

A LINE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST : MEDITERRANEAN GEOGRAPHY IN MEMMI AND AUDISIO

Valeria GIUDICI

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan-Italy

valeria.giudici02@icatt.it

Résumé: L'article vise à examiner deux visions littéraires différentes de la terre tunisienne avant la décolonisation. Le littoral est étudié à la fois par Gabriel Audisio et Albert Memmi, mais acquiert des coordonnées physiques et mentales qui conduisent à des résultats différents en termes de regard culturel. À travers la méthodologie de la comparaison, opérée sur les thèmes de l'arrière-plan, de la composition poétique et de l'influence historique, une théorie méditerranéenne inclusive est détectée chez le premier auteur (*Sel de la mer*, 1936) ; dans le second (*La statue de sel*, 1953), au contraire, un point de rupture géographique imminente est le signe du choix identitaire entre la culture méditerranéenne orientale ou occidentale.

Mots clés: géographie littéraire, méditerranée, cultures comparées, identité, Tunisie.

Abstract: The article aims to examine two different literary visions of Tunisian land before decolonization. The coastline is investigated both by Gabriel Audisio and Albert Memmi but acquires physical and mental coordinates which lead to different outcomes in terms of cultural gaze. Through the methodology of comparison, operated on the themes of background, poetic composition and historical influence, an inclusive Mediterranean theory is detected in the first author (*Sel de la mer*, 1936); in the second one (*La statue de sel*, 1953), instead, a point of an imminent geographic rupture is a sign of the identity choice between East or West Mediterranean culture.

Key words: literary geography, mediterranean sea, comparative cultures, identity, Tunisia.

Introduction

From the legacy of ancient Carthage to the threshold of Tunisian independence, the Mediterranean coast can be analysed as a medium in the framework of spatial perception in literature. We can verify this assumption in two works that find an excellent reason for reflection in the Tunisian land. I am primarily referring to a novel dating back to 1936 that made the Tunisian coast its central protagonist: it is *Sel de la mer* by the French writer Gabriel Audisio, in which an intensely poetic atmosphere is portrayed, encompassing the whole Mediterranean basin. Unlike this, Albert Memmi's novel *La statue de sel* (1953) employs geography as one of the most valuable features of the author's identity crisis.

The argument of this article lies in the literary comparison between the two works in the attempt to highlight the progressive differences in the geographical vision of the Mediterranean Sea. The historical influences significantly affect this outlook, to the point that it is possible to notice a deviation in the literary path. In order to achieve these goals, the article will first examine the importance of the literary cartography of the two works in question. Once this is accomplished, Audisio's Tunisia will be addressed, deepening the points of literary composition, Mediterranean humanism and a phenomenological approach to vision. After the pre-war perspective has been established, Memmi's Tunisia will investigate the internal fractures of the territory, in parallel with the internal ones experienced by the young protagonist Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche¹. From the Tunisian coast to the rift between city districts, the objective is to draw attentions to the tension that animates the author and the colonial territories in the '50s.

1. Literary cartography

The starting point of depicting Memmi and Audisio's geography is the most immediate one of visual representation. This methodology does not lack precedence: in his *Atlante del romanzo europeo 1800-1900*, Franco Moretti investigated literary forms through cartography and used the latter as an analytical tool to create a geography of literature. Starting from the consideration expressed by Fernand Braudel on the fact that there is an absence of 'artistic' atlases, Moretti undertook to create true cartographies of the 19th-century European novel; therefore, we start from geography to understand the modern novel. The investigation deals with the nation-state, but the analytical lens slips into the microscopic, up to cities, neighbourhoods, streets.

The author analyses a century that does not belong to the object of study of this work, but his logic can be helpful. In the space dedicated to the French and English colonial novel, he suggests the trend: colonialism, in fact, after having penetrated into the heart of Africa, would move towards the outside, in an unidirectional way. In other

¹ A classic of Maghrebi literature of the twentieth century, *La statue de sel* is the writer's first narrative work and has a large autobiographical character. In this narrative context, an identity laceration arises and leads Memmi to become «writer of the laceration» (Dugas, 1984, all translations are mine), or, as Camus explains in the Preface (1953, p.9), «a French writer from Tunisia who is neither French nor Tunisian». The belonging to native land is the first example of this above-mentioned laceration. Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, his author's *alter ego*, is constantly debated on the choice he must make whether to continue on the path of the Eastern Tunisian Jewish family based on traditional values or whether to undertake the turn towards the West, whose culture he has assimilated in French schools.

words, the utilization of space and African resources is aimed at a single outlet: the sea and the trade routes. In summary, Moretti (1997, p.66) condensed colonial logic into the triptych «to penetrate; to take; to go away». With the necessary differences, Audisio and Memmi move through Tunisia towards the end of the French colonial protectorate: we cannot overlook the confluence of their paths, which meander for the most part along the coast, on the border between land and sea. The starting point is ultimately the concept of liminal geography.

The question of how this *limen* is conceived requires a first historiographical distinction, which has the Second World War as a turning point. In 1936 (the Audisian one), nationalism is spreading, and a climate of tension pervades European powers. Nevertheless, in *Sel de la mer* there is still an ideological sense of cohesion, which will be inevitably cancelled by the experience of the Second World War. Since 1934, the Neo-Dustur led by H. Bourguiba has emerged as the most uncompromising faction of the separatist Dustur movement, that promoted an uphill struggle for independence. The picture became more dramatic precisely during the World War, affecting the colonies of the warring European states. When Germans captured France in June 1940 many Tunisians were satisfied with the failure of the French ruler. However, when the British and American troops also arrived in Morocco and Algeria, they started a North African military campaign that aimed to conquer Tunisia to make it a «jumping-off point for an invasion of Sicily» (Perkins, 2014, p.111)². Also Memmi perceives that the Tunisian coast can act as a war link between Africa and Europe³. To proceed in order, however, we will start from the pre-war look by Audisio, who conceives the Mediterranean connection in terms that are anything but oppositional.

2. Audisio's poetic Tunisia

² «When Vichy commanders negotiated a cease-fire, Germany seized the Vichy-administered area of France and Tunisia. German forces poured into the protectorate, halting the Allied advance along a front through the center of the country. Both the Allies and the Axis vied for Tunisian support, but Moncef judiciously declined to take sides» *Ibid.* Divided between the German and allied contenders, the national government led by Moncef (until 1943) does not take a precise position, while the Neo-Dustur's leader, Bourguiba, is far away in his Italian exile. The Neo-Dustur movement will definitely flourish again only at the end of the war, with the Manifesto of 1945.

³ In the personal diary daily compiled by the writer, the controversial feelings about the approaching war resurface. On 10 June 1940, with the declaration of war by Italy, Memmi is led to a reconsideration: «It's odd, the war until now was too far away, we didn't feel it. I still managed to reason about it. Now I will feel it». Memmi (2019, p.41).

In the 1940s, the distinguished historian Fernand Braudel gave a unified vision of the Mediterranean, proposing a global interpretative key. Here, the concepts of space, history, man and tradition trace transversal lines that transcend political or ideological borders. Here is an excerpt that focuses on the physical commonality of Mediterranean landscapes:

However, it is not indifferent in history to find almost everywhere the same climates and seasonal rhythms, the same vegetation, the same colours and, the geological architecture lending itself to it, the same landscapes (similar until obsession). [...] Fundamental truths, essential to say: everywhere is found, daughter of climate and history, the same trinity: wheat, olive tree, vine, hear the same agrarian civilisation, the same victory of men over the physical environment. Braudel (1949, pp. 199-200)

Even earlier, the writer and poet Gabriel Audisio (1900-1978) had reached the same conclusions with the enthusiastic enunciation of an inclusive Mediterranean theory, shared with other intellectuals of the School of Algiers. In the twenties and thirties, Audisio carried out an intellectual activity that is not negligible, though currently underestimated. In his first work, *Jeunesse de la méditerranée* (1935), he opens up a possibility of multicultural and peaceful coexistence for modern civilisation, which he identifies as a sort of Mediterranean homeland, where the sea takes on the value of a meeting place and openness to dialogue. *Jeunesse de la méditerranée* finds continuation in his sequel, *Sel de la mer* (1936), invaluablely helpful in the context of this article.

Starting from Algeria, where he lived, Audisio found the same theoretical basis, but further strengthened, in Tunisia, where this sequel is set. Here, it is pretty evident that the *limen* mentioned in the previous paragraphs does not have a disjunctive character in Audisio's poetics but rather a cohesive one. The author does not conceive the coast of Tunisia as a geographical and cultural border because he supports harmony in plurality. It is necessary then to consider the Audisian method of literary composition, which help us to understand this plurality.

Speaking of Audisio's work, Max-Paul Fouchet (1937, p.964) affirms how much its author corresponds to an extremely multifaceted man: «In Audisio flows a blood made of several types of blood, lives a tradition made of more than one tradition. A man of the sea who mixes and stirs, Audisio feels a compatriot of each of the peoples of the sea, of his sea, of the Mediterranean». In the previous work, the writer had already created spatial connections between ports and lighthouses of the

Mediterranean, which Miriam Begliuomini (2013, p.5) considers «poetic catalysts». The lyrical self is therefore in a mode of observation that is dynamic and that finds a life-giving reason in the journey:

The traveller who wants to say what he saw could not ask himself first about the journey? [...] There is no point in arriving on time; you have to run! A good sight, a good memory, and first of all to be hungry and thirsty [...] Then, digestion takes place slowly. Audisio (2002, p.14).

By transposing all this in a literary form, this composition style is that of a travel notebook which also does the work of literary digression: the result is a juxtaposition of natural and human elements offered to a voracious gaze that reconnects by analogy, tracing what Audisio (1935, p.15) calls « Mediterranean similarities ». Maria Chiara Gnocchi (2008, p.482) also confirms that the narrative proceeds piece by piece, calling it «a travel story» which has the «rhythm of exploration, therefore, systematically, in stages [...] discovered little by little [...], the space he explores is built city after city, island after island, port after port». The perceptual mechanism is explained by Audisio himself and literally consists of the arrival of symbolic stimuli, «poissons»⁴, which reach the observer without the effort of research on his part. Secondly, there is also the appeal to the reader to be taken by Africa, little by little⁵: the proposed movement corresponds to the doing and undoing of a pattern of suggestions.

2.1. *Carthage, against latinity*

The elements captured in the way described above seem all-natural, such as sand, waves, fish and lush vegetation. Nevertheless, when natural beaches seem to be the cornerstone of Audisio's experience, a new foothold is given: the human element. Columns and capitals emerge from the sand, recall the past and antiquity, until it emerges that it is the proper fulcrum of human civilisation, Carthage, a pole of the Mediterranean, in the same way as Rome⁶.

⁴ «Later, I will recount how I travelled through Tunisia in search of some symbolic fish, or rather how these fish came to me without me really wanting it: I affirm that I took more in a few lyrical days than I would have done in six months of application ». Audisio (2002, p.15).

⁵ «Let it happen, let Africa take you little by little, or take you back, which is even better when it has already possessed you». Ivi, p.17.

⁶ «That there is a perpetual conflict between East and West, I am sure. The Mediterranean has two basins: the eastern and the western, the sunset sea and the rising sea. Two geographic poles, two spiritual poles. Their contact sparks off through the centuries: the Achaeans against Troy, the Persians against Greece,

With the arrival of man cartography returns. As Audisio points out, Tunis/Carthage is located precisely in the center of the Mediterranean and is a way of passage for Arab migrations that takes place horizontally on the map, from East to West. Another interesting consideration lies in the spatial orientation of the region. In fact, it is no coincidence that it faces East: «Its maritime facade, which was so welcoming to Sidonian boats, opens up to all oriental influences; it receives its food and messages from the Orient, she assimilates them and retransmits them» (Audisio, 2002, p.55). In the middle of this movement of attraction lies the city of Tunis, as happened to the ancients because «their universe was precisely the Mediterranean: a circle. All the points also face the center, everything is brought back there by a kind of centripetal dynamism» (Ivi, p.57).

However, there is a solid reason behind Audisian insistence for ancient civilisations and the continuous contributions that have allowed Carthage to become a great central power from all points of view. As Fouchet suggests again, *Sel de la mer* is undoubtedly a work that recalls the utopian Mediterranean homeland: still, above all, it is a protest against the prevailing notion of *latinité*.

Audisio, in fact, thinks that there has been an excess of trust in the term, pushed to a synonym of humanism. Paraphrasing the author, Rome gave the law, but not her blood, to say that the Mediterranean race is instead made up of multiple crossings of peoples. Audisio (2002, p.215) suggests then an overcoming of the Roman 'rhetoric of ruins' towards developing a new identity: the Mediterranean would be relatively recent if it were possible to remove «the yoke of Roman archeology».

I will give an example. In the book, the choice of the fish, a living entity that characterises the sea, is symptomatic of the connection between nature and man, between physical geography and its conceptualisation. Audisio explains that the fish's image, Christian symbolism par excellence, like the dove and the lamb, is actually a Greek legacy, therefore older than the religious appropriation made by Christians. This example bears witness to his theory of the multiplicity of ancient contributions, later merged into the great Roman or Christian receptacle.

With a parenthesis that, however, acts as a link, it can be said that the issue of multiculturalism is also perceived dominantly by the other author in question, Albert

the dispute over maritime trading posts between the Greeks and the Phoenicians, the duel between Rome and Carthage [...] The role of the sea was always not to oppose but to join». Ivi, p. 51.

Memmi. His densely populated city is dotted with neighbourhoods that conform to class and ethnicity:

O prostitute city, with a fragmented heart, which has not had you as a slave? When I learned a bit of history, I was dizzy; Phoenicians, Arabs, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Berbers, Arabs, Spaniards, Turks, Italians, French, I forget and I must confuse some. Five hundred steps for a walk and you change civilization. Memmi (1972, p.110)

The same bewilderment is found in an excerpt from Memmi's contribution *Novel and essay. An example of cultural identity*⁷, in which an internal dialogue takes place during a troubled night between the writer, who is now mature, and a demon not well specified, discussing the nature of cultural identity. Here the principle emerges affirming that continuous cultural contributions settle on the ancient layer: culture actually splits, with respect to the postulated unity, into heterogeneous elements from the most varied origins. Memmi brings examples for Tunisia: the typical *brik* dish, an Ottoman legacy, and the *Karageuz* shadow theatre, coming from classical antiquity. Agave and aloe would be borrowings from overseas, such as eucalyptus, horse, perfumes, and spices. On Audisio's part, contextually, there is a reference to toponymy, against the all-encompassing inclusion operated by the Romans: some regret is expressed for how the Latin pronunciation has distorted the Berber or Punic names, again concerning the aforementioned Roman yoke overlooking the true nature of the places.

2.2. *A phenomenological approach*

In terms of composition, the shift of Audisian focus has been noted and analysed from a literary point of view. Audisio's work starts from the objective nature to move to man; it begins with a natural cue to produce images of the poetic order. At this point, we can deepen the properly spatial approach by which the narrative is created. This

⁷ «Are not you ashamed [...]? Look at the map! It is a place of passage open to all winds, from the North, East and the sea: it had to endure all the conquerors, it has kept traces of all; in the end, every conquest - human nature is like that - leaves thousands of little bastards who then mingle with the population. On such an ancient plot, it is true, what a jumble! The Phoenician colonies, the Jewish nomads, the southern blacks, the Romans, pagans and later Christians, the Arabs [...] -But everyone lived for himself locked up in his community. -But come on! You know well it is an illusion!» Memmi (2007, p.275)

spatial representation is founded on an interior man-place relationship that proceeds according to an existential principle (Bailly-Scariati, 1993).

The novelty of thought of this human geography lies in the fact that man's personal vision of the world prevents a direct consideration of space and changes the way of approaching it. It goes without saying that, against historical objectivity, there is no single lasting representation of the place but a constant and intersubjective evolution. Audisio enlivens the shores and ports of Tunisia and even the 'cadaveric' ruins of Roman times. Although it is not his native land, he recognizes himself within it as part of the whole. Furthermore, he wanders to tell the 'qualities' rather than the material places⁸. A valuable issue for this point is that of phenomenology: rejecting *a priori* rationality, it indicates a subjective approach, which concerns what man personally experiences, the values linked to individual experience. Humanist geography neither abstracts nor channels everything into models and theories; unlike neo-positivism, it exploits the evocative and subjective power of the landscape, lived, internalised and personal. The landscape is not the passive embodiment of values and beliefs but rather the communication engine capable of influencing human behaviour. Audisio was not looking for an unveiling, but the appearance of fish along the Tunisian coast was for him the revelation of a whole cultural background that stimulated a journey through history.

2.3 The salt

Proceeding with the gaze of a geographer of this type, another element, after the fish and the ruins, is a reason for Audisio to pause and examine. Such a theme is also present in the title and common to Memmi: the salt. Even the saline patina of Audisio has a contingent character: it accompanies the elements that flow under the eye and leaves its mark on the objects on which it rests. The Gabès station, along the coast, is described as a ghost of salt; then, the sand has a transient saline reflection. Nevertheless, salt is also accompanied by Carthage, with a different outcome from the previous ones: it is a razed Carthage, on which salt has been sprinkled to prevent the grass from growing. Such is the violence of Rome, which attempted to annihilate an enemy civilization and tried to place its strength above any living cultural antecedence. Nevertheless, with the opposite effect, Audisio (2002, p.70) celebrates

⁸ The expressions «flotter» and «nouvelle errance» that Pierre Sansot uses to define new mobility are well suited (Sansot, 1990).

also «the salt of the marine genius that made Carthage sparkle in the Mediterranean sun». In other words, a purifying deposit:

It is not a ransom, it is better than redemption, it is the resurrection of the rarest and purest, what the sea deposits in the hollow of the rocks: salt. We do not burn a city, we do not kill a civilization, even by sprinkling it with salt, without the salt itself crying out, without one day a pious pilgrim coming and taking the salt in his hands to present it to the sun, higher than his head.
 Audisio (2002, p.74)

The sea and the sun are a connecting thread with Albert Camus, another French author who cares about Mediterranean culture. Gabriel Audisio published together with him the first issue of the magazine *Rivages. Revue de Culture Méditerranéenne*. In Camus's introduction to the periodical (1965, p.1329), he hopes for a lively search for a common culture, in broad agreement with Audisian poetics. Unlike Memmi's mistrust of barbarian culture, the magazine embraces it with inquisitive enthusiasm: «While it is true that culture does not separate from a certain barbarism, nothing that is barbaric can be foreign to us. The key is to agree on the word barbarian. And this already constitutes a program». Quite different from the detached Memmian approach, as we shall see, *Rivages* aims to collect the focal points of the Mediterranean, united by the sky and the sea, and by a shared vision of man. Here, sun and sea stand out again as vital elements, before they become, with Memmi, respectively burning for the skin and a means of escaping from the native land.

3. Memmi's prosaic Tunisia

Albert Memmi can now be approached with the assumptions indicated in Audisio, to admit a solution of continuity with the ideas discussed so far. A disparity of movement in space is immediately noted: Audisio proceeds by way of random combinations (the result of analogy), unsystematically; Memmi, on the other hand, uses space with excellent narrative coherence.

The first important note to the geographical movement of the young Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, Memmi's alter ego, concerns his progress in concentric circles, from the micro to the macro-structure. The gaze is calibrated towards amplifying the spaces that correspond to the three sections of the novel: *L'impasse*, *La ville* (name of a chapter in section II) and *Le monde*. The debut is at a walking pace, in the reassuring nest in *rue Tarfoune* where children play safely, protected; the same street is humanized

as «lazy and rested like a rose girl's morning» (Memmi, 1972, p.28), that «woke up with regret, growled from all his open windows» (Ivi, p.19). Above all, the sense of smell is distinctive as it can make a distinction by contrast: «the dreamy silence of the freshly watered *Impasse*» separates «the aggressive stench of the ghetto lanes» (Ivi, p.34).

3.1. *From local to global*

The *sortie* from childhood is a painful process because Memmi/Alexandre becomes aware of not being a child of his city once the intimacy with the alley has been lost. In this context, there is a consideration by the author dating 2006 and regarding a novel of maturity, *Le Pharaon*, where he clarifies the role of the birthplace within his works:

[...] probably because art and literature are a joyful or painful expression, or both, nostalgic in any case for a lost paradise, that of childhood, in which the bond with the mother seemed indestructible. Thus childhood, widely dreamed of over the years, becomes the terrain of artistic creation. Well, the native country is above all the maternal country. We can leave it, adapt to other districts, adopt different cultures, and not completely break with it because it constitutes us. Parisse (2011, p.65)

This consideration embraces the entire span of the life of a centenary author. However, it still has no parallel in *La statue de sel*, where the adolescent feeling of detachment from his native country prevails.

Benillouche leaves his childhood and the alley and faces disorientation in the bourgeois neighbourhood, the place of academic education. That's why he affirms that «knowledge was perhaps the cause of all the heartbreaks, all the impossibilities that arose in my life» (Ivi, p.98). The young man, who has had the opportunity to access a privileged education with respect to his low social class, remarks of his fate: «And I was astonished then to have left below, behind me, the narrow alley, the steep and dark stairs, the sordid streets» (Ivi, p.244). On the one hand, he makes a horizontal movement of translation from the *Impasse* to the slightly higher *Passage*, up to the bourgeois school where he works as custodian; on the other hand, he moves vertically, considering the cultural elevation, which nevertheless gives him a persistent sensation of vertigo.

Transversal to this passage from childhood to adolescence is the recurrent presence of walls: physical, like the narrow ones of the Jewish ghetto, characterised by the persistence of smells and noises, but above all symbolic, regarding cultural barriers

between different city areas. The aforementioned impression of asphyxiation consists in feeling «as walled» (Ivi, p.247), but it is not only his prerogative: historically, it is well known the physical isolation of the Jews, «that centuries of fear had surrounded by thick walls» (Ivi, p.286). The bloody Pogrom, of which some pages of the novel are concerned with, contrasts the parts of the city, the Jewish and the Muslim one, which came into contact in an explosion of hatred: Alexandre's feeling is still that of being between two walls, in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion.

The analysis of interurban relations in the Maghreb region was the subject of studies by Yvan Gastaut (2001), who dealt with the solidarity attitudes of cities and the relationship with the Other from a topographical point of view. The scholar argues that the myth of a 'benevolent cohabitation' in the Maghrebi region has been overestimated and that, though it existed at a neighbourhood level, it has been falsely amplified to larger dimensions. The actual functioning of relations consists, instead, in obligatory frequentation between different urban areas: this is how the Jewish community of Tunis is structured for Memmi, who finds in the *rue Tarfoune* the extreme limit of a 'gut' in its own right, as he defines it. The cinema and the *souk* crossed by Alexandre's mother are 'forced' meeting places and going to the *Kursaal* theatre means for Alexandre to witness a struggle for the privilege of a seat. School segregation is another barrier when talking about the contact between French and native young people. Memmi repeatedly emphasises his loneliness due to the contrast with the social categories that meet at the high school: «Like the city, the school was of an exotic diversity. I had French, Tunisian, Italian, Russian, Maltese, and Jewish comrades too, but from such a different background from mine that they were strangers to me. These rich, second-generation Western Jews [...], like the others, mocked the ghetto accent» (1972, p.119).

However, there are also moments of prolific contact and mutual exchange: sometimes, extraordinary events lay the foundations for occasional contacts between individuals from different social groups. One of these events was the Second World War, that aroused the clash but also the alliance between peoples. The third part of *La statue de sel, Le monde*, is dedicated to this world conflict, which promises a further perspective opening if compared to the initial alley and then the city.

While trying to open to the outside, Alexandre perceives the opposite world's movement breaking into his life, with considerable consequences. It is well known that

the war between European powers did not spare the involvement of their respective colonies. The painful choice between native and Western culture is now physically arranged on superimposed planes. The Tunisian land is, in fact, threatened by European planes, of which Memmi has just accepted the dominant ideology, thus perceiving a sort of betrayal. From this moment, and by now it is the end of the novel, Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche decides to detach himself from his native land and uses the Sea to reach South America. With his departure, he undermines the relationship with the East, which he calls medieval, but also rejects the West, responsible for the war events that have just passed. The choice to write, which gradually materialized starting from his diaries until the novel, has put the author in front of himself, allowing him to analyse his own alternating and precarious crises, which ended in a total sense of strangeness.

It is here that the meaning of the title is explained and the element of salt is again highlighted, after Audisio: the meaning of the saline element in Albert Memmi is far from the symbolic connotations of the other writer. In *La statue de sel's* last chapter, Albert Memmi gives the reader a precious key to understanding his poetics:

[...] I am dying, for I turned to look into myself. It is forbidden to see each other and I finally knew myself. Like Lot's wife, whom God turned into a statue, can I still live beyond my eyes?
Memmi (1972, p.368)

With an appeal to the famous verse of Genesis (Gen 19,26), he then prepares to leave for Argentina, leaving behind him the alley where he was born and the values of the community. Therefore, the meaning attributed to salt is that of metaphorical petrification of the *ego* that has analyzed its attachment to homeland. Memmi embarks on an unknown future, with his gaze forward and his back turned to the saline encrustations of Tunisia, now freed from belonging to that land.

Conclusion

The perception of space diverges considerably in the two analysed novels, not for a simple matter of style. The two writers show different thought processes, which is also the result of historical contingencies. The research carried out on Memmi's novel highlighted the identity problems of the young author, who, in my initial hypothesis, in this narrative work reached the point of maximum tension, where the break takes place. Through the analysis of these unstitches, I have highlighted how Albert Memmi is actually in a state of liminality. For the whole novel, he stands on the threshold of the break up, pushed from both sides by irreconcilable, opposing forces. The tear tied to the homeland is almost tangible since Albert Memmi is on the borderline between East and West.

The Tunisian coast visually acts as a *medium* between the two realities. This space can be approached to the interstice (Bhabha, 1994)⁹ between East and West, or to the border of the puzzle pieces (Bauman, 2004)¹⁰ that make up identity. Whereas the writer Gabriel Audisio aspires to Mediterranean continuity, Memmi questions himself at length about the break, even more so when he leaves for Argentina choosing a fictitious third rupture line.

On a second, more microscopic level, I highlighted the internal fractures in the streets of Tunis, where the protagonist's native *Impasse* stands on the border between the neighbourhoods. This is a symbolic *impasse* of Memmi's selfhood, a position of physical uncertainty that reflects an internal one. It is evident how Memmi insists on a polarization process that dominates the individual, revealing a cultural opposition

⁹ The Indian philosopher of postcolonialism (1994, p.13) investigates these 'places of culture' as hybrid spaces, «emerged from the overlapping and succession of differences»: they are «the articulation of cultural differences. These in-between spaces constitute the ground for the elaboration of strategies of the self - as individuals or groups - which give way to new signs of identity and innovative places to develop collaboration and contestation in the very act in which it is defined the idea of society». The differences with Memmi are evident, since in the Memmian interstice hybridization does not yet take place and coexistence is seen in opposite terms.

¹⁰ Referring to men's identity under globalization, Bauman talks about a defective puzzle missing some pieces. Unlike the new product, which has the complete image of the game on the cover, the identity puzzle is scattered on the table in pieces, without a final vision that steers one towards the goal. It is, therefore, necessary to direct attention towards making pieces work together by experimenting with the best combinations. In connection with Memmi, it appears that the author has two different pieces that compose his identity (Western and Eastern) that, however, are mutually exclusive.

between larger systems (for example, think about the double structure of the subsequent essay *Portrait du colonisé précédé de Portrait du colonisateur*¹¹).

Ultimately, Memmi's novel not only represents an individual and personal story, but without much effort it can also depict a larger reality. The Audisian theory was probably less faithful to the historical contingency; Memmi, instead, may better interpret the situation of an entire country. He is, in fact, approaching the inevitable breaking point, such as the one that the Tunisian state will soon face for independence, after long decades of internal tribulations.

¹¹ Jean Paul Sartre, in the Preface (1957, p.22) to the work, defines the «perpetual discomfort» that grips the Tunisian writer. The essay focuses on the «movement which opposes the colonists to the colonized», but also, internally, on the opposition between «colonists who accept themselves» and «colonists who refuse», indicating a series of more subtle polarizations.

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