French political line. See Pedani 2006, 109.

7 This term means the collection of poems of an author arranged alphabetically. Costanza (2010, 400) however use *divan* as a musical form what I think it is improbable. The same lyric entitled *Ebrulerinin zahmı nihandır çiğerimde* arranged by Dede Efendi is indicated in Üngör (1981, 138) as *şarki*.

8 Ottoman classic music developed mainly around the *Enderûn*, i.e. the music school of the Court, the palaces of the musicophile elite and the sufi *tekke*, namely of confraternities *mevleviyye* and *bektaşhiyye*. Above all vocal Ottoman music traditionally accompanies a solo singer with a small instrumental ensemble. It has a large and varied system of modes

man music was expressed through a plurality of traditions and reflected the vast and heterogeneous mosaic of the peoples who constituted the Ottoman Empire. During Donizetti's sojourn, the *makam* classical, Art music tradition, was represented by the famous Hammamizade İsmail Dede Efendi (1778-1846) and his disciple Hacı Arif Bey (1831-1885) whom Donizetti had met and with whom he had the opportunity to exchange musical teachings. Giuseppe's first occupation in Constantinople was to study the previous attempts at Ottoman music transcriptions. In particular he made use of the *hamparsum* notation which came from the name of the Armenian musician Hamparsum Limonciyan (1768-1839).<sup>9</sup> He wished to plough through the teaching of Western music's notation to his pupils and at the same time approach the rich and composite Ottoman music sphere blending some examples of Janissary, classical and folk music into his compositions.

The role played by Donizetti in Constantinople is not restricted to his compositional activities, or his being music teacher (to the imperial band and harem) but is also proved by his important contribution to the knowledge of Turkish music in the West. Moreover Giuseppe brought to the Ottoman court's attention musicians such as Rossini, Verdi, Liszt and his own brother Gaetano, and contributed to the launching of the first operatic performances.<sup>10</sup>

I have mentioned in the introduction of this essay the intimate relationship between opera and military Western music during the earliest nineteenth century, because of the innumerable "operatic representations" of military march in the opera of that period. For these reasons it is possible to speak of mutual influence between opera and the music of the military

or scales known as *makam*, and various genres, including the spiritual, improvised (*gazel*, *kaside*, *durak*, respectively 'improvised solo singing, religious poem set in music, 21 beat rhythmic pattern') and *fasil* music in 'suite' form. See Feldman 1996; Costanza 2010. The classical *makam* was canonised and regulated directly by the sultan's court. For a complete list of Mahmud II's compositions, see Costanza 2010, 400. I have retraced and translated Mahmud II's lyrics and I will include them in my Ph.D. thesis.

9 Among the other previous attempts at Ottoman music transcriptions it is worth remembering those in Western staff notation from right to left made by the Polish Wojciech Bobowski (1610-1675), in what was called *Mecmû'a-yi Saz ü Söz*, as well as in his collection of psalms known as *Mezmurlar*, the transcriptions in Ottoman alphabetical notations made by the Moldavian *voivoda* Dimitri Cantemir (1673-1723), the examples in Western staff notation appended at the end of *bailo* Giambattista Donado (1627-1699) *Della Letteratura de' Turchi* (1688) which also includes some singular examples of Turkish lyrics written with latin letters and syllabified under the score and, one century after, at the end of the *Letteratura turchesca* by Giambattista Toderini (1728-1799). See Behar 2013; Toderini 1787; De Zorzi 2010, 33-5.

10 Gaetano Donizetti composed in 1841 the *Gran marcia Militare Imperiale* dedicated to Sultan Abdülmejid. Liszt, during his six-week stay in Istanbul in 1847 composed a series of pianistic variations on the theme of the Donizetti's *Mecidiye*. Rossini composed two marches dedicated to the sultan and, as written in his letter dated 7 May 1852, he left the choice of which one to present to the sultan to Donizetti. See Aracı (2006, 71). About the Donizetti's operatic involvement see also the witness of Gerard de Nerval (1997, 424-7).

bands; however Donizetti and after him, as we will see, even other Italian masters in Constantinople combine this hybrid musical tradition (opera and military music) with components of the Ottoman Art music tradition. In certain way they give back also some echoes derived from the so called current of style *alla turca* in vogue in the classical Western music (mainly in Vienna) since the seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup>

The spread of operatic culture was, according to Spinetti, a phenomenon closely related to the re-organising process established in the Ottoman capital: it was certainly supported by an elite, diplomatic and Levantine society but it found acceptance also by a larger amount of non-Muslim minorities. For instance the Ottoman review *Ceride-i Havadis* notes that the Turkish libretto of Donizetti's *Belisario* was available for the low price of six *куруş* 'cent',<sup>12</sup> to capture people attention.<sup>13</sup> The music of Donizetti Pasha and that of the great Italian opera composers was increasingly listened to people not just in the *serail*, in surroundings of the Topkapı Palace, in the Theatre of Pera situated in the European district but also in the living rooms of the wealthy Turkish and Armenian *amiras* and *en plein air* along the streets, through the numerous parades recounted by many foreign writers such as Hans Christian Andersen, Frederich Tietz, Gerard de Nerval, Adolphus Slade, Charles MacFarlane, Alphonse de Lamartine and the Princess Cate-

11 See among others the recent study by Claudio Toscani (2010, 79-99). It is noteworthy that Leyla Saz in her memoirs of harem life remembers that some typical instruments of the disbanded Janissary corps, mainly percussion instruments such as the "Turkish crescent", continued to be played by the "Western fanfare" of the harem in the "Donizetti era" and thereafter. See Woodard 2011, 2-3. This fact is also confirmed by a same Donizetti's score in which you can see the employments of traditional Turkish instruments, i.e. the *davul*, a folk percussion instrument typical of the *mehter* and popular in all the country. See Giuseppe Donizetti I-Nc, MS. 63762. In the archival collection of Donizetti in Naples Conservatory are preserved pieces of *alla turca* of Antonio Salieri, one of the composers most involved in this Western classical style.

12 Silver coin in use during Ottoman period the name of which is now still used in Turkey to indicate a subunit of lira.

13 The review bears the date of 30 April 1842, and it is often quoted by the scholars see Turan; Ayşeoğlu (2007; 12) and Mestyan (2011; 342). The latter quotes as source Sevengil (1959, 66-71) stating that the author of the Turkish libretto of *Belisario* is Heyrullah Efendi which actually is not demonstrated by an attentive reading of this book. There may be confusion from the fact that Hayrullah Efendi is considered the author of the first Ottoman Turkish libretto in four acts entitled *İbrahim Paşa ile İbrahim Gülşen'i'n hikâyesi* 'Story of Ibrahim Pasha and Ibrahim Gülşen'i' composed in 1844, the same year he achieved his graduation.

rina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso,<sup>14</sup> most of them quoted by Emre Aracı.<sup>15</sup>

As Namık Sinan Turan and Ayşegül Komşuoğlu refer in their essays, the perception of opera in Turkey, permeated around the 1830s even among muslims, surprisingly reveals its incorporation in some religious ceremonies (Turan, Ayşeoğlu 2007, 12). Alphonse de Lamartine remembers that, during the *Cumasamlığı* 'Friday's prayers', attended by the sultan himself, the imperial band played a repertory ranging from Mozart to Rossini.<sup>16</sup> These were not isolated incidents limited to Constantinople: Adam Mestyan says in his recent study on military music in Egypt, Western music was appreciated during Muslim religious ceremonies (Mestyan 2013, 647) and it had similar wide appeal also in all the Mediterranean countries, each of them with their own leading actors (Spinetti 2010, XII-XIV).

According to Federico Spinetti's Introduction of the volume dedicated to Giuseppe Donizetti in 2010, the role of the Italian master was both that of opening the way to several Turkish musicians, composers and orchestra conductors, and that of "significantly influencing traditional Turkish music" starting a *metissage* process continued in the next wave of European masters to the Ottoman capital. However Donizetti also promoted a new kind of poetry that could represent the ideological development of the new course of the sultanate.

Although almost completely unpublished, of great interest are Donizetti's lyrics sung in Turkish, but written in Latin phonetics to simplify the singer's reading, whose corpus I retraced searching within the library of the Conservatorio San Pietro a Majella of Naples, the Civic Library Angelo Mai and the Museo Donizettiano of Bergamo, and the archive of the Topkapı Palace of Istanbul. I have drawn up a translation of this corpus, composed mostly of hymns, such as were in vogue in the main European countries during that period: Donizetti's compositions

**14** She was a writer and journalist who came to Constantinople after her participation in the first Italian Risorgimento phase. She wrote several essays among which worth remembering is her *Souvenir dans l'exile* (1946; 2001, 281) In Constantinople she looked for employment as singer and music teacher and as she testified she gave support occasionally to Donizetti in teaching Western music to the royal pupils at the Imperial music school situated in Üsküdar. De Leone 1967, 67-186.

**15** Aracı (2006, 62, 95, 157; 2010, 65). Nerval reports his attendance of the opera *Buonde-monte (Maria Stuarda)* directed by Giuseppe Donizetti, who, according to the writer, was also appointed by his brother to collect Greek and Wallachian arias for his operas. Nerval (1997, 424-7). Less known among the scholars is the testimony of Tietz (1838, 37-47), who recounts he was invited as a guest for a dinner by a rich Turkish renegade, on which occasion a band composed of "Turkish, Gypsy and Jewish" musicians played pieces of Ottoman music and then also a popular venetian *barcarola*. See also "Della musica nella Turchia" 1852, 140-1.

**16** As Alphonse de Lamartine (1841, 266) writes in June 1833 in his *Voyage en Orient (1832-1833)*.

presented patriotic features and some were even utilised as a national anthem.<sup>17</sup> The following are the titles of the compositions: *Cansone mussulmana*,<sup>18</sup> *Inno di Sua Maestà Imperiale il Sultano Abdül Medgid*,<sup>19</sup> *Canzone Popolare Turca*,<sup>20</sup> *Per il ritorno del sultano Abdulmegid parole di Hairy Efendi*,<sup>21</sup> *Inno di S.A.I. il Sultano Abdulmegid*,<sup>22</sup> *Inno di S.A.I. Valide Sultana*<sup>23</sup> and *Silistria* also with Italian words by the poet-patriot Achille Tondi (San Severo 1826-Costantinopoli ca. 1860), the most relevant literary figure to whom all the Italian musicians of the Ottoman capital addressed their requests for poetry and translations.<sup>24</sup> The contents of these songs are mainly in praise of lawfulness and modernity, and celebrate the love of the homeland too, but, for example in the *Canzone Popolare Turca*, besides these themes, calls to harmonious coexistence between Christians and Muslims, and to behave with humanity appear. Let me quote a salient tercet of this song:

Musulmanler ylé christianler  
sevichoup ulfat itmeli-dirler  
chan insanieté alich-sounler<sup>25</sup>

Christians and Muslims  
have to love and care for each other  
and humanity must be familiar to the peoples  
(transl. by the Author)

In line with the *Tanzimat's* ideological values, Donizetti's lyrics aimed

17 Among Giuseppe's first compositions there were the two instrumental marches: the *Mahmudiye*, dedicated to Sultan Mahmud II and *Mecediye*, dedicated instead to his successor Abdülmeceid. These were the first hymns officially accepted in the Ottoman empire. See Aracı 2007, 276.

18 I-Nc. Raccolta di diversi Pezzi di Musica composti da Giuseppe Donizetti per musica militare e ridotti per piano forte dall'autore. IT-NA0059 20.7.3@10.

19 I-Nc. Inno di Sua Maestà Imperiale il Sultano Abdül Medgid. Fondo Giuseppe Donizetti, 63653.

20 I-Nc. Canzone popolare turca. Fondo Giuseppe Donizetti, 63761.

21 Napoli, I-Nc. Per il Ritorno del Sultano. Abdul Medgid. Parole di Hairy Efendi, 63649. As indicated in the title this lyric was not composed by the Italian composer therefore, and in accordance with Aracı (2006) and Spinetti (2010) we can deduce that, probably with the assistance of a poet-translator, Donizetti was the author of the other lyrics.

22 Donizetti (1846).

23 Donizetti (1846).

24 Donizetti (1854); for further informations about the poet Achille Tondi see Russi (2009).

25 I-Nc. Canzone popolare turca. Fondo Giuseppe Donizetti, 63761.

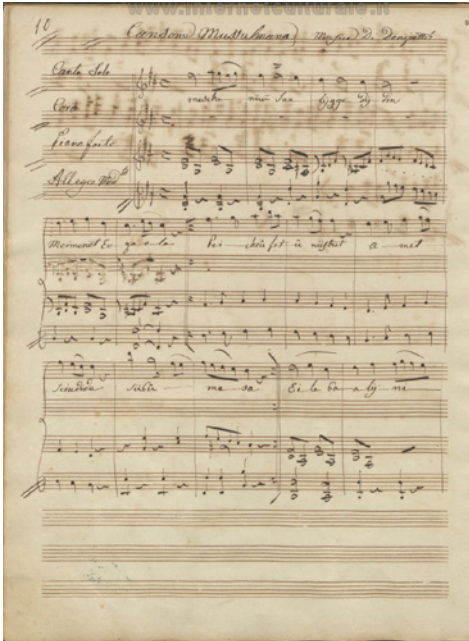


Figure 1. Giuseppe Donizetti, *Canzone Mussulmana*. *Raccolta di diversi Pezzi di Musica composti da Giuseppe Donizetti per musica militare e ridotti per piano forte dall'autore*, 1832. I-Nc, P. 20. IT-NA0059 20.7.3@10



Figure 2. Giuseppe Donizetti, *Canzone popolare turca*, 1839 ca. P. 2, I-Nc, Fondo Giuseppe Donizetti, 6376.

to mitigate the religious conflicts of peoples belonging to the sultanate and avoid their demand for independence (supported also by European powers). However it seems to me also the music's combination with the Ottoman lyrics transliterated with Latin letters, adopted by Donizetti, apparently with the sole purpose of simplifying the singer's reading, represents instead another important component of cultural *metissage*.<sup>26</sup> In some measure it shows clearly the spoiling of Ottoman music's oral

26 As it is known Ottoman Turkish was used by the Court, the diplomacy and the literati and it was written with Arabic-Persian letters however there are some exceptions of the use of Turkish in latin letters, employed by dragomans and above all by erudite-grammarians for didactic or lexicographic purposes since the sixteenth century which reveal interesting developments of the history of the Ottoman phonetic. Several studies on the so called Turkish literature in latin letters are been published by the Turkologists such as Bombaci 1948; Gallotta 1990; Rocchi 2013; Yağmur 2014.



Figure 3. Giuseppe Donizetti, *Inno di Sua Maestà Imperiale il Sultano Abdül Medgid*, 1846. I-BGi, 3540

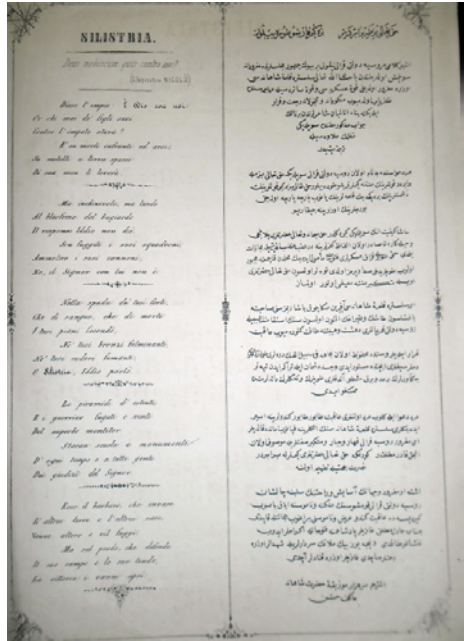


Figure 4 Giuseppe Donizetti, *Silistria*, 1854. P. 2, I-Nc, 63701

traditions,<sup>27</sup> but at the same time it became unquestionably a groundbreaking experimental use of the transcription and syllabification of spoken Turkish language with the Latin alphabetic letters. From a more general point of view, Murat Cankara sustains, in his recent article on the question of the cross-cultural encounters in the Ottoman empire, that, from the 1860s, have occurred an important debate on the replacement of the Ottoman writing system with the Latin which gradually evolved, during the first quarter of the twentieth century, into a “war of scripts” (Cankara 2015, 6) between those who support the Latin alphabetical character, those who argue for a reform of the Arabic and even those who propose a convincing alternative with the Armenian script. The above-mentioned musical technique of rhythmic-syllabic adaptation

27 It is well known the vocal text in Ottoman tradition is learnt by memory, not writing.



of the Turkish words in Latin letters, almost unknown in the Ottoman lyric tradition, opened the way, as we will try to see in this short essay, to similar works of other Italian composers, becoming a particular model of transcultural action.

### 3 “Rimembranze del Bosforo”. Angelo Mariani’s Three Year Stay in Constantinople

The most noteworthy case of continuity in this work of Donizetti lies in the *Inno Nazionale* dedicated to Sultan Abdülmecid (1823-1861) by the musician Angelo Mariani (1821-1873) from Ravenna, sung in Turkish on 28 January 1849 and printed for the first time by the publisher Frédéric Brochtorff in Beyğolu, Constantinople. Significantly, this printed edition presents on the dust cover the *tuğra* ‘imperial signature’ of Sultan Abdülmecid, next in the following pages the poetic text in its original Ottoman form, then in the third sheet ‘translated’ into Italian by Achille Tondi, and finally the lyric score, for male chorus and orchestra, where, immediately under the vocal part, the words of the text appear in Italian and further below, as still happens today in the bilingual rhythmic versions, in Ottoman-Turkish written in Latin characters. As Mariani writes in his letter to Giovanni Ricordi of 25 April 1849:

le parole Turche vi sono scritte coi caratteri francesi, non potendolo fare altrimenti poiché la sillabazione Turca camina viceversa della nostra e non permette la separazione delle sillabe.<sup>28</sup>

The Turkish words are written with French characters. This could not be otherwise because Turkish syllabification is quite different to ours and does not permit the separation of the syllables. (Transl. by the Author)

As we will see in the music score which Ricordi would print, the Turkish words are also written in Latin characters with a clarification note to the singers: “Read the Turkish words with the Italian pronunciation” (Mariani 1849). The National Anthem of Mariani was a success that he immediately shared with the publisher Giovanni Ricordi in his 20 March 1849 letter, with the evident reason of communicating that it would be printed at the expense of the Grand Master, thus enticing Ricordi also to make a print in Milan (this would certainly happen):

28 I-Mr, Fondo Corrispondenza, MS. PIV2\_01a-013. I have chosen to maintain always the authentic orthography of Mariani which clearly reveal the way of speaking in use in his native region.

Le faccio noto con tutto il piacere che sua Maestà il Gran Sultano mi ha onorato col regalarmi una ricca tabacchiera in brillanti munita di suo maggior sigillo del valore di cinque milla franchi, per aver io composto in Lingua Turca un Inno nazionale il quale venne a sua richiesta replicato in sua augusta presenza il giorno che onorò con la sua venuta il Teatro. Di più ha Egli ordinato che sia stampata tutta la partitura ed adotato in tutto il suo regno. Appena sarà fatto sarà mio dovere il mandargliene una coppia accio Ella caro Signor Giovanni possa farne quel conto che più le agrada. Questo mio lavoro ebbe sorte fortunata anche presso il pubblico perché ne dimandano sempre la replica.<sup>29</sup>

I communicate to you with pleasure that his Majesty the Great Sultan honoured me with a rich snuffbox of diamonds, carrying his highest seal and worth five thousand francs, for having composed a national anthem in Turkish which was then repeated at his request in his august presence the day that he honoured the theatre with his coming. He also ordered that the whole score be printed and adapted throughout his kingdom. As soon as it is done, it will be my duty to send it to you, so you can use it as you please. This work of mine also had great fortune with the audience because they always ask for it to be again performed. (Trans. by the Author)

Following the instructions of Mariani, the succeeding year Ricordi provided a reprinting of the work which the musician welcomed with these words in his letters of 17 May 1850:<sup>30</sup>

Mi fa molto piacere che Ella abbia ristampato il mio Inno Turco colla traduzione in Italiano. Questa cosa farà molto piacere anche a sua Maestà perché ama assai questa composizione. Veramente non è gran cosa, ma chi ha sentito le preghiere dei Turchi, non potrà far di meno da non trovarci il genere suo. Ed eseguito a piena orchestra è di un effetto sicuro. L'ultima sera della stagione teatrale si terminò colla replica di quello. Se Ella me ne manderà una copia in carta fina ed alquanto elegante io la farò presentare a Sua Maestà a suo nome per qualche sicuro mezzo, e sono certissimo che l'aggradirà molto ma molto. Così vedrà che il Chiarissimo Editore Giovanni Ricordi vuol pure con ciò offrirle anch'egli il suo omaggio.<sup>31</sup>

I appreciate very much your reprinting my Turkish Hymn with the Italian translation. This will give great pleasure to His Majesty because he loves this composition a greatly. Actually it is nothing special, but whoever has

29 I-Mr, Corrispondenza MS. PIV2\_01a-11.

30 I-Mr, Corrispondenza MS. PIV2\_01b-035.

31 I-Mr, Corrispondenza MS. PIV2\_01b-035.

listened to the prayers of the Turks will never fail to notice his genre. And performed with the full orchestra, its result is guaranteed. The last evening of the operatic season finished with an encore performance of it. If you send me a copy of some elegance on fine paper I will make a present of it to His Majesty in your name through some safe means and I am really very sure that he will appreciate it really very much. In this manner he will see that the esteemed publisher Giovanni Ricordi also wants to offer his own present. (Transl. by the Author)

No less important than that of Donizetti is, in fact, the figure of Angelo Mariani on whom we must focus a little at this point. Born in Ravenna in 1821, much younger than Donizetti, Mariani arrived in Constantinople in 1848 to escape Austrian repression following the Revolution of 1848 when he had enlisted as a volunteer in the ranks of the Sardinian-Piedmontese army. Mariani was then a very talented violinist, already established as a conductor in some of Verdi's operas.<sup>32</sup> He showed his willingness to put his art to the service of the national ideal and as a conductor, a concept very close to that of today in which a single person plays both the roles of 'maestro concertatore' and conductor.<sup>33</sup> Mariani arrived in Costantinopoli unwillingly and with a lot of prejudice towards the place, the life and culture in the Ottoman capital and he was subjected to the multicultural influence of the metropolis, proving himself ever more sensitive to the Turks' usual behaviour and civic-religious way of thinking. As he wrote in a letter of 12 October 1850:

intorno all'Inno Turco che Lei deve stampare mi fu raccomandato sopra a tutto che non vi siano figure sopra al frontespizio. Uccelli, alberi, aria tutto ciò che desidera l'artista, ma figure di uomini no perché la religione Turca non lo permette. Una copia bellissima per il Sultano altre tre di meno lusso per il primo pascà, qualche altra per i più piccoli pascà, ed altre per i ministri.<sup>34</sup>

On the subject of the Inno turco which you have to print, It was commended to me above all else that on the frontispiece there be no images. Birds, trees, air and everything that the artist wishes, but no human representation because their religion does not allow it. One really beautiful copy for the sultan and another three more in less luxury form for the first pasha, some other for the smaller pasha, and others for the ministers. (Transl. by the Author)

32 About the relationships between Verdi-Mariani see Walker 1964.

33 'Maestro concertatore' was generally the first violin of the orchestra who dictated the phrasing and the so called *arcate* of the whole bowed instruments.

34 I-Mr, Corrispondenza MS. PIV2\_01b-045.

In his letter of 21 December 1850, Mariani wrote to the publisher to tell him also about the difficulties encountered by Achille Tondi in adapting the libretto of Verdi's *Lombardi alla prima crociata* so it could be accepted by a Muslim audience:

ora si stanno provando i *Lombardi alla Prima Crociata* del M. Verdi. In quanto al libretto però non sono più i *Lombardi* di Solera perché non potendosi qui rappresentare a cagion dei Turchi quest'opera così come si trova col battesimo, coll'harem, colla presa D'Antochia, con quell'empie bende, con quegl'empi musulmani che ricorrono ad ogni tratto, l'impresa ha incaricato il poeta Tondi a ridurre il libretto in modo che non ne potesse venir offesa la suscettibilità politica e religiosa dei discendenti di Osmano. Io credo che avrà dovuto trasportare l'azione in altro luogo e ad altri tempi; in modo diverso io non saprei come si possa cavarne le mani. Ma essendo così ben veggo che per quanta abilità possa avere il riduttore non riuscirà mai a non togliere a questa musica il tipo caratteristico che ella ha di quel fatto messo nella storia. Intanto staremo a vedere cosa n'uscirà.<sup>35</sup>

Now they are rehearsing the *Lombardi alla prima crociata* of Master Verdi. Talking of the libretto by the way, it is not anymore the Solera *Lombardi* because it might not be performed by reason of the treatment of the Turks. This opera as it is, with the baptism, with the harem, with the conquest of Antioch, with those unholy turbans, and with those unholy Muslims which occur in each part, the company charged the poet Tondi to adapt the libretto in the way so that it might not offend the political and religious susceptibility of Osman's descendants. I believe that he must have carried the action to another place and in other times; in a different way I would not know how one would do it. Being so, I well see that whatever skill the reducer may have, he will never be able to not take away from this music the characteristics that he has put into this history. Meanwhile, we will see what happens. (Transl. by the Author)

As the poet Achille Tondi wrote in his review in the *Gazzetta Musicale* dated 5 May 1850, which offers us an interesting portrait of Mariani within the Constantinopolitan milieu:

io seguo con tenera simpatia i passi di codesto giovane ingegno che, in materia d'arte, fa caro ed onorato il nome italiano all'europea barbarie di Costantinopoli (dove del resto i barbari non sono i Turchi). In tanta penuria di buoni ingegni, e mentre la musica cerca e non trova chi sap-

35 I-Mr, Corrispondenza MS. PIV2\_01b-047.

pia farla risorgere alla primitiva sua altezza, Mariani potrebbe chiamarsi speranza dell'arte, se il suo soggiorno in questo deserto dell'intelligenza, il non consacrarsi a tutt'uomo a robusti studi ed a continuati esercizi, e l'essersi egli fatto un culto esclusivo per la maniera di Verdi, non nuocesse all'originalità delle sue proprie ispirazioni e non menomasse la certezza di que' risultati che potremmo diversamente ripromettercene. (Tondi 1850, 89-90)

I follow with affectionate sympathy the steps of this young talent who, in matters of art, makes precious and honoured the Italian name to the European barbarity of Constantinople (where after all the barbarians are not the Turks). In lack of good wits, and while the music seeks and does not find anyone who knows how to let it resurge to primitive height, Mariani could be called the hope of art, if his stay in this desert of intelligence, not to be consecrated to a man of robust studies and continued exercises, and having made himself an exclusive cult for the manner of Verdi, did not harm the originality of his own inspirations and did not undermine the certainty of those results that we could otherwise promise. (Transl. by the Author)

In Constantinople, Mariani developed this new conception of his orchestra conducting and he became the dominant spirit in an international atmosphere that was centred on the theatre of the Christian Sirian brothers Naum<sup>36</sup> of Pera. Here during the seasons 1848-1849 and 1850-1851 he led several operas of Verdi, Bellini, Meyerbeer, Rossini and Donizetti. Until November 1851 he still remained in Constantinople devoting himself mainly to the composition and teaching. The city life and the Turkish delight of Büyükdere would be the inspiring motive of the birth of some chamber romance albums entitled *Rimembranze del Bosforo*, (almost like a recurring image showing his attachment to the city) *Una notte sul Bosforo for cello and piano*, the scenic cantata *Matilde* or *La Fidanzata del Guerriero*, *Il Canto dell'Esule* with the words by Achille Tondi (Potito 1985, 20-23).

Mariani's mentor, in his almost three year stay in Constantinople, was the Russian ambassador Dimitri Sergejievic De Titov who accommodated him in verdant Büyükdere, the district populated by Greeks and Armenians in whose houses the Italian musician gave singing piano and composi-

<sup>36</sup> The Naum brothers are also remembered as Armenians (Arditi 1896, 44) and their father was an Aleppian nobleman in the service of the Ottoman Porte. Michel Naum also served as a dragoman and later travelled in the same role with Lady Stanhope, finally settling in Constantinople. See Mestyan 2011, 110; Aracı 2010. As theatre producers, they were greatly involved in the cultural-artistic life of Constantinople, and were internationally renowned, as attested by the rich correspondence between Mariani and Ricordi. (Michael Naum travelled several times to Milan to arrange operatic staging with the publisher Ricordi, meet artists, buy scores, etc.).

tion lessons as well as doing Academies (concerts), delighting 'the lords', bourgeois and aristocrats of different nationalities as well as mainly religious Armenians who knew and required the execution of favourite pieces such as the *Stabat Mater* by Rossini or that by Pergolesi. Moving from neighbourhood to neighbourhood on horseback or along the banks of the Bosphorus with a modern paddle steamer or with the most rustic and traditional *caicco* 'gulet', Mariani went to Pera every day to give lessons to the Armenian women's college of the nuns of the Immaculate Conception and had as students the Armenian Alexanian Adelaide Diran, a composer herself, the Turkish Madame Devlet, the daughters of Francesco Franchini, first dragoman of the Russian legation at the Sublime Porta.<sup>37</sup> These meetings provide a first glance of his one-year experience in the broad spectrum of the Levantine city still studded with the conversations with the poet Achille Tondi, the composer Callisto Guatelli, and the impresario Naum brothers at the Greek café (smoking Cibuch, the 'Turkish tobacco pipe' and sipping lemonade), at receptions at the palace of the British Minister Stratford Canning (1786-1880),<sup>38</sup> and at that of the Russian baron and diplomat Egorovič Staal (1822-1907) and at the house of the French banker Alléon where every evening music echoed along the banks of the Quai. These names and situations fill the pages of an unpublished manuscript, an autobiographical diary that Mariani kept in the year 1851 and now held in the Library Livio Simoni of the Museo Teatrale Alla Scala.<sup>39</sup> It is a document of great historical and social interest that I was able to study and finally, only in recent days, reconstruct according to its original chronological arrangement, and fighting away through its state of total confusion. Except for Emre Aracı who refers a rough but not unrealistic dating of the diary, scholars generally do not deal with this source with the proper attention due to the very difficult comprehension of Mariani handwriting and rushed arrangement.<sup>40</sup> This diary documents the meeting of cultures in the city under the aegis of

37 This is an Armenian Catholic female college run by the Sisters of the immaculate conception whose order was founded in 1846 by the archbishop Hassoun where besides the Catholic religion, were taught Armenian, French and Italian and a whole series of high-quality artefacts were produced. See "Cose straniere" 1885, 245. As witnessed by Mariani's diary also music would be taught.

38 According to Zürcher 1995. Canning had a crucial role in the British support to the reforms (ambassador from 1851 to 1858). He was on close terms with many of the leading Ottoman reformers (Reşid Paşa, Fuat Efendi, Mehmet Emin Ali) he is generally considered a Russophobo but from the Mariani testimony we can understand that his political and cultural position is more in favour of a broad internationalist view.

39 I-Ms, Diario autobiografico di Angelo Mariani, (Dono M.° Carlo Gatti) 1940, MS. 20494.

40 Aracı 2010, 137. I have patiently transcribed the entire diary of Mariani's stay in Constantinople and finally I have managed to deduce that it runs from the 31 May to the 20 November 1851. I will include in my Ph.D. thesis an annotated transcription of this document.

a common passion for music beyond the national and religious boundaries, even though the latter are deeply felt. Another documentary source of Mariani's stay in Constantinople, which also allows us to know the economic profile of the operatic culture in the Ottoman capital, is the correspondence with the publisher Giovanni Ricordi, also unpublished, which includes forty-four letters between October 1848 and December 1851.<sup>41</sup> Even the first letter dated 12 October 1848 reveals the intention of Mariani to suggest that Ricordi start a shop with books and musical items in general in Constantinople, together with Leopardo Moretti, copyist and prompter of the Teatro Naum from 1842, where 'Cavalier Donizetti' would assume the role of cashier. The letter details the list of points in the contract:

Art. 1<sup>o</sup> Il signor Ricordi dovrà somministrare tutta quella musica che dal Moretti gli avrà ordinato.

Art. 2<sup>do</sup> La musica invenduta dovrà rimanere a carico del Sig. Ricordi.

Art. 3<sup>zo</sup> Il Moretti si obbliga di armare a proprie spese un magazzino fabbricato in pietra con sue vetrine e pagarne il rispettivo affitto.

Art. 4<sup>to</sup> Gli incassi veraño Rimessi nelle mani del Sig. Cavalier Donizetti o di altra persona nominata dal Signor Ricordi.

Art. 5<sup>to</sup> Sarà tenuto un giornaliero registro della vendita.

Art. 6<sup>to</sup> Tutte le commissioni particolari che riceverà il d<sup>to</sup> Moretti saranno a Beneficio del Sig. Ricordi, e questi sarà tenuto di dare al Moretti il 10 × 100.<sup>42</sup>

Art. 1<sup>o</sup> Mr. Ricordi shall consign all the music that Mr. Moretti has ordered him to do.

Art. 2<sup>o</sup> The unsold music shall remain the responsibility of Mr. Ricordi.

Art. 3<sup>o</sup> Mr. Moretti undertakes to furnish at his own expense a warehouse made of stone with its display cabinets, and pay the respective rent.

Art. 4<sup>o</sup> The earnings will be returned to the hands of Mr. Cavalier Donizetti or another person named by Mr. Ricordi.

Art. 5<sup>o</sup> A daily register of sales will be held.

Art. 6<sup>o</sup> All the special commissions received by the mentioned Moretti will be to the benefit of Mr. Ricordi, and he will be obliged to give Mr. Moretti 10 × 100. (Transl. by the Author)

<sup>41</sup> The annotated edition of the entire correspondence between A. Mariani and G. Ricordi will be available with my Ph.D. thesis.

<sup>42</sup> Mariani's letter, Constantinople 12 October 1848, I-Mr, Corrispondenza, MS. PIV2\_01a-007.

The music store would be based in Beyoğlu, the district of Pera where most of the Europeans resided and would have to be built in stone and not in wood since the main danger was fire. The price of renting a stone shop would have been excessively high (equal to 150 francs a month), as the composer points out, but it would have been worth it given the lower risk of fire. With these arguments he asks for a discount on the cost of providing music which would be amply repaid by the greater safety of the building chosen for the shop:

la notte scorsa la passammo in strada perché ebbimo il foco in Galata Serai il quale distrusse più di cinquecento case, e questo si dice che sia stato dato apositamente, perché il governo non ama far case di legno, avendo proibito di fabbricare in simile modo. Molti individui della nostra compagnia che abitavano in quel quartiere hanno perduto la maggior parte della sua roba. A noi forestieri ci fanno senzo simili disgrazie, ma qui ci sono talmente avezzi che mentre la sua casa arde essi fumano una pipa di tabacco.<sup>43</sup>

We spent last night in the street because we had the fire in Galata Serai which destroyed more than five hundred houses, and this is said to have been done on purpose, because the government does not like to make wooden houses, having forbidden building in such a way. Many people in our company who lived in that neighbourhood have lost most of their belongings. We foreigners are astonished, but here they are so used to this that while his house burns they smoke a pipe of tobacco. (Transl. by the Author)

Fortunately, the Naum Theatre where the company was performing did not suffer great damage because the building had already been rebuilt in stone some years before according to a first design by the architect Giuseppe Fossati,<sup>44</sup> following a great fire that had broken out in 1846 and had completely destroyed it. The high cost of the rent continued to be the main obstacle to the opening of a store with its own building independent from that of the theatre, which in fact continued to be the headquarters of the Ricordi bookshop and to store a lot of music from the Milan house whose sale Mariani continued to take care of during his whole stay. Here I have just space to quote one more passage from the letter of 9 November

43 I-Mr, Corrispondenza, MS. PIV2\_01a-007.

44 Actually Giuseppe Fossati gave up the design of the Naum Theatre which was took up by the English architect William James Smith who completed the building. Aracı (2010, 105-107) Dadyan (2017, 130). The architect Giuseppe Fossati (1822-1883), together with his older brother Gaspare Trajano (1809-1891), also an architect, designed a large number of public buildings, churches, embassies and private residences in Constantinople. Giuseppe in particular restored the basilica of S. Sofia. See And 2004, 49 note 13; Lacchia 1943; Lacchia 1939, 3-7; Palumbo Fossati Casa 2006.



1850 in which besides reporting the success of *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti with a first-rate cast, Mariani also gives an account of the tragic event of the bloody anti-Christian 'revolution' in Aleppo that the army of the sultan could not stem and that was therefore the cause of a serious political and diplomatic crisis:

per l'ulteriore andamento posso dirle che lo spartito va sempre tanto bene quanto la prima sera, e che il Teatro è affollato di spettatori. La Signora Penco, e la Signora Lotti prime donne, il basso profondo Signor Mitrovich ed il Tenore Signor Prudenza riscuotono sempre grandi applausi. Martedì prossimo andremo in iscena colla Lucia, in cui canterà la Penco, Baggetti, Corsi, ed Alessandrini. Sabato venturo gliene darò notizia. Adesso è scopo che le dica qualche cosa intorno alla presentazione del mio Inno al Gran Sultano. Sfortunatamente sono qui succeduti avvenimenti gravissimi che hanno messo sossopra la Corte, la diplomazia, e fanno traballare l'attual ministero. Una sanguinosissima rivoluzione in Aleppo, e si suppone anche nei luoghi circonvicini, ove han tagliato a pezzi molta parte della popolazione franca, saccheggiate le case e incendiato il quartiere ove quella abitava. Nel medesimo tempo qui è saltata in aria la Nave amiraglia, souvra alla quale fra un'altra mezz'ora doveva recarsi il Sultano. Era il più gran legno della marina Turca a tre ponti e mezzo con cento sessanta cannoni. Senza sapere il come prese fuoco la santa Barbara, e se la polvere non fosse stata scaricata per nove decisioni il giorno innanzi facilissimamente bruciava le altre quattro o cinque navi ch'erano ancorate vicino e con essa l'arsenale, e dei quartieri franchi di Pera e di Galata le case di pietra sarebbero andate in ruina e quelle di legno in fuoco ed in fumo. Con tutta la poca polvere che c'era lo scoppio fu talmente forte che parve terremoto; la città si scosse tutta ed i vetri delle finestre andarono in pezzi. Le vittime sono state poco su poco giù intorno a mille; sei soli camparono ma mezzi sfragellati ed in pericolo tutt'ora di vita. Per questi ed altri simili fatti di minor conto il governo è in apprensione; gli Ambasciatori dimandano grosse indennizzazioni per l'affare d'Aleppo e garanzie che per l'avvenire non abbia a succedere il simigliante ivi ed altrove.<sup>45</sup>

I can tell you that the score is always as good as it was the first evening, and that the theatre is crowded with spectators. Signora Penco, and Signora Lotti are the leading ladies, the deep bass Signor Mitrovich, while the tenor Signor Prudenza always receives great applause. Next Tuesday we will be on stage with *Lucia*, when Penco, Baggetti, Corsi, and Alessandrini will sing. On Saturday I will give you news. Now it is

45 Mariani's letter, Constantinople 9 November 1850, Corrispondenza, MS. PIV2\_01b-046.

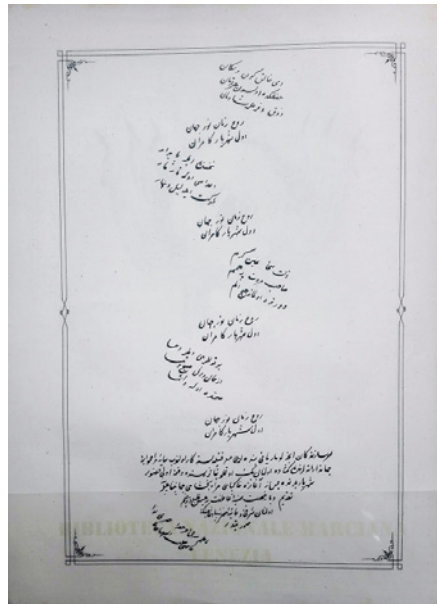


Figure 5a-c. Angelo Mariani, *Inno Nazionale dedicato a S.M. Imperatore il Sultano Abdul-Medjid. Eseguito per la prima vota in presenza di Sua Augusta Persona al Teatro di Pera il 28 gennaio 1849, 1850. Frontispiece, I-II. I-Vnm, misc. mus 4780*

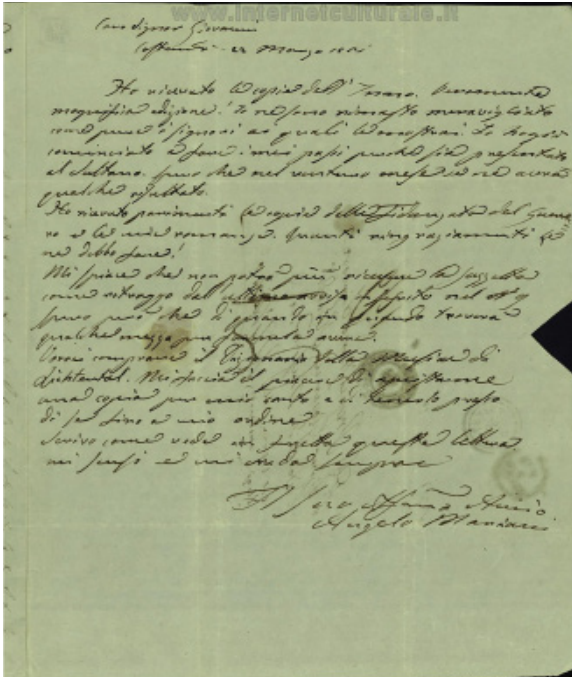


Figure 6. Angelo Mariani, Letter of 22 March 1851. Milano, Archivio storico Ricordi, Fondo Corrispondenza, I-Mr MS. PIV\_01b-049.

my purpose to tell you something about the presentation of my Hymn to the Great Sultan. Unfortunately, here serious events happened, which have upset the Court, diplomacy, and the current ministry. There has been a bloody revolution in Aleppo, and also I suppose in the surrounding areas, where they have cut a lot of the free population to pieces, looted the houses and burned the neighbourhood where they lived. At the same time the flagship was blown up here, on which the Sultan was due to go in another half an hour. It was the largest wooden ship in the Turkish navy, three and a half decks with a hundred and sixty cannon. With nobody knowing how, the arsenal caught fire, and if it had not been decided to discharge the powder the day before, there could easily have burned the other four or five ships that were anchored near it and with it the arsenal, and the stone houses of the Frankish neighbourhoods of Pera and Galata would have gone to ruin and all those in wood would have gone up in fire and smoke. With all the little powder that there was, the blast was so strong that it felt like an earthquake; the city shook all over and the window panes shattered. The victims were more or less around a thousand; only six of them were still alive, but they were badly injured and in danger of their lives. With these and other similar minor events, the government is apprehensive; the Ambassadors demand large

indemnities for the Aleppo affair and guarantees that for the future a similar thing will not happen here or elsewhere. (Transl. by the Author)

#### 4 Constantinopolitan Developments in Other Italian Composers

I can just point out here two other Italian composers in Constantinople about whom Aracı (2007, 277; 2010) Spinetti (2010; XVII, XXVI) and Baydar (2010; 288-92) had recently discussed: the cello and double bass player and composer Callisto Guatelli (1820-1900) from Parma who during his long stay of sixty years in Constantinople working at Naum Theatre as player and 'maestro concertatore'. In 1856 he achieved the role of Head of Imperial Music succeeding Giuseppe Donizetti. Guatelli composed a collection of melodies entitled *Arie nazionali e Canti popolari antichi e moderni*. Similarly, the renowned Piedmontese composer Luigi Arditi (1822-1903), engaged as director for the 1856-57 opera's season at Naum Theatre, composed an *Inno turco* performed in 1856 in praise of Sultan Abdülmecid and later sung again during the sultan's Abdülaziz (1830-1876) visit to London on 16 July 1867 by an English choir of one thousand six hundred singers.<sup>46</sup>

Finally I have to distinguish from the previous the case of Bartolomeo Pisani (Constantinople 1829-*post* 1895) because he was Levantine not Italian as generally indicated in the scholars' studies.<sup>47</sup> The almost unknown history of his own life placed him in a different and still unclear position. He was born in Constantinople in 1829 by Federico Maria Pisani and Thérèse Alléon,<sup>48</sup> the descendant of a family of Italian origin long time resident in Constantinople and well-established among the European aristocracy: Pisanis, in fact, held for several generations the primacy of the prestigious position of dragoman of the British Legation. As a way to show his desire to re-appropriate his own culture, Bartolomeo Pisani completed his studies in Naples with Saverio Mercadante around the years 1850s, later composed operas for some important Italian theatres: *Ladislao re di Napoli* dedicated to the sultan Abdül Aziz Khan (Naum Theatre, Constantinople, 1863; Teatro

46 The first recordings of this hymn of Arditi are available in *İstanbul'dan Londra'ya* CD 349 (Kalan) conducted by Emre Aracı; Arditi composed also an *Oriental Cantata* in praise of Sultan Abdülaziz Khan and performed at Crystal Palace. For further details of Arditi's stay in Constantinople, see Arditi 1896, 68-70, 325, 327.

47 See for instance Spinetti 2010, XXVI; Aracı 2006, 219.

48 Regarding the dates of birth and death of the composer, at the present state of research we refer to the information based on the genealogical research of the Levantini by Marie Anne Marandet. "Bartolomeo Pisani". *Geneanet* [online], <https://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&n=pisani&oc=0&p=barloomeo> (2018-05-15), in contrast to what is indicated by Ambivieri (1998) according to whom Bartolomeo Pisani was born in 1811 and not in 1829.

Pagliano, Florence, 1863), *Rebecca* with libretto of Francesco Maria Piave (Teatro alla Scala, Milan, 1865) and *La Gitana* (Teatro La Fenice, Venice, 1876). Unfortunately at the present all the musical scores of these operas seems lost, whereas some other autograph scores survive, for instance, the collection entitled *Composition inedites pour piano et chants* in Conservatorio "Luca Marenzio" of Brescia.<sup>49</sup> Pisani maintained with Mercadante a sincere relationship of esteem and friendship over the following years: his education with the Neapolitan master was an important stage in his development and was reported in his unpublished correspondence in French with his friend Francesco Florimo, from 1852 to 1863, who at that time was the director at the Conservatory of San Pietro a Majella in Naples.<sup>50</sup> From these letters we learn some new biographical data, for instance that he travelled a lot and married an English wife, Margaret Turner.

On the same lines as Donizetti, Mariani and Arditì he also composed an *Inno turco* written in Turkish with Latin letters and dedicated it to Sultan Abdülmecid. At the end of the music score manuscript, we can read this hymn was composed in Constantinople in 1868. In a letter, probably of the same year of 1868 (incompletely dated 29 May) he enthusiastically recounts its performance:

J'ai fait exécuter un Hymne en turc chanté par toute la compagnie. Le copie joliment [écrite] a été présenté au Sultan par l'ambassador de France recommandant l'auteur que bien le Sultan a laissé en partant 25 mille ₺ à l'impresa. Et bien à moi.<sup>51</sup>

I had a Hymn performed and sung in Turkish by the whole company. The finely-written copy had been presented to the Sultan by the French ambassador informing the author that willingly the Sultan had left twenty-five thousand lira to the company. And so, well, to me. (Transl. by the author)

49 I-BRc, Pasin 235a-260a. As indicated in a note by author this collection was gifted to the friend Francesco Pasini in date Constantinople 12 May 1895 and include a lot of musics composed between the years 1867 and 1895. These details make more difficult determinate his biography because they are in contrast to Marandet see n. 40 and Ambivieri (1998). A  *messa a quattro voci e grande orchestra* dedicated to Mercadante is preserved in Napoli, I-Nc, 10.7.11. Other sacred and secular of his musical pieces are scattered all around Italy: Trieste, Milan, Livorno, Turin, Rome and Naples. Aracı refers also a march entitled *Une Larme sur la tombe du Sultan Abdul-Mejid* preserved in Paris, F-BnF, Vm 12, 23190 (Aracı 2006, 220). The librettos of his operas are preserved in Bologna, Parma, Vicenza, Venice, Florence and Naples. See also Aracı 2010, 304.

50 I recently founded these letters in the Library of the Conservatory San Pietro a Majella of Naples and an annotated edition of this correspondence will be available with my Ph.D. thesis.

51 The unedited letter's manuscript is preserved at the Library of the Conservatory S. Pietro a Majella of Naples. Rari lettere MS. 19.2T XII. 8.13.

Pisani, just as Donizetti formerly was, was in charge with the role of conductor to the Imperial Theatre. In his unedited letter of 10 December 1859, he wrote:

Mon cher Florimo, mille remerciemens de votre bonne et chère lettre dont M. Oliva était porteur. J'ai été enchanté de faire sa connaissance, c'est un excellent garçon. Et vous pouvez être sûr que je ferai tout ce que je puis pour lui être utile. Quoique il n'a pas besoin de moi il se trouve déjà trop bien recommandé. Nous avons beaucoup conté de Naples et de vous cela va sans dire. Il m'a rafraîchi mes souvenirs mais pas mon amitié pour vous ne la calculé pas par mes lettres.

Souvenez-vous des bontés que vous ami avez pour moi et dites-moi si je puis jamais cesser de vous aimer. J'ai reçu une lettre de Mme Diran. Elle se porte à merveille et chante toujours. Je veux bien la voir. J'ai été nommé chef d'orchestra du theatre Impérial. J'ai un bijoux du theatre petit mais le plus riche et le plus joli qu'un puisse voir. J'ai un orchestre de 45 personnes tous turcs. Des chœurs et des chanteurs turcs - tous mes élevés. Je fais exécuter des scènes des dues des potpourri d'opéra. Venez et vous entendrez. J'espère que vous mettez en exécution votre ancien projet. Conservez la joie que j'aurai de vous revoir.<sup>52</sup>

My dear Florimo, a thousand thanks for your kind and dear letter of which Mr. Oliva was the bearer. I was delighted to make his acquaintance, for he is an excellent garçon. And you can be sure that I will do everything I can to help him. Although he does not need me as he is already too well recommended. We have said a lot about Naples and about you so there is no need to say more. He refreshed my memories but not my friendship for you, do not calculate it by my letters. Remember the kindness you have for me and tell me if I can ever stop loving you. I received a letter from Mrs. Diran. She is doing well and she continues to sing. I want to see her. I was appointed conductor of the Imperial Theatre. I have a little jewel of a theatre and the richest and most beautiful one can see. I have an orchestra of forty-five people, all Turkish. Turkish are both the choirs and the singers - all my students. I have had performed some scenes, some duets, potpourris and operas. Come and you will hear. I hope you implement your old project. Think of the joy that I will have on seeing you again. (Transl. by the Author)

As the case of Pisani demonstrates, the well-established Italian-Levantine community of Constantinople had assimilated Donizetti's lesson and participated in the *metissage* process producing composers, musi-

52 I-Nc, Lettere a Florimo. Rari lettere 19. 2T.

cian's exchanges, operatic performances and literary activities closely connected with opera, (as the several poems and translations of poetry written by Achille Tondi testify). In the letters quoted Pisani reports that the orchestra conducted by him was assembled entirely of Turks and his relationship with Adelaide Diran, an Armenian singer and composer, already well-known and appreciated by Angelo Mariani. This development of operatic culture was attested moreover by the increasing interest in the musical life in Constantinople addressed by Italian revues such as *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*,<sup>53</sup> *La Fama*, *Il Pirata*, *L'Italia Musicale*<sup>54</sup> and it is confirmed by the constitution of societies such as *Società Musicale Italiana*, *Ausania*, *Unione Drammatica di Costantinopoli*, *Società Operaia di Mutuo Soccorso*, *Armonia and Teutonia*.<sup>55</sup> As a consequence, in those years Constantinople became an important centre for opera culture thanks to which a lot of Italian musical and theatrical terms came into use in Turkish, maintaining their original pronunciation (nota, solo, musica, tempo, canto, pagliaccio, prova, compagnia, impresario, etc). (Aksoy 2007, 70). In the years in which Pisani published his piece for voices and piano entitled *Pace*, the Armenian Ottoman composer, Dikran Çuhacıyan (Constantinople 1837-1889) with whom Pisani was in contact, produced the first Turkish opera entitled *Arif Ağa'nin Hilesi* 'The Trick of Arif' in 1874 and *Leblebici Horhor Ağa* 'Good old Horhor, the chickpea vendor' staged in 1875.<sup>56</sup>

53 A revue imported from Italy whose circulation in Constantinople was possible mostly thanks to Mariani's great commitment to Istanbul's musical life and his advantageous friendship with the Milanese publisher Giovanni Ricordi.

54 The circulation in Constantinople of *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, published by Ricordi and imported from Italy was possible mostly thanks to Mariani's great commitment to the Ottoman capital's musical life. Also the French and English presses were very interested in opera in Constantinople see for example *Le Journal de Constantinople*, *The Musical World* etc. and of course Turkish as *Tekvim-i Vekayi* and even Armeno-Turkish as *Ceride-i şarkıye*, *Cihan* see Cankara 2015, 6-9.

55 See Suner 2013, Pannuti 2008, 5-8.

56 Dikran Çuhacıyan was the son of the clockmaker of the Sultan and had his first musical education in Constantinople, from 1860 to 1864 he studied at Conservatory "Giuseppe Verdi" in Milan (during the same period of the Armenian impresario-composer Serafin Menasse). Arriving back in Constantinople he worked with Italian, Turkish and Ottoman Armenian musicians and theatre directors, composing several operas and operettas in Ottoman Turkish, French, Armenian and Italian. He is also considered the founder of the Armenian operatic tradition started with his *Arshak II*. See Mestyan 2017, 290.

## 5 First Conclusions and New Perspectives of Research: the Sacred Metastasian Dramas Translated by Hovannes Yeremian

It seems to me widely demonstrated that the Italian opera in Constantinople presents some strongly original features: it is deeply settled into a multicultural context and becomes itself a multicultural factor whose characters are still far from being studied and defined in their breadth and depth despite the recent studies by Spinetti and Araci. By the study of his Turkish lyrics, the portrait of Donizetti emerges with a more actively participatory ideological position in relation to the *Tanzimat* and with interesting specific reports on the history of the Turkish language; while the image of Mariani is proposed, through the study of his autobiographical diary of Constantinople and the letters with Ricordi, as that of a precious witness not only of the important developments of the artistic quality of the opera stagings, but also weaving together the Ottoman society and the circles of international diplomacy; the career of the Levantine Pisani, that we have met with new data, prove furthermore how Italian opera constitutes a meeting point between the people of Constantinople. Having said this, and having established the material documentary bases for future investigations, I would like to give my essay an open conclusion on a new perspective of research.

The last scenario of operatic culture influences in Constantinople I would like to discuss here present an even deeper link with the secular phenomena of cross-cultural encounter which was played out by the Christian Armenian community which had lived in Constantinople since the fifteenth century.<sup>57</sup> In the early nineteenth century those phenomena manifested themselves in contradictory forms and often resulted in an open crisis within the multiethnic and social body of the great metropolis. What I have called 'scenario' opened in 1831, three years after the arrival of Donizetti in Constantinople, but was actually rediscovered in the twentieth century by the renowned Austrian Turkologist Andreas Tietze and to be exact starting with the essay published in Italy in 1979. As is known, Tietze endured exile under Nazism and this was precisely the reason that led him to Istanbul where he enjoyed political asylum which he always remembered with great gratitude. He was particularly attentive, in his work as a wide-ranging

57 Armenians' role during the nineteenth century went beyond commercial and producer-managerial activities and involved scientific and artistic culture as well. It is worth remembering the name of Séraphin Minasyan (1837-1888), a composer and a theatre producer able to compete with Naum's monopolistic activity. Minasyan was a well-known family name, as many of their members served in the Ottoman administration as translators or diplomats. See Mestyan 2011, 162-89. Sivazliyan (1986) claims that from the half of the nineteenth century the Armenian community of Constantinople became an economical, political and cultural essential centre for all Western Armenians.



scholar, to the culture of minorities present in Constantinople, the so-called *millet*. Tietze also collaborated with Armenian scholars on the question of that misunderstood literature of the Armenians speaking Turkish who used to write in it in Armenian letters.<sup>58</sup> In 1979 Tietze pointed out and with great refinement analysed the edition of four oratorios by Metastasio (that is to say, as a matter of fact, operas on a sacred subject) printed in Venice at the typography of the Armenian monastery of the Mekhitarist fathers of San Lazzaro and entitled *Metastazyo Şairin Teliflerinden Bir Kaç Ruhani Kasideler Tercümeleridir* (Some sacred musical drama from the repertoire of the poet Metastasio) translated into the common Turkish language written in Armenian characters; *La morte d'Abel*, translated into Turkish, *Abelin ölümü* (The Death of Abel); *Isacco figura del Redentore* which in Turkish is rendered as *İsahak efendimiz Yisusun Örneği* (Isaac Figure of Jesus our Lord); *Giuseppe Riconosciuto*, freely translated as *Yovsep Qeşik*, (or Joseph the Handsome); and *La passione di Cristo* translated as *Yisus efendimizin siyaseti* (The Passion of our Lord Jesus). The 1831 edition worked on by Tietze was presented anonymously and the scholar could only guess that it was intended for the audience of the Turkish-speaking Constantinopolitan Armenians. (Tietze 1979, 368).

Tietze was wrong to suppose that the author of the translation was a Mekhitarist monk, drawing this conviction from an allusive preface by the same translator, but he certainly noticed the great culture of this character, hoping for his identification in future studies. In this regard it is appropriate to let Tietze put it:

credo comunque si possa dire non soltanto che egli ha il merito di essere stato uno dei primi - o forse anche il primo - a tradurre in turco testi teatrali occidentali, libretti di opere musicali, ma che il suo lavoro è degno d'attenzione per la bellezza e la forza espressiva della lingua nonché per la magistrale tecnica traduzionale. (Tietze 1979, 368)

I believe, however, that it can be said not only that he has the merit of having been one of the first - or perhaps the first - to translate into Turkish theatrical texts and librettos of musical works, and that his work is worthy of attention also for the beauty and the expressive force of the language as well as for the masterful translational technique. (Transl. by the Author)

Tietze then returned to these Metastasian subjects in 1994 to give a complete transliteration of the text of the first sacred drama, *La morte d'Abel*,

58 On the Armeno-Turkish literature see also Pamukciyan 2002, Strauss 2010, Stepanyan (s.d.), Cankara 2015, Vartanian 1991.

from the original Turkish language in Armenian characters to the modern one in Latin characters (Tietze 1994). The scholar, however, was not aware of another edition of the same sacred dramas printed again, eight years later, in 1839, at the same Venetian Armenian Typography of San Lazzaro. ("*Libri turchi*" 1839, 376-377). This time, however, the name of the translator is explicitly mentioned: he is the Armenian baron Hovannes Yeremian who in the announcements of the new books printed in Italy which were included in the review *Bibliografia Italiana* is also defined as the first dragoman of the King of Denmark in Constantinople. So we easily come to know that he counts at least another couple of translations, among which there is the poem *Yung Feylesofun Fiğanleri, yaxöd Yung'un Geceleri* (Complaints of the Philosopher Young, or Young's Nights) by the English poet Edward Young, published again in Venice in 1836 at the Typography of the monastery of San Lazzaro.<sup>59</sup>

The reasons why this interesting character did not reveal himself in 1831 cannot have any definitive answer but we can observe that the first edition includes just those Metastasian oratorios whose stories, based on the Christian Bible, are mentioned in the Quran. We may think that this perhaps should have also facilitated the spread to, and acceptance by, a Muslim audience within the sultanate and perhaps in this regard there are signals in the translation: the names of the characters and the same name of God mainly cited as 'Allah'.

History tells us that the Armenian Christian millet had a period of relative peace and prosperity starting from 1831, and from 1839 its autonomy and freedom within the sultanate was further consolidated.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps for this reason in 1839 Yeremian revealed himself and it is also noteworthy that in this edition he added a fifth drama, *Betulia Liberata*, whose fortune in the history of Western music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was great. The same year Albrecht Krafft pioneer of Oriental Studies (1841), in his article in the review *Jahrbücher der Literatur*, presented Yeremian's translation with an extended comment including an Ottoman transliteration precisely from the lastly added oratorio. (To be precise Krafft transliterated the narration of the death of Holofernes that Judith tells of when she came back to the Judaic city). *Betulia* earned its author the epithet of a philosopher-poet and contains pages of extraordinary spiritual commitment to an absolutely non-iconic vision of the divine. However, it belongs to the tradition of the exegesis of the biblical character of Judith,

59 "*Libri armeni e turchi*" (1837, 231). The work consists of three books (volume 1 from first to ninth *Night*, volume 2 from tenth to seventeenth *Night* and volume 3 from fifteenth to twenty-fourth *Night*) for a total of 197 pages. Stepanyan 2005, 51.

60 In 1856 was promulgated a second edict called *Islâhat Hatt-ı Hümâyûnu* 'Imperial reform edict' which granted even more equality and government participation in the Ottoman office to the domestic leaders of each religious minorities.

a female figure not mentioned in the Quran, an allegorical interpretation that reveals in itself the idea of nation. Did Yeremian perhaps want to take part in that wide rediscovery movement of the national identity that went under the name of the Armenian Renaissance, while proposing this within a vision of harmony between the peoples? These are the questions I am asking myself at present concerning an author about which almost nothing exists in any studies dedicated to him.<sup>61</sup> Anyway, I am gradually acquiring very important data on Yeremian's involvement in the ecumenical debate between Armenian Christian communities and their relationships with Islam in those years.

In relation to the question of the musical use of the Metastasian translations by Yeremian I am following some trails. In this period the Armenian musicians called *ashug* were very productive. They sang in Turkish but their lyrics were written in Armenian characters and their very rich repertoire is today, sadly, still very little studied. They sang by blending the Turkish and Armenian singing traditions and some among them became accustomed to Western music. The *ashug* repertoire did not exclude the employment of the Christian biblical stories, carrying it with success even to the sultan's palace.<sup>62</sup> Did Yeremian perhaps want to create a repertoire of texts that could be set to music but not necessarily as a written composition in the typical manners of Western music? Or did he rather want to make it available as an improvisational arrangement in the manner of the oral *ashug* poets' tradition? Were the *ashugs* wont to perform extrapolated scenes and arias of the sacred Metastasian dramas in the *amiras*<sup>63</sup> palaces and at the sultan's court? On this topic it is peculiar that one of the favorite pieces<sup>64</sup> of the sultan Abdul Aziz (1830-1876) was the famous *Sird im sasani* which recounts the scene in which Jesus washes the feet of his disciples

61 Some scholars such as Metin And (1974, 64-65) refers he could worked on these topic thanks to Tietze who provided to him the 1831's metastasian translation of these oratorios, and also other Turkish and Armenian scholars deal with it but without any extensive regard. See as instance Manok (2013).

62 For a recent detailed study on the *ashugs* see among the others Van Lint 2004.

63 The *amiras* were the representatives of the influential bourgeois families of the Armenian living in Constantinople. They enjoyed great prestige as bankers and as financial advisors, as well as holding important positions in the Ottoman government. As it is generally known the majority of them were adversed to the empire's renovation in order to maintain their privileges but at the same time they supported the economical and cultural development of Constantinople financing the building of several public schools, churches, and also an hospital and a typography. Some noteworthy names also linked with music development are: Düzryan, Bezciyan, Dadyan, and Balyan families. On this matter, see Agbabian Hubbard 2010, 289-92; Kerovpyan, Yılmaz 2010, 83-105. And for a more specific critical approach on *amiras*' role in this period see Barsoumian 1982, 171 and Sivazliyan 1986, 23; Dadyan (2012).

64 This piece used to be performed by the *ashug* Kemani Sebu. Hubbard (2010, 290) refer erroneously this piece was a *hijaz* which actually it indicates the fifth mode of the harmonic minor scale. About Kemani Sebu see also Bora (2010, 207-10).

as a symbolic act of humility.<sup>65</sup> Finally, Yeremian's aspiration seems to be that of developing a new, vulgar poetry suitable to secular spirituality and offering it through that sentimental dimension which Metastasio had impressed on the opera of his own century and the following one. I can only temporarily close this contribution by reporting Yeremian's preface to the collection of oratorios: a masterpiece of allusiveness and creativity that in its apparent naivety aims to have a profound effect on individual and collective consciences.<sup>66</sup>

### Ifadéi meram

Dünyade derd deyi şikayyet etdiyimiz sıqıntılarn dürlüsü` bi ğaraz mizan ıla vezn olunsa, işsizlik sıqıntısı` kişiye pek küçük derd deyilikén, niçe kimseler boş durmayı` kéndilere rahatlıq, ve belki devlet sayarlar. Bazılar da` ömrümüz pek uzun dur, vaqti biz her ne qadar telef etsek, eksileceyi yoq: zira punar başından biri biri ardı sıra ğelıyor gibi, eyvence, ve vaqit ğeçirmek şöretleri ile kimi ğaybet, kimi qumar, kimi de ğayri bedxüya meşğul, o baha yetmez vaqti, o bir demi ile axretlerini yapacaq hazineyi` bir çürük mal gibi israf etdiklerini taaccüb edecek şey, ve acınacaq haldir. A` zavallı, bu şimdiki vaqit` ardından ğelecek vaqtin müjdecisi deyil dir: illa önünden qaçanın hesabını` Yaradan senden istiyecek haberini vermeye ğelıyor. Ğerçi kişiye défi ğam için bir eyvence elzem oduğu inkyar olunmaz: lakin bir eyvence` ya tene, ya cana faidesi olmazsa daxi, zararı da olmamaq elzem olduğu aşıkıyar dir. Yoqsa ya ele, ya kéndiye zarar verib, qalbde nedamet braqacaq eyvence` défi ğam olmaz, zámme ğam olur mülahazalarıyla, zatin biri dünyaden el çekmiş iken, yine vaqtini boş ğeçirmemek için, kéndiye eyvence deyi` şöretıyab Metastazyo şairin ruhaniye dair kitaplardan ixrac, ve *Opera* nami ile te'lif eylediği işbu vezinsiz Qasideler` örneksiz bir tertib ile etdiyi tercümeıy` bazı éhli vuqf gyorüb, tahsin edib basma olunmasını arzulediklerine binaen, oquyanlara daxi maqbul, ve günahsız bir eyvence

65 The scene is an elaborate *dagh*-aria from *votenıvat* which is a ritual of the Armenian Church. See Agbabian Hubbard (2010, 290). Keşiş Oğlu was another Armenian *ashug* who used to perform for the sultan Abdülmecid see Van Lint 2004, 340-2.

66 I based my transliteration mainly on the pioneering and practically only studies on this topic provided by Tietze 1994 and Vartanian 1991, 9-21. Although these sources seem to me contradictory in the use of some conventions they allow me to proceed in a more accurate understanding of this subject. In the time between the writing of this article and its publication I have further investigated these topics finding answers to the proposed questions which presumably will be presented in a consequential essay or certainly with my Ph.D. thesis, in which will be available also a complete transliteration in Turkish characters of the second oratorio, *İsahak efendimiz Yisusun Örneıy*, '*Isacco Figura del Redentore*' from Yeremian's translated book (1839) unite of the Italian translation of the Turkish text of this oratorio that I was able to translate thanks also to the generous guide of my Prof. Giampiero Bellingeri.



Figure 7. Pietro Metastasio, *Metastazyo Şairin Teliflerinden Bir Kaç Ruhani Kasideler Tercümeleri dir.* (Some sacred musical dramas from the repertoire of the poet Metastasio). Çev. Yohannes Yeremian, 1839. Frontispiece. Wien, ÖNB, 128324-A.

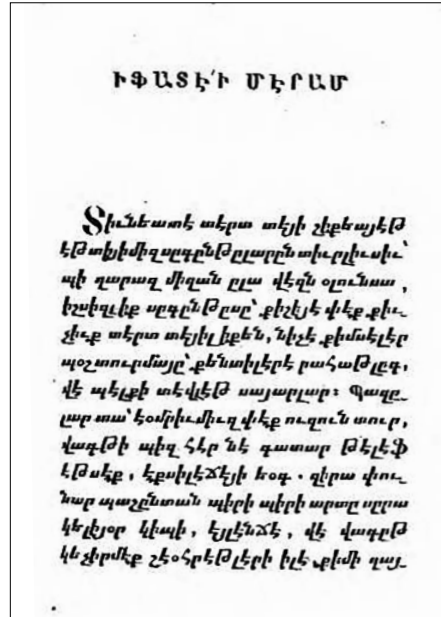


Figure 8. Pietro Metastasio, *Metastazyo Şairin Teliflerinden Bir Kaç Ruhani Kasideler Tercümeleri dir.* (Some sacred musical dramas from the repertoire of the poet Metastasio). Çev. Yohannes Yeremian, 1839. Preface. Wien, ÖNB, 128324-A.

tertib me'muli ile hasma olunmuş dur. İnşa-Allah me'mulimiz boş olmaz. (Yeremian [Çev.], 1839)

Expression of intent

The variety of the sufferings we complain of, when weighed without prejudice, would make us observe that affliction due to idleness is not at all a small pain for a person, although many consider that remaining idle is a comfort and perhaps a fortune. In fact, our life is very long and as long as we waste time it will never be shortened. While standing one by one in line along the way to go and come back from a fountain, we note that some with fun and amusement disappear from society, those

involved in gambling and those with other shady dealings. Now, it is astonishing and sorrowful to see the waste of time, almost like it was an out-of-date commodity, rather than taking advantage of every moment to treasure it. Ah wretched us, when our present time has gone the joyful messenger of the future will not come, but instead the announcement that the creator will want to present you with the account of what you missed in life.

Although it certainly cannot be denied that fun is necessary to dispel sadness, it is clear, however, that even if this is of no use, neither for the body nor for the spirit, it also likewise must not cause harm. Otherwise, harming other people and themselves, that fun which will have left remorse in the heart, will no longer be able to ward off affliction and make it heavier. On the contrary, a person who withdraws from the world and spends time for his own enjoyment draws out the authentic word from the sacred books of the renowned poet Metastasio. Some experts have noted this translation denotes an original pattern of Qasides [odi], without a metre, collected under the name of 'opera'. Proceed with people's desire by publishing a printed edition in the hope that it can be innocent fun and it will be also welcomed by the readers. If God wants all this, he will not disappoint our expectations. (Transl. by the Author)

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# Literary Agency in the Wake of Catastrophe

## The Canonization of the Literary Responses to Trauma

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**Abstract** Textual agency plays a fundamental role with regard to the literary production devoted to catastrophic events and the trauma they entail; it raises questions about the ethics of the disaster, as if to say the legitimacy of the literary works on the theme. The authorial commitment to bear witness to the events often clashes with the unrepresentability of the event itself: silence and discursivity are both misleading choices in the sense that the first is a real blot on History, while the latter implies to domesticate trauma in order to transpose it into literary forms. This article aims to give relevance to the therapeutic agency of the Literature of the catastrophe and in doing so, it contributes to the re-evaluation of the genre as part of the literary canon.

**Summary** 1. Introduction. – 2 Mimesis and Pleasure as Keywords for the Canonization of the Literature of the Catastrophe. – 4 The Textual Agency of the Literature of the Catastrophe. – 4.1 A Committed Literature. – 4.2 The Therapeutic Value. – 5 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Literature. Trauma. Catastrophe. Canon. Fukushima.


## 1 Introduction

The definition of agency in the literary field usually refers to the active performance of texts in a restricted socio-cultural domain, that is, in the case of the literary text, the reading target of the literary work in question. This assumption is inspired by the idea that any text, whatever oral, written or iconic, is by no means neutral and it can rather “make a difference” (Cooren 2004, 375). This article aims to show how textual agency is particularly relevant with regard to the literary production known as the Literature of the catastrophe. This label points out the literary responses to a natural or man-made disaster whose catastrophic extent encourages the formation of a collective memory of the historical events; and, at the same time, the genre touches the sensitive subject of individual as well as collective trauma.

The ambitious title of the article reveals the urge to reconsider the role of the Literature of the catastrophe – 震災・人災文学 *shinsai-jinsai bungaku*

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2018/01/029

Submitted: 2018-07-11 | Accepted: 2018-10-09

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in Japanese – in the light of the increasingly central position that this genre has assumed after the 2011 Japanese Daishinsai. Although this literary production is still marginalized if compared to other popular literary themes, it is precisely its therapeutic quality (read: its agency) to turn it effective as a means to help victims in detecting and working through their trauma. In this perspective, the canonization of this literary genre only takes advantage of the ever-growing popularity of the so-called 3.11 文学 *3.11 bungaku* 'literature of 3.11' in Japan to reassess the function of the Literature of the catastrophe in the broader context of the world literary canon. The author draws off Japanese literary representation of traumatic experiences to develop a theoretical framework of the Literature of the catastrophe in the broadest sense.

The complex process of canon formation is here shortly mentioned in order to provide proof of the legitimate affiliation of the genre to the 'high culture' which encompasses any cultural products of aesthetic value. In doing so, two main keywords are particularly analyzed: mimesis and pleasure. By taking into account the philosophical debate around 'beauty', an overview of the general connotations of the literary classics ascribed to the literary canon is provided; and after introducing its interpretations applied to the literary field, the article underlines the relevance of two different features, mimesis and pleasure, which result particularly significant in the case of the Literature of the catastrophe intended as testimonial accounts.

The article then moves forward to investigate the role of 'agency' and its implications on the literary ground. Special emphasis is given to the definition of the range of the textual agency as it is employed in the Literature of the catastrophe as a genre itself. Above all, to take into consideration the authorial commitment into writing that this particular genre entails is considered crucial as a form of 'literary agency'. At the same time, it is inevitably to investigate the aim that this literary production intends to achieve.

In addition, as textual agency entails not only textual performance in specific settings but also the degree of its action which defines the allocation of its agency (Cooren 2009, 42) the stages of the literary production, mediation and reception should be carefully analyzed too. Hence, it is worthy to underline the importance that the reception of this literary genre showed during the past decades among the literati as well as the wide audience: for example, the literary testimony to Nazi Shoah finds nowadays a loyal public of readers in Western countries and its reading is largely encouraged on a scholastic level for educational purposes. On the contrary the literary production known as 原爆文学 *genbaku bungaku* 'literature of the atomic bombings' underwent the American censorship soon after WWII, which has greatly contributed to the ghettoization of the genre. Suffice it to say that the first literary testimony about the atomic bombing on Hiroshima, namely 屍の街 *Shikabane no machi* (City of Corpses, 1948), was drafted by the journalist Ōta Yōko in September 1945 but suffered

a strict censorial penalization for three years before its first publication. Albeit the Japanese socio-political establishment exhibited a revival of the interests toward hibakusha after the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear power plant, this literary production is a long way from obtaining the evaluation it deserves as a therapeutic literary production.

In the case of the Literature of the catastrophe the target to which the literary product is addressed as well as the broader audience involved in the reading are fundamental factors to be considered in order to shed light on how the textual agency of the genre is fully performed. Actually, the literary texts prove to be effective on two different levels – writing and reading – which both encompass the peculiar therapeutic value that the testimony accounts accomplish. This is seen as an important added value of the literary genre in question, as well as the heart of its ‘agency’, totally performed through the psychotherapeutic process of the “abreactive catharsis” and the “catharsis of integration” (Dayton 2000, 96), deeply described later.

By stressing the relevance of mimesis and pleasure as fundamental characteristics at the basis of the canonical literary works and by giving a new interpretation of the Literature of the catastrophe’s agency according to the commitment of the testimonial literature and its therapeutic potential, this article aspires to contribute to the re-valorization of the genre and, in doing so, to prove its legitimate membership in the literary canon.

## 2 Mimesis and Pleasure as Keywords for the Canonization of the Literature of the Catastrophe

It should be noticed that the Literature of the catastrophe owes several characteristics that the long philosophical debate around the canon formation has brought to light as fundamental for the aesthetic evaluation of the artwork. To talk about literary canon nowadays may seem pointless to some extent, unless there is the intention, as this is the case, to give a stronger voice to the therapeutic power of the genre. Walter Benjamin was perhaps the first to diagnose “der Verfall der Aura” ([1935] 1989, 17) in our era, as to say the downfall of the value of the artistic work, today mostly mass-manufactured. John Whittier Treat echoed this analysis by defining the Japanese literary production by contemporary authors like Yoshimoto Banana and Murakami Haruki as 使い捨て *tsukaisute* that is, “reading and throw away” literature (Treat 1993, 357). The label clearly refers to free-flowing readings well suitable for entertainment but often forgotten after their fruition. For the record, Ōe Kenzaburō’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1994 mirrored Treat’s consideration by labelling the above-mentioned Yoshimoto and Murakami as “subculture writers”, a criticism shared also by Etō Jun (McKnight 2011, 205-6). It results the devalu-

ation of the trendy literature that since the dawn of twentieth century was defined in Japan as popular – 大衆文学 *taishū bungaku* ‘popular literature’; this term was commonly accepted by the literary establishment in order to distinguish it from the 純文学 *jun bungaku* ‘high literature’, the literary production focused on more elevated themes (Suzuki 2000). Notwithstanding, this is the appellation used by Japanese writers like Abe Kazushige and Kawakami Mieko among others, to define their literary productions after 11 March 2011 – see, for example, the literary cross-talks published by Waseda Bungaku (2012). This authorial declaration is anything but irrelevant if interpreted as a statement of quality assurance of authorial works, perceived as ‘high’ literary production although devoted to the three-fold catastrophe of earthquake, tsunamis and nuclear meltdown. Nevertheless, the 3.11 *bungaku* still remains appanage of a small élite of critics who are interested in the investigation of the intricate relationship among literature, trauma and catastrophe; and the big success among the audience is likely to emphasize the empathy of Japanese people towards Tohoku victims.

Of course, the *jun bungaku/taishū bungaku* debate cannot be dismissed in a few lines and should deserve further investigations; right now I limit my considerations to the self-assessment expressed by Japanese authors in evaluating their testimonial products. It should also be acknowledged how the distinction between the two labels is restricted to Japanese literary production and does not affect world-wide literature, according to Britannica Encyclopaedia 2013: “nowadays the examples of the worldwide *taishū bungaku* are detective novels and science fiction.” [Authors’ italics, Japanese in the original], (Nakamura 2014, 25)

Back to the canon formation issue, some considerations can be drawn up by underlining the importance of mimesis to aesthetically evaluate a product of art. Aristotle defined it in his *Poetics* (trans. Butcher 1902) as the perfect imitation of reality. The mimesis concept found large consensus among the representatives of the French Naturalism movement and it witnessed its Japanese interpretations almost a century later, in the twenty-first century, through the works by Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai, among others. Furthermore, Japan saw the birth of the treatise on the topic of the modern novel by Tsubouchi Shōyō: his 小説神髓 *Shōsetsu shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel, 1885) well summarized the relevance of mimesis (模写 *mosha*) in the representation of human feelings (人情 *ninjō*) briefly indicated by seven different emotions (喜怒哀樂 *kidoairaku*) developed in a specific environment – Zola’s milieu became Tsubouchi’s 世態 *setai* (Bienati, Scrolavezza 2009, 30-3).

The central role of mimesis is recognized by the Literature of the catastrophe too, especially with a reference to testimonial accounts and documentary novels: the reliability of the work is extremely important to the victims in order to be truthful to their experiences. To prevent any artistic

(read: literary) manipulation of the historical events means to protect the memory of *I sommersi e i salvati* (The Drowned and the Saved) to borrow Primo Levi's words, who was one of the authors who considered the writing about Nazi's deportation a moral commitment for the survivors as much as for the broader public. The author also refused any form of fictionalized work on the ground that "the theme of the massacre is not open to revision and fiction. The few novels written on the topic are odious, they are disgusting to read" (Levi quoted by Sullam 2010, 108) According to Levi, any efforts in conveying the traumatic experience into literary forms is acceptable as long as it enables the reader to sympathize with the victims. The lyricism attributed to his works by the critics suggests the attempt to transpose the traumatic experience into words – see for example the outstanding metaphor between Auschwitz's life and Dante's *Inferno* (Levi 1958) – but the verbalization of the atrocity does not corrupt the experience itself, neither it tries to domesticate the catastrophe. To aesthetically portrait the disaster does not equal to beautify it in a strict sense but it means only to create a new literary language able to convey the nightmarish, barbaric and shocking experience, if possible.

By stating that mimesis is one important attribute of the Literature of the catastrophe, it might seem that all the fictionalized literary works on the theme are excluded from the evaluation of the genre. Actually, the semantic proximity of the term *factio* to *inventio*, which are both translatable as 'shape with fantasy', is the source for the allusion to the linguistic and literary creativity, hence the adjectives 'fictional' and 'fake, false' with their negative connotations (Segre 1985, 214). This, then, fomented the debate between Plato and Aristotle regarding 'art as a lie' or 'art as a keeper of truth': the first assertion focuses on *factio* in its most negative sense while the other interprets any manifestations of art like a mimesis of reality (215). Actually, hybrid production can be detected too, in a progressive passage from mimesis to verisimilitude to fiction.

Anyway, it should also be remarked that according to the re-definition of the Aristotle's term by French and Japanese Naturalism, any form of imaginary portrayals of real life well suit the terminology – see, for example, Tsubouchi Shōyō's *Shōsetsu shinzui* mentioned earlier. In this sense Levi's averse attitude towards Shoah fiction as well as Adorno's statement about the impossibility to write poetry after Auschwitz (1955, 30) appear only like exceptional cases of extremely hostile stance of the authors towards fictionality. This is what is commonly addressed to as the debate of the 'ethics of the disaster', in other words the legitimacy of any artistic or literary discourse on the theme, since the catastrophe calls into question the aestheticization of the dehumanization, as well as catastrophe's (un)representability, especially when it deals with the critical trauma of loss, abandon, death.

More complex is the attribution of pleasure, which came to the fore in the second half of twenty-first century thanks to the Decadent movement.



Oscar Wilde, the Italian D'Annunzio and his Japanese counterpart, Mishima Yukio, are examples of literary hedonists who embraced Théophile Gautier's slogan "l'art pour l'art" (1835). This vision of the artistic field highly influenced the production of authors like Roland Barthes who, almost one century later, defined the literary work by the French terms *plaisir* or *jouissance*, 'pleasure', 'amusement' (1982, 29); the literary text became a concrete, almost erotic body: a source for pleasure which is an end in itself.

But how to apply the attribute of pleasant to literary works on a catastrophic and traumatic subject? Assuming that this operation is not a forced artifice simply intended to underline the aesthetic value of this literary production, history comes in help: Voltaire's (1759) (*Gargantini* 2005) *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (*Candide: Optimism*) and Kamo no Chōmei's ([1212] 2011) *方丈記 Hōjōki* (*An Account of My Hut*), only to mention a few, are considered everlasting classics, fundamental in the construction of the literary canon of France and Japan, respectively. Hence, is it possible that a literary work on great environmental upheavals which overwhelm the miserable protagonists assumes the connotation of pleasant?

Kant (1790), in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of Judgment*) pointed out how the aesthetic judgment can be interpreted according to the reference of 'beauty' (as opposed to the sublime), and even more specifically, judgments about the beauty of nature (as opposed to art). The concept of sublime is taken into consideration in the sense of what is immeasurable; a contradictory feeling of attraction and repulsion that emerges from the confrontation with natural forces (Kant 1790, 250). The human being perceives a profound discomfort due to his conscious inadequacy - defined as 'Das mathematisch Erhabene' (mathematically sublime, 260) - and the disarming physical impotence to face nature itself - called 'Das dynamisch-Erhabene' (dynamically sublime, 260). Any natural manifestation is perceived by Kantian philosophy with extreme astonishment and amazement, thus evaluating its aesthetic perception of 'incredibly fascinating':

The sublime is a key moment [...] so overwhelming as to defy reason to understand. It is a moment 'beyond representation'. Sublimity is the means by which the presentation (*Darstellung*) of the trace of the event [...] is accomplished by a failure inherent in representation (*Vorstellung*). The sublime, Kant claims, involves negative presentation, an experience of the breakdown of the accord between the imagination and the understanding [Authors' italics]. (Bernard-Donals, Glejzer 2001, 13)

Because of the extraordinary nature of the event, it goes beyond representation, hence the failure in any adequate testimony. The judgment of the sublime takes action only when the patient is overwhelmed by the agent in a way that can even lead to his apocalyptic annihilation.

It is undeniable that tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes have been subject of fascination since the dawn of time. Their study is not merely cautious: the thinly disguised concern reveals the attractive power of these events on human beings. Since any kind of natural or man-made 'catastrophe' is the main theme of the literary genre in question, the attraction these works has on the wide public is easily explained. Moreover, readers not only share the interest in extraordinary events beyond the reach of human's power, but they also demonstrate the urge to learn about those tragic accidents to prevent them to happen again in the future. Furthermore, the public can also enjoy the beneficial effects this reading provides in the form of witness' testimony at least in two different forms: recording data and therapeutic means to overcome trauma (this point will be developed later).

Even though the Literature of the catastrophe shows the compliance to mimesis and pleasure concepts for natural forces which confirms the value of timeless classics like *Candide* and *Hōjōki*, the literature of the genre does not find wider deployment on contemporary bookshelves in the sense that it seems not as much appreciated as other literary genres. Of course, it is a committed literature which refuses to be read only for fun. It is not by chance that, as noticed before, the so-called 'Shoah Literature' finds in Western countries widespread use in schools for educational purposes. As a matter of interest, it is worthy to mention that the Hebrew term שואה *shoah* finds its translation in the English 'catastrophe'; on the contrary abominable is the undignified label 'Holocaust narrative' due to the implicit meaning of sacrifice that the label 'holocaust' entails.

What is clear from this last consideration, is that the art (read: literature)'s purpose needs to be taken into account too, in order to consider with foresight the role of the Literature of the catastrophe in the broader literary canon.

### 3 The textual agency of the Literature of the catastrophe

#### 3.1 A committed literature

To speak about the qualities of the classics which are objects of the process of the literary canonization implies of course to talk about originality, creativity, uniqueness – as underlined, among others, by the concept of 'genius' in Schopenhauer (1844). It goes without saying that mimesis and pleasure do not suffice to determine the status of the literary works in question. In this sense, useful is the analysis proposed by the critic Harold Bloom (1994) in his *The Western Canon*. Bloom conceived the canonical standard as a "conflict between past genius and present aspiration in which the prize is literary survival or canonical inclusion" (8) and, by describing the

works by William Shakespeare – the centre of Western canon in Bloom's perspective – the author elaborates further considerations on the aesthetic value of literature, inter alia:

1. cognitive acuity (associated with a great ability to understand and transpose into literature human psychology and its mutability);
2. linguistic energy (in terms of will to figuration and motive for metaphor); and
3. power of invention, considered as the competence to mirror reality (mimesis) as well as the quality of being inventive. (9)

This scheme works as a recapitulation of the necessary features that qualify the literary classics and that are also shared by – at least – the majority of the literary texts which belong to the Literature of the catastrophe. A Japanese counterpart to this scheme can be found in Nakamura's essay and his considerations about "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" which led the critic to underline the qualities of "great kindness, reliability, or honesty" and "conspicuous for virtue, intellect [...] a luminary." (Nakamura 2014, 27) It is worthy to stress that this analysis was deeply influenced by Western approach to aesthetics. Notwithstanding, I would like now to move forward to a related topic, the one of art (read: literature)'s purpose which is equally significant if considered the sensitive themes of the genre.

Actually, having settled the issue of the 'agency', it is extremely relevant to notice how the term also entails "la capacità umana di agire" 'human capacity of action' (Ahearn 2002, 18). This general definition refers to human activities and performances and requires to be embedded in the narrower field of the literary text in order to fulfil the main topic of this article. The textual agency, as to say, the ability of the text to create theory of action (Derrida 1990, 13), genuinely disguises authorial commitment into writing as well as the purpose of his literary work.

A first observation should be addressed to the terminology to indicate literature's function or intention – *Zweck* as reported by Kant's writings, not to confuse with *Zweckmäßigkeit* translatable as 'purposiveness': according to this nomenclature the 'beauty' does not have to be useful but there must be a particular reason under its existence (1790, 146). It goes without saying that this interpretation clashes with the consideration of art (read: literature) as a pure entertainment; the debate around the *tsukaisute* production – books as mere consumer goods – comes to the fore again. Actually, if we take for granted that any single artwork owes a value because it is the result of human's creativity and talent, it is difficult to downgrade any literary work. It is not by chance that the intent of the artistic production is taken into account: it makes the difference between two literary products – A and B – both created with authorial originality but which show the different aims of amusing (A) or informing (B) the public.

Following this approach, I would like to turn the attention to the meaning attributed to the quality of *inutile* 'useless' by Sartre ([1948] 2008, 88), who saw the literary production as the result of a free creative act in terms of *liberté/gratuité* 'liberty/gratuity', a combo the critic often discussed. According to this viewpoint, the value of the literary product is inestimable: it is actually impossible to estimate the fruit of human's intellectual efforts. And, only in this perspective, the aspiration to an ultimate creation avoids ethics and morality to find the perfection in the futile and pointless art. It is interesting to underline how Sartre's considerations ascribe a positive attribute to the *inutile* linked to any artworks. The logic of profit that rules human society's mindset nowadays is antithetical to this concept: anything useless usually loses its sense of existence. Following this approach, Japanese literati frequently debated regarding the distressful impotence of literature after 3.11 disaster. Among others, Takahashi Genichirō's literary productions testify an interest towards the role and use of language in the wake of catastrophe – see his 「あの日」から僕が考えている「正しさ」について '*Ano hi*' kara boku ga kangateiru '*tadashisa*' ni tsuite (About the 'Correctness' I Have Thought since 'that Moment', 2011) and 非常時の言葉 *Hijōji no kotoba* (Words of Emergency 2012). In a crosstalk with Sasaki Azushi and Abe Kazushige, the latter stressed the fruitless stance of literature arguing that the 3.11 underlined exactly the weakness in literary production: "When I thought about what literature could do [after 11 March] I am afraid to say anything came out to me. It is useless to the extent I was shocked" (Abe, Sasaki, Takahashi 2015, 27). Again, the novelist echoed himself in the 言葉もまた壊された *Kotoba mo mata kowasareta* (Even words crushed once again, 2016) interview by the *Asahi Shinbun*: "the trust in words incredibly faded. [...] Wherein, it is necessary to restore the value of words one more time". And actually, the cross-talk with Takahashi and Sasaki concludes with Abe stressing the real role of literature, in his own opinion: to cool down the crazy and reflect to what can be done to recover Japan's devastated areas and help its refugees with a clear head (Abe, Sasaki, Takahashi 2015, 28).

Likewise, the lay *impératif moral* 'moral imperative' proposed by Sartre ([1946] 1998) in his *La responsabilité de l'écrivain* (The Responsibility of the Writer) and throughout his collection of essays reveals the perception that morality is a part of authorial *engagement* 'commitment'. According to this theory "*la réalisation plénière de la liberté*" 'plenary realisation of the liberty' (Benoît 2000, 33) of the author consists in assuming all the consequences that the act of writing entails. Authorial engagement into writing, and implicitly, the purpose which pushes him to write, are to be considered as the double faces of the same 'agency' coin: the starting engine of the process of writing which assumes a particular connotation in the case of the Literature of the catastrophe:

by focusing on textual performance, we challenge our overreliance on face-to-face interaction and show that texts contribute to the local translocation of constraints and abilities. (Cooren 2004, 374)

This aspect is actually extremely topical and relevant when dealing with any literary response to a traumatic event. The keyword here, as underlined by Kobayashi in dealing with Japanese post-3.11 literature, is exactly the common matrix that “response” and “responsibility” share: “It must not be forgotten that in case there is the chance to carry out a 応答 *outou* ‘response’ to face others’ inquiry, there, 責任 *sekinin* ‘responsibility’ follows” (2012, 4). What moves author’s pen is a clear moral imperative towards his audience as well as towards the literary (read: testimonial) work itself. The compelling plea to participate in the socio-political debate in the wake of catastrophe also involves the individual (read: authorial) integrity that the process of writing and witness encompass. In this sense the Literature of the catastrophe responds to the Sartrean perspective of a *littérature engagée* ‘committed literature’ which implies a total commitment of the author in the writing (Sartre [1946] 1998).

Of course, this idea is extremely controversial on two fronts. First, because it implicitly bans from the canon all the literary works that answer to the only demand for *plaisir* or *jouissance*, as mentioned earlier by taking into consideration the pure entertainment feeling engendered by the *Trivialliteratur*, as to say the trivial or commercial literary production for leisure – before labelled by the Japanese term *tsukaisute*. However, this problem does not concern the Literature of the catastrophe, as already analysed before. Second, observing the requirements in order to be considered as ‘committed literature’, implicitly means to argue again the legitimacy of intervening into the memories of the historical events in order to aesthetically portrait the catastrophe. The ethical debate around disaster’s representability is always on the prowl and has to be taken into account every time we approach a literary work on the theme:

The sublime moment is that in which the witness knows that she is seeing but can’t say what it is, and yet must say what it is. (Bernard-Donals, Glejzer 2001, 20)

It is now time to turn to the therapeutic value of the Literature of the catastrophe.

### 3.2 The therapeutic value

It is necessary to put emphasis on how this literary production, often devaluated by the literary establishment and marginalized, presents a significant added value which is able to rehabilitate the genre. And it is also the lieu where its textual agency is better performed, namely the therapeutic potential that this production fosters for the victims.

As concerns Japanese literature, the attribute of 'healing' is not anew: the label of 'healing narrative' – 癒し *iyashi* in Japanese, translated as 'comfort and healing' by Gebhardt (2004, 257) refers to a literary trend born in the late 1990s to respond to the new popular culture of New Age, Yoga and Asiatic medicine boom (262) The concept of healing in literature is easily summarized in a therapeutic narrative which aims to cure readers' wounds and trauma by suggesting new ways to approach pain and suffering in daily life. The novels by Yoshimoto Banana are emblematic examples of this literary production, which actually cannot be addressed as a 'testimonial literature' in a strict sense: indeed, these literary works are not based on historical facts that claim for social awareness but rather on fictional portraits of troubled characters looking for the reconstruction of their microcosm in the everyday life, often supporting a review of social behaviour and morality.

Otherwise, the Literature of the catastrophe which is at the core of this study is strictly connected to witness' testimony and its therapeutical value is taken into consideration as far as the writing/reading can benefit both author/reader, whatever victims or non-victims.

The agency is expressed all-round: the therapeutic value of the literary product is articulated during the writing process as well as during the act of reading. Therapeutic is the gestation's phase of the literary product as far as it provides the author with the possibility to work out the trauma actively; and therapeutic is the literary product itself thanks to the curative effects that its reading can stimulate in the audience. The writing process is experienced by the author as a sort of "confessional literature" (LaCapra 2001, 8) for which the writing itself represents a scriptotherapeutic exercise – the latin matrix *scripto* underlined the means of the therapeutic act – to work out his own trauma in the case of a first-person account. The 'working out' is perceived by LaCapra as the "acting (or playing) out in performative discourse or artistic practice" (186) and it is at the basis of any literary productions which belong to what he called "traumatic and post-traumatic writing" (186).

The reading can be effective because, in the case of the testimonial literature, the literary product aims to become the locus of a therapeutic session between author/therapist and reader/patient (Shimokōbe 2006, 23). This mechanism is deeply analysed by Tian Dayton (2000) who identified two preparatory phases in the therapeutic session: the "abreactive catharsis"

(295) which derives from the Freudian *Abreagieren* 'abreaction' and which consists in the regression of the victim to a past event, often repressed – a sort of "historical retroaction" (Laub 1995, 70) – and its oral or written articulation. The second stage is represented by the "catharsis of integration" (Dayton 2000, 296), as to say the achieved capacity of the victim to recognize and verbalize his emotions. The first reaction of victims to trauma is indeed a form of emotional illiteracy which is scientifically called 'alexithymia' and

refers to a condition in which people have no words to describe their emotional states, either because they have no awareness of their inner states or because they cannot distinguish one emotion from another. (102)

This particular condition can often be accompanied by a form of anhedonia – a lack of pleasure or of the capacity to experience it – or analgesia – the absence of sense of pain (Krystal 1995, 29) – which both contribute to the temporal stasis of the victim. Hence, the phase of the catharsis of integration aims to develop the awareness of the patient who can give a start to the healing process from trauma. This process can be performed through re-enactment – in the case that the figures of reader and victim match – or through transference – with regard to a no-victim reader. What remains essential is the verbalization and articulation of victim's experience through any communicational forms able to be decoded and interpreted by the receiver.

To sum up, the textual agency of writing and reading about catastrophe (read: trauma) transforms the literary work into the meeting point where the abreactive catharsis and the catharsis of integration are performed according to a double-edged action on the writer and on the reader.

In literary terms the abreactive catharsis can take the shape of a private account: *mémoire*, diaries, private memos are the most frequent forms of this intimate literature which provides a highly therapeutic benefit. Actually the psychotraumatologic term 'scriptotherapy' denotes the various forms of writing used for therapeutic purposes, for which the journaling – Barthes' ([1966] 1999, 54) *journal intime* (private journal) – is the prevailing form. Indeed, this practice is highly used in counselling session and cognitive therapy – a psychotherapy treatment based on the assumption that things can affect people emotionally.

On the grounds that this literary authoring is usually highly influenced by the subjectivity (read: emotionalism) of the author, it is obviously not a reliable production from an historical point of view but it can offer a testimony of the events as perceived by the victims themselves. LaCapra, again, pointed out the risk a "faux mémoire" 'false diary' (2001, 18) can entail, considering aporias, paradox, impasse, hyperbole as a failure for the realistic representation of the historical event thus compromising not only the compliance to the historical facts but also the possibility of mourn-

ing in the sense that absence, loss, silence prejudice the testimony itself. The boundary between the need for an historical archive and for a true testimony of the experience is a fine line that seems to find no answer yet: to report the historical facts means to ignore the human element while to bring justice to the whole experience of the victims implies to accept a poetic license able to sensitize the audience and to convey an emphatic feeling into the testimonial writing.

Notwithstanding, the fidelity to the fact is more detachable in journalistic inquiries, reportage, scientific study on the catastrophe: this non-fictional production is more reliable than the fictionalized work in order to provide a meticulous historical recording.

The so-called 記録文学 *kiroku bungaku* (documentary literature) finds in Japanese literary production an old tradition: the above-mentioned *Hōjōki* constitutes only a first, great example of catastrophe-related literary recordings. Despite the large number of works on the topic of earthquake and tsunamis – among which the testimonies of the Great Kantō earthquake (1923), and the most recent Great Hanshin earthquake (also known simply as Kobe earthquake, 1995), the Tohoku earthquake (2011) and the Kumamoto earthquake (2016) are worth mentioning – the legacy of the *genbaku bungaku* plays a fundamental role in the constitution of a repository of Japanese testimonial literature.

At this point, I have only marginally touched the theme of memory when talking about the faux mémoire. Actually, although the imperative to bear testimony – Shoshana Felman's *appel à téimogner* 'call to testimony' (1995, 16) – implies the loyalty to the memories, it must be underlined how the truth of the historical facts and the true memories of the experience as perceived by the victims might not match at all. Thus, the case of the faux mémoire mentioned by LaCapra for which the memory of the events are corrupted in order to protect one shattered self. Moreover, another reason which can transform witness' testimony in a faux mémoire can be found in the intentional or unconscious need for victimization, which can involve both author and audience. The victimology study actually reveals this is the side effect of the textual agency of the Literature of the catastrophe in the sense that the literary work becomes the proof of author and reader's suffering, thus convincing – sometimes – both part of their own martyrdom.

The role of memory in the testimonial account should not be underestimated, neither; the following example by Cooren (2004) can shed a light on the relationship between textual agency and memory. Talking about a manager who left notes in his office Cooren explained:

One interpretation of this practice is that these notes reminded the manager what needed to be done. Another possible read, as speech act theorists would claim, is that the manager performed the act of reminding himself. (378)



Thus, in the case of the Literature of the catastrophe, the text (read: testimony) represents the material (read: actual, psychical) memory of the event; its textual agency is then achieved through the writing – the author/witness reminds to himself what happened – as well as through the reading – the author/witness reminds to the audience what happened. In this sense the textual agency can be interpreted as an imaginary process of re-enactment/transference of the event (see above) or a perpetual, immortal memory of the experience as long as the reading of the testimonial narrative is accomplished. Ergo, the relevance of the Literature of the catastrophe as everlasting (read: perpetual, immortal) classics.

Further considerations deal with the role of the author as the witness of the experience. Generally speaking it is common to acknowledge as a first-hand witness the person who directly experienced the historical event; different is the case of a mere *conosseurs de facts* (Hayden White's 'middle voice'; LaCapra 2001, 25), someone who assisted to the events although not being directly involved in the situation. A simple example of the present day is enacted by what I defined elsewhere 'media witness' (2018) for whom the traumatic experience is 'mediated' by video footage on the web, TV news, live cams and who are likely to act pushed off socio-political reasons. Of course, there might be also cases in which the catastrophe appears as a main theme of the literary production of authors who are totally unfamiliar with the incident for whom they show a particular interest. Nevertheless, the status of the writer is unlikely to interfere with the textual agency of the literary product in question, unless its potential is not plentifully performed by the working out and through the trauma that the catastrophe entails.

Among Japanese authors, the response to the popular plea to come into action and speak on behalf of the victims is extremely resounding. The Nobel Prize winner Ōe Kenzaburō stood up for encouraging the anti-nuclear movement during the さようなら原発 *Sayounara genpatsu* demonstration on 19 September 2011 but this action was not isolated: in addition to his *History Repeats* article on *The New Yorker* (2011), it should be remembered his commitment devoted to Hiroshima's victims – see his ヒロシマ・ノート *Hiroshima nōto* (Hiroshima notes, 1965) and 何とも知れない未来に *Nantomo shirenai mirai ni* (usually translated in 'The Crazy Iris and Other Stories of the Atomic Aftermath', 1983) for instance. But the list could be longer: Tawada Yōko, Wagō Ryōichi, even Murakami Haruki took actively part in bearing the testimony of 11 March victims, by paying homage both personally and through their literature.

According to a strict literary point of view, the authorial commitment can be manifested frequently during author's literary career or can be shown up only as a cameo in his production. It also appears clearly how the literary transposition of the traumatic experience, especially in the case of first-hand witness, requires time to be working through, thus constitut-

ing a long-distance literary production. Otherwise, following the urge of bearing testimony, the witness can give birth to a prolific literary career based mainly on his traumatic experience; this production is usually addressed to as 'literature of the debris' from the German *Trümmerliteratur* (Tachibana 1998, 7) a term used to describe the first literary responses of German authors to WWII and Nazi's behaviour at the concentration camps. Anyway, the textual agency of the 'literature of the catastrophe' maintains unchanged its healing potential since the psychotherapeutic abreactive catharsis and catharsis of integration are performed at the core of the literary product. In a sense, it demonstrates how the author and his work "can act from a distance across space and time" (Cooren 2004, 380).

## 4 Conclusion

The Literature of the catastrophe demonstrated to be a fully-fledged part of the complex world of the literary canon: the fidelity to the factual reality (mimesis) is underlined by the testimonial accounts while the interest in the astonishing natural power testifies the pleasure it produces (sublime). Moreover, this genre, by its very nature to constitute a testimonial archive of historical facts of particular atrocity, is likely to survive the literary trends, thus raising its status from fashionable but flimsy works to everlasting ones - the 'high' literature that finds its Japanese translation in *jun bungaku*.

Foremost, this study focused the attention on the double faces that textual agency manifests in the Literature of the catastrophe. Indeed, the article considered the textual agency not according to its semantical perspective, as it is usually the case (Ahearn 2002, 22), but in a broader sense.

First, the moral commitment of the author was taken into account in order to evaluate the genre as a 'committed literature' - Sartre's *littérature engagée* - which not only demands for a re-consideration of the intrinsic value of the genre but also represents a way in which its textual agency is performed. The 'committed literature' actually acts into the reading to catalyze audience's attention on sensitive socio-political issues, which become the main topic of discussion in the case of the Literature of the catastrophe in the forms of trauma, wound, suffering, mourning. In this particular sense the literary text represents also the literary venue where the trauma is acting out and worked through, if possible. The psychotraumatologic studies applied to the literary field then reveal to which extent testimonial narrative can be effective in the healing process of trauma.

This is the peculiar agency of the Literature of the catastrophe, underlined by its therapeutic value. The article tried to illustrate how the textual agency works in the Literature of the catastrophe in a very practical sense by enacting the process of the abreactive catharsis and the catharsis of

integration, involving both author and audience. It is extremely relevant that Cooren himself recognized in the definition of 'agency' the "capacity of (oral, gestural, and written) texts to do things (in the most literal sense of these terms)" (2009, 58) The Literature of the catastrophe represents in this perspective and emblematic example of concrete, pragmatic textual agency whose benefits are recognizable in both author/witness and reader. The testimonial works become "textual agents" (Cooren 2009, 61) whose influence on the audience is beyond dispute.

In addition, by considering 'agency' as a synonym of action, Cooren made it clear that "an action then is a transformation of state operated by an agent" (2004, 376) This is exactly what happens with the agency of the Literature of the catastrophe since the therapeutic effect (read: action) over the writer as well over the readers is also fuelled by the moral commitment that the testimonial writing entails, thus enhancing the potential agency of the genre.

All in all, by focusing on the moral commitment of the author and on the therapeutic benefit of both the acts of writing and reading, this article tried to illustrate how the therapeutic power of this literary genre, namely, its agency, is developed throughout the process of its writing (read: production) as well as reading (read: reception).

Of course, this article does not pretend to be conclusive but it rather would like to represent the starting point of a wider investigation on the topic. The multidisciplinary of the discourse was highlighted in the article: literature, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, all are subjects involved in determining the value of the Literature of the catastrophe. A literary genre which responds to the exhortation of History to tell itself; to the moral imperative to bear testimony; to victims' auto-determination to break the silence and articulate their trauma, which, precisely thanks to literature, can perhaps be exorcised and healed.

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Dipartimento di Studi  
sull'Asia e sull'Africa Mediterranea  
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia



1848  
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ISSN 1125-3789



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