

1. *Sharing Memories of Global Encounters*

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The present chapter's aim is to contribute to the reflection on Afro-European memories from the perspective of African oral and written literatures and films, more specifically, that of Amazigh Berber studies, which are my fields of research.¹

Some years ago, I set off together with my colleague Kofi Dorvlo to research oral and written narratives on the ancient migrations of the Ewe people in Ghana. Today the Ewes inhabit south-eastern Ghana, where they arrived in the 17th century after a migration started from East Africa around the 11th century.² My colleague and I interviewed several people on such migration stories and among them a retired schoolteacher, Mr. Goodwill Seth Tamakloe. During our conversation, I explained that before doing research on Ewe oral literature in Ghana, I had worked on a similar topic on Berber (Amazigh) literature in North Africa. Mr. Tamakloe began to tell us about his knowledge based on stories transmitted orally—mouth to ear, so to say—but also on written texts, as he was a schoolteacher and history was one of his subjects. At a certain moment, he told us that according to oral narratives, the Ewes traveled from the area that is now on the border between Egypt and Sudan. He added that in such a journey they encountered and had exchanges with Berber peoples, before going south to Togo and Ghana. Then his story went on recounting the adventures of the Ewes under a cruel king, Agokoli I, according to a series of oral narratives that are well known in the area.

Using a well-known technique of storytelling, Mr. Goodwill Seth Tamakloe incorporated my interests in Berber topics in his recollection of Ewe migrations. Narrative sequences indeed include alternative possibilities that may or may not be actualized by the storyteller: a certain event or act can be continued or brought to a conclusion. Thus, in any story, we have virtual

sequences that may be actualized or not, goals that may be attained or not (Bremont 1966, 1980). When the storytellers narrate that the Ewes travel throughout North Africa, the possibility of the encounter with other peoples in such regions does exist, and Mr. Goodwill Seth Tamakloe actualized this possibility in his story of the encounter of the Ewes with the Amazigh Berbers, to integrate my presence in his narration. For me, the presence of Berbers and Ewes in his story indicates not only the possibility of establishing links through a shared (if imaginary) past, but also the *will* to create a shared heritage in the present and to form a syncretic world out of our encounter.

Storytelling is a wonderful tool for implementing the dialogue of different memories and their representations of colonial and postcolonial encounters. However, memories are not uncontroversial, and critical reflection as well as political choices are required. My anecdote points to the fact that memory of the past, whether recollected or invented, recreated or silenced, functions to create the present. 'Cultural memory' studies (Halbwachs 1950; Nora 1989; Erll, Nünning and Young 2008; Dermentzopoulos and Komodou 2016) show that recalling the past is not just an individual act but a process shaped by social networks and cultural models, which influence the ways in which elements of the past are represented for present and future aims. The forms that such a recalling can take are many.

Institutions create national and collective identities by the selective remembering, forgetting, and even inventing or forging of significant events (fateful events or 'figures of memory', as in Assmann 1995: 129). National memory takes form through 'the materiality of the trace' (Nora 1989), such as memorials, sanctuaries, museums, archives, and iconic places—the Waterloo battlefields in present-day Belgium, for example—and through the less material forms of speeches, anniversaries, ceremonies, and rituals, all deliberate creations which the historian Pierre Nora includes under the term of '*lieux de mémoire*'. Through and by such 'sites of memory', structured collective remembrances become official history and dominant discourse. Paul Connerton (2008) adds yet another level of collective memory: that which can be bodily assumed and performed. 'Embodied memories' work in a somehow implicit way, particularly in the case of gestures and postures, all of which Connerton calls the 'choreography of authority'—for example, when we automatically know when to stand up to greet somebody.

The 'sites of memory' and the 'choreography of authority' refer to dominant and conventional forms of memorizing, but remembrance can also give voices to what is silenced in dominant histories. We think of the memories of events personally experienced or passed down from the bearer of the memory to the following generations ('lived memories'). More complex is the case of

oral genres that recount the past and adapt it to present times—such as myths and epic narratives often do—as they can be 'sites of memory' when they construct and affirm (internal) social structures and dominant history (e.g. of local conquerors, of male vs. female perspectives) or assume an alternative function when submitted to the imperialism of literacy, colonialism, and nationalism. In the latter case as well as in the case of lived memories, remembrance can make room for episodes obliterated by national histories and hegemonic representations of the past and thereby express often forgotten and negated histories and perspectives—as indicated by all the above-mentioned studies.

If recalling is central to the construction of collective and cultural memory, forgetting also appears to be important. Connerton (2008: 60) notes that forgetting plays a role not just in the repressive forms of the *damnatio memoriae*, the erasure of facts and people from public memory, or, we can add, in what Ann Laura Stoler (2011) calls the cultural 'aphasia' which disconnects facts—or remembrances in our case—from the appropriate categories and concepts; forgetting also plays a role in the forming of new identities by contributing to 'newly shared memories' and 'tacitly shared silences' (Connerton 2008: 63). We construct, transmit, and even manipulate what to remember and how to remember it in view of present and future configurations of our identity. The differences and the oppositions in what we recall, how we recall, and what we make of these recollections as a group lead to situations in which collective and cultural memories are, more often than not, a battlefield.¹ Afro-European memories do indeed include dialogues and controversies.

Cultural Memory and Its Discontents

Cultural memory may conflate also with the notion of 'heritage' and with the interrogations as to what should be protected or not. What sites should be preserved when there is no agreement? What commemoration should take place or not, when it points to the suffering of a group of ancestors? An example is provided in the commemoration of the so-called discovery of America, by the various statues of Columbus erected in many cities of North America. Such commemoration and such statues are nowadays opposed and challenged by Amerindian activists who have obtained the right to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous People's Day.² Another case is the statue of South African politician Cecil Rhodes, who implemented brutal institutional racism in the 19th century. The statue was removed, and defaced during the removal, from the campus of the University of Cape Town in 2015 after large

student demonstrations. Even more appalling, and widely debated and analyzed, is the example of the statue of the so-called Negro of Banyoles, whose stuffed remains were exposed in the Darder Museum of Banyoles (Spain) and, after a series of heated polemics, repatriated and buried in Barcelona in 2000. In the latter case, the controversy was reopened in 2015, when it was discovered that the museum had made a secret silicone mould of the stuffed body and that three sculptors intended to make a statue from the mould. Again, there were vociferous complaints that making a statue from the mould was a form of inhuman racism; on the other side, the sculptors defended themselves by claiming that it was a case of cultural memory. As a follow-up to the debate, a petition was started to remove the statue of the slave dealer Antonio López in Barcelona and to rename the location after the activist Dr Alphonse Arcelin, who started the campaign for the repatriation of El Negro's body.⁴ The antiracist protests after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis (USA, 25 May 2020) prompted an international wave of actions against the statues of various historical figures, which were toppled, dumped, coated with red paint. As iconic '*lieux de mémoire*' for what (post)colonial society wants to commemorate, such statues become targets of iconoclastic actions to implement changes *hic et nunc*, revealing the urgency for these actions as only the latest deeds in a long series of requests to remove the statues addressed to local and national authorities⁵—requests which have not been answered, despite the fact that the involvement with slavery, murder and racism of the represented historical figures were well documented. This is certainly the case of Edward Colston (1636–1721), slave trader and member of the United Kingdom's Parliament, and King Leopold of Belgium (1835–1908) who enforced colonial rule in Congo with the utmost brutality resulting in the decimation of the local population.⁶ Other cases are more complex and give rise to controversy. The statue of Mahatma Gandhi was removed from the university campus at Accra in Ghana (2018), and other sculptures of him were tampered with in South Africa (2015), France (2017), the United States (2020), and the Netherlands (2020), because of his writings and offensive attitude towards Africans when he was in South Africa (Desai and Goolam 2015). On the other side, Ramachandra Guha (2008) writes that Gandhi was a man of his time who expressed racist ideas when he was in his twenties, but who knew how to change and no longer spoke of the inferiority of Africans in his mature adulthood.

Cultural memory in terms of popular culture is also controversial, as we see in the Netherlands, where a growing contestation is directed towards the figures of the helpers of Saint Nicholas (who takes the place of Father Christmas

in Dutch festivities). The helpers, called *Zwarte Piets* (Black Petes), appear during the festivities celebrating the arrival of the saint in the Netherlands, supposedly from Spain, in the period of November and December. The Black Petes are expected to reward 'good' children and punish disobedient ones; but this latter element is less important today, and the Petes primarily scatter spicy biscuits all around for children and adults alike. These helpers are usually impersonated by white boys and men whose faces are painted black. The ally impersonated by white boys and men whose faces are painted black. The Black Petes were and often still are characterized by stereotyping elements, such as red mouths, enslaver's gold earrings, and the inability to speak Dutch in a correct and fluent way. The contesters see the Black Petes as a visible representation of the racism still haunting the Netherlands. The counter-demonstrators, in favor of the Petes, on the contrary, see such figures as belonging to Dutch national history and to their own cherished childhood memories.⁸ The counter-demonstrators do not want to let the Black Pete disappear from the Dutch landscape, nor do they want to change its color—as it was also suggested to invent, for example, a Blue, Violet, Green, or White Pete.⁹ John Helsloot (2012: 11) develops the hypothesis that the Black Petes (nowadays also impersonated by women) constitute an embodied memory: they cannot be isolated from the carnivalesque context in which they appear, expressing liberty and contestation, cross-dressing and otherness for all the participants. Such a carnivalesque experience incorporates memories of past performances, including the Petes' masking, which have become inextricable from the embodied memory. As a bodily-lived experience, the Black Pete experience cannot be expressed or discussed in rational terms (Helsloot 2008, 2012). It becomes a 'choreography of authority', in Connerton's terms, which could explain why counter-demonstrators refuse even to add 'Colour Petes' to the Black ones.

Pressurized by the wave of demonstrations, local authorities and members of national governments react, presenting a large range of positions, from recognizing the need for change (as in the case of Dutch Prime Minister Rutte acknowledging his change of perspective on the 'Black Petes') and removing a controversial monument (as in the case of the statue of the slave trader Robert Milligan from outside the Museum of London Docklands), to refusing to knock down public statues (as in the case of French President Macron) and accusing 'the mob' of criminal acts, because people should follow democratic routes and campaign for a statue's removal (as in the case of United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson), or threatening the 'statue vandals' with ten-year prison sentences (as in the case of United States President Donald Trump). Whatever the response, the activists' forceful action has (re)positioned cultural memory and its discontents at the center of the public

debate. This marks a significant shift from the discourse of various strands of populism in the last few decades. Building on the majority's anguish linked to the new migratory waves, populism has forged and propagated a nostalgic attitude toward imagined 'pure' national tradition and history. Perschke (2020) calls such strands 'magical populism': they oppose both post-war multiculturalism and a national identity that may include its discontents in terms of discrimination of color, ethnicity, gender, social class.

Cheryl Hudson (2016) raises questions on what is historical writing and memory in her article ('History is not a morality play: Both sides on #RhodesMustFall debate should remember that') concerning the South African case. Looking at the diffusion of similar demonstrations on British and American campuses, we can ask with Hudson whether the removal and defacing of the statue of Cecil Rhodes is the only way to 'correct' the public presence of an unacceptable and unforgivable figure in history and whether apartheid and racism should be canceled from the 'visible' national memory and from the sites of memory. In the case of the Black Petes in Dutch popular culture to allow new common Dutch identities to flourish. Looking at the counter-demonstrators in favor of retaining Black Petes, are they in the grip of their embodied memories and cultural aphasia (Helsloot 2012), thus denying the suffering of their 'Others' by promoting 'cultural memory'?

The question remains, however, as to how to do justice to the victims of violence and to the ambiguity of memories. What aspect prevails (does Rhodes's racism weigh more heavily than his endowment to let scholars do research at Oxford; does Ghandi's racism in his twenties weigh more heavily than his later position and spiritual example) and for whom? And what happens with the sites of memory of national victories that are tragic defeats for the 'Others'? Or when the reality of the Black Pete as a racist token—and nowadays a relic of it—is simply denied?

The examples above point also to another central characteristic of memory: its affective, emotional charge and investment. Historian Luisa Passerini (2008) claims that we should study the value of emotions in creating and transmitting memories among generations and cultural groups, which she also calls the intersubjectivity of memory. Emotions and intersubjectivity are fundamental in her discussion of European identity:

Memory, which is a form of subjectivity, would not exist without its emotional undertones and components, and the same applies to identity, of course. For instance, when we talk about European identity, what we mean is not only an intellectual and political engagement, but also an affective investment towards

being European, and being European cannot exist without feeling such, even if this entails sometimes contradictory sentiments. This has been observed for both individuals and collectives.¹⁰

Turning to Afro-European encounters and legacies, the creation of Spanish identity in relation to colonization and decolonization is a case in point. As indicated by Alda Blanco (2007: 2), the 'dialectics of remembering and forgetting' can be clearly recognized in the fact that 'the Spanish "empire" has come to be almost exclusively identified with the conquest and colonization of the Americas and the Philippines'. Blanco points out that Spain's ambivalence towards its African 19th century colonial past can be read in the scarcity of 'commemorative sites to [such] imperial memory in present-day Madrid's urban topography'. Spanish literature gives space mainly to the 'inscription of the empire' in the Americas, but Africa is also concerned. Blanco (2007: 6) provides the example of popular theater pieces of the mid-19th century:

the war against Morocco was performed as a patriotic event in plays such as *Los moros del Rif* [...] and *El pabellón español en África*, just to mention two of the many pieces that were staged during the duration of the war.¹¹

Such theater texts and novels defended the legitimacy of Spain in North and Equatorial Africa and contributed to the construction of Spanish identity by extolling patriotic feelings. Clearly, such remembrances are controversial, and we will see below how the 'other side' of these memories plays a role in the battlefield of Afro-European memories.

Literature as Memorialisation

Literature can be seen as a particular site for memorialization. Storytellers are active users and producers of memories, and oral and written literature as well as cinema are forceful media for creating collective memory 'by recollecting the past in the form of narrative'—as noted by Astrid Erll and Agnes Rigney (2006: 112). In this section, two broad ways of literary memorializing of the Africa–Europe encounter are discussed.

One Side of the Story. An African Ambiguous Adventure

An example of the first strand of literary memorializing is found in *L'aventure ambiguë* (The Ambiguous Adventure) by the Senegalese writer Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1961).¹² Kane's novel became a famous work in the field of African literature, and it is still considered one of its founding texts. The memories that the novel narrates are those of a Fulani boy, Samba Diallo,

who goes to France to study.¹³ Diallo acquires French education and, at the same time, tries to retain the memories of his childhood and of his religious education to create a coherent new identity. Under the pressure of foreign colonization and oppression, his attempt ends in failure, and he is stabbed to death when he returns to Senegal.¹⁴

The intricateness of remembering and forgetting in the novel is described by Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, quoting a fragment from a dialogue in which the *Aventure*'s character the Most Royal Lady wonders about what Diallo's children will learn at the new school ('I want to ask you: can one learn the without forgetting that, and what one learns, is it worth what one forgets'—Kane 1972: 34). Mudimbe-Boyi (1999: 148) asks:

what events, facts, and characters of the past should be retained and inscribed in the national history in order to create the collective memory? In other words, what should be forgotten and what remembered?

The story ultimately shows that the remixing of memory and knowledge is impossible in the context of colonization, but several dialogues express the *will* to create a shared heritage in a present syncretic world—something that I mentioned earlier when presenting the anecdote of the retired school teacher, Mr. Goodwill Seth Tamakloe. One example is provided by the character of Samba Diallo's father, when he tells a French figure:

Nous n'avons pas eu le même passé, vous et nous, mais nous aurons le même avenir rigoureusement. L'ère des destinées singulières est révolue. (Kane 1961: 24)

We have not had the same past, you and ourselves, but we shall have, strictly, the same future. The era of separate destinies has run its course. (Kane 1972: 79)

To interpret this remark, we need to remember the colonial rhetoric of the cleavage in time between Europe and Africa. The notion of time was central to the imperialist project of European 'modernity' in the 19th and 20th centuries. Colonial narratives hinged on temporal dislocation: although Europeans and their Others physically existed at the same time (they could meet each other), they were not 'contemporary' and not seen as 'coeval' (Fabian 1983: 31). In this line of reasoning, there was thus a synchronous existence but no contemporaneity of those deemed to be 'modern' or 'primitive' (Augé 1999: 55). By such an ideological discourse, being primitive could be accepted as a shared *bygone* past, but only when a divisive development in the past, in the present, and in the future was imposed. On the contrary, the character speaking the quoted remark from *L'aventure ambiguë* (Samba Diallo's father) reverses the imposed relation: he acknowledges the different

past but resolutely refutes the cleavage in time to forcefully assert a shared present. In the dialogue, at the same time, it is tactfully forgotten that the shared present derives from the violence of colonization.

Critical studies tend to agree on an elaborated incorporation in the novel of elements of the autobiographical narrative of the writer, who as a boy went to study in France.¹⁵ The autobiographical elements are restructured in the broader narrative of the (failed) attempt to combine forms of knowledge derived from local knowledge, Islam, and French schooling. Published a year after the granting of independence to Senegal in 1960, *L'aventure ambiguë* can be read as the literary transformation of 'lived memories' into a site of collective memory. As collective memory, the novel refuses what it presents as the ambiguous compromise of French assimilation with a flavor of 'Africanity' reduced to childhood remembrances. The impossible-to-overcome cultural clash will characterize African literatures in European languages on the eve of national independences.

We recognize the theme of the amalgamation of different forms of knowledge and memories in the acclaimed film *Keita, l'héritage du griot* (1995) by the director Dani Kouyaté (Burkina Faso), which develops such a theme with an outcome different from that of Cheikh Hamidou Kane. *Keita* makes use of the central figure of one of the most emblematic oral epic narratives of West Africa: the Mande hero known as Sunjata Keita. The story of Sunjata has been transmitted in the form of narrative poems and nowadays is also rewritten in other media and shared in the international cultural area including modern Mali, Guinea, Gambia, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. The story concerns the adventures and the heroic deeds of King Sunjata Keita (or Mari Djata) and the foundation of his Islamic kingdom in about the 13th century. As noted by Jan Jansen (1998: 14–16), the epic of Sunjata is entertainment but also living history, because its characters' names are present patronymics linking the people carrying them to their ancestors' roles and interactions in the epic.

Through the figure of King Sunjata, the film *Keita, l'héritage du griot* shows that syncretism is possible. The epic hero was able to reconcile Islamic and pre-Islamic knowledge to create an extended trading empire. In the film, Sunjata is the exemplary model for the young schoolboy Mabo, who—like the main character Samba Diallo of Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*—is caught between school and local knowledge. Cultural memory of the past, the film tells us, is indispensable to create an organic (African) person. The film shows that the memory of the Sunjata epic is at risk in the new school system when school programmes follow only a European model. The school operates a repressive form of amnesia by 'ignoring' the knowledge

of the past memorialized in the Sunjata epic. One exhilarating scene connects the origin of human beings. We see the boy Mabo reading from a school text that human ancestors were apes. At this point, the character Djeliba, the griot who has knowledge of genealogies and the memory of the Sunjata epic, intervenes in the scene. Djeliba explains to a confused Mabo that 'great kings' were at the origin of the creation of the (Mande) world and that these oral knowledge is not impossible to fill, as Mabo is able to memorize the epic, to incorporate it, and, following in the footsteps of Sundjata, to operate the hopefully successful syncretism of cultures in his own time. The film has an open ending, signaling that in the contemporary world each person should find his/her own balance in mixing and merging.¹⁶ The close relation that Djeliba and Mabo develop underscores the affective link to the cherished cultural past.

We see in the case of *Keita, l'héritage du griot* that cultural memories in the form of African oral narratives are represented as indispensable knowledge that must contribute to the present if a new project of Africanity is to take form, a project including (acceptable?) European legacies of the colonial encounter, represented here in the main form of science and technology.

We may also note that, in both novel and film, the idea that '*l'ère des destinées singulières est révolue*' is spelled out only for the African characters. These works focus on the conflicting memories and results of the Europe-Africa encounters in their impact on African individuals and collectivities, as only Africans are expected to adapt to the new configuration of the world.¹⁷

Reciprocity in Ambiguity and the Creation of New Memories

More recent African works show the recognition of the 'ambiguous adventure' as a mutual endeavor and one of reciprocity, the Afro-European encounters impacting also the once self-defined 'modern' world. Under this aspect, African literatures and films, resonating with recent trends in postcolonial literatures created by displacement and migration, develop what can be seen as a second strand of literary memorializing.

A first example is *As mulheres do meu pai* (2007) (*My Father's Wives*, trans. Hahn, 2008) by the Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa. This novel retraces the convoluted effects of mixing and merging and of 'lies made of many truths', through the parallel stories of the novel's creation—written in the notes and fragments of Agualusa's authorial voice that pepper the main text of the novel—and of the main character Laurentina's search. Laurentina goes to Africa to meet Faustino Manso, her supposed biological father, but

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when she arrives, he has already died. She begins to record various characters' memories of her father's travels along the whole southern African coast, and finally she discovers that he was infertile and that all his lovers and 'children' had tacitly agreed to uphold Faustino's fictive paternity. McNee (2012: 19) notes that in her journey to retrace paternity and identity, Laurentina finds a genealogy of women, lovers, mothers, and sisters who take control 'over the paternal narrative'. The lived memories of the various characters contribute to the construction of a new and yet unstable identity for Laurentina.

The ambiguous intersection between colonial legacies, filiation, and personal choices is expressed from the beginning in Laurentina's reflections, when she writes about herself and her boyfriend Mandume in the following terms:

Mandume decided to be Portuguese. He does have the right. However, I don't think that to be a good Portuguese person you have to renounce your entire ancestry. I'm sure I'm a good Portuguese woman, but I also feel a little bit Indian; and now at last I've come to Angola to find out whether there's anything in me that's African. (Agualusa 2007: 14)

The existent analyzes convincingly show that the novel constructs a new discourse on Creolism, going beyond—thanks to multivocality and hybridity—the binary opposition between Portugal and Angola and beyond biological and racialized conceptions of filiation and identity.¹⁸ Treating the theme of mixing and choosing, the novel also makes ironic commentaries on 'reciprocity' in a playful way, as in the following quotation when Mandume presents his Portuguese school friend to his Angolan father. The father is convinced that the school friend ('a blonde lad') is also Angolan:

[Mandume's father]: 'You weren't born in Angola?! [...] Get away! You talk as though you were Angolan ...'

[Mandume's school friend]: 'Man, there were only brothers in my neighborhood. At school too [...] We choose between being Cape Verdean and being Angolan. I choose to be Angolan.' (Agualusa 2007: 36)

If in the latter, ironic passage, a Portuguese subject 'chooses' to be Angolan because of his neighborhood—which seems to imply socio-economic conditions of marginality—the position of the character Laurentina is more ambiguous. In Elisa Antz's words (2012: 273), Laurentina

combines a yearning for authenticity and belonging [...] with a 'hybrid' conception of identity where various 'selves' merge [...] Hence, while 'roots' and 'hybridity' correspond to different perceptions of cultural identity in postcolonial theory, they do not do so in Laurentina's world view.

On his side, Hughes (2017: 116) adds a further level of complexity, referring to decolonial studies and the risk of 'flattening' the colonial references.

The juxtaposition of these voices [of multiple characters] with that of a narrator-character points to the excess and ambivalence of mimicry: a narrator who is 'not quite' the author, a father (Manso) who is 'not quite' the prolific progenitor alleged, and a contradictory hybridity (Mandume and Laurentina) over which hang colonial stereotypes carried into the present.

Merging multiple collective and individual remembrances—all of them subjective, invented, manipulated, and manipulating, but partially truthful in their intersubjective dimension and as mutual endeavor—Laurentina tries to imagine new shared cultural memories for the Afro-European encounters.

Another complex example of mutual exchanges is offered by the Amazigh Berber film *Iperita*. This film is an example of the controversial quality of memories and the question whether and how it is possible to integrate conflicting memories in a new European identity configuration.

In 2017 Mohamed Bouzaggou, an Amazigh (Berber) writer from the Rif in north Morocco, released a self-made production, the film *Iperita*. The film was realized with very little means thanks to the help of Bouzaggou's own village. The director could not find Moroccan distributors but obtained the support of another Amazigh Berber film director, Mohamed Amin Benamraoui, who is active in Belgium and received multiple awards for his first feature film *Adiós Carmen*. The title *Iperita* refers to the Spanish term for the toxic mustard gas used for the first time by German troops at Ypres in Belgium during the First World War. The gas forms large blisters on exposed skin and attacks the lungs; it is now prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention. The film stages the memories of a veteran of the war in the north of Morocco during the Spanish and later the French attacks against the Republic of Rif established by Abd al-Krim al-Khattabi (1921–1926).¹⁹ At the same time, the film exposes the present-day consequences of the use of toxic gas in the Rif, something that is denied not only by the previous colonial power, Spain, but also by the national and local Moroccan government. The government silence is confirmed by historian Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (2011: 158), who writes that since 2000 a number of Spanish and international scholars and journalists have highlighted the systematic use of gas against Rifian soldiers and civilians during the anti-colonial fighting, and the official marginalization of the survivors' demands of help:

until now, Moroccan authorities have ignored Amazigh demands and been unwilling to ask the Spanish government for acknowledgment and compensation

[...] In Spain, as well, the subject was almost entirely kept out of the public eye, at least until recently.

The film's narrative links present marginalization and poverty in the Rif, with official corruption and denial of the past. In the logic of the film, the Moroccan denial is due to corruption and to civil servants who are uninterested in the well-being of the population. The film shows that hospitals and decent health care are seriously lacking in the region. The film's representation corresponds to the demand for hospitals, strongly expressed by the demonstrations which have taken place in north Morocco since 2016 and which are still going on, notwithstanding the wave of arrests of protesters and activists.

In terms of collective and lived memories, the remembrances of the retired Spanish soldier, José, are central to the film's narrative; and the act of remembering is central to recognition and change. José returns to north Morocco sixty years after the Rif War and discovers the effects of the toxic gas still haunting the population, which has the highest percentage of laryngeal cancers in Morocco. At the end of the film, José shares his memories of the use of the gas during the bombings of the Rif along with local teachers and activists, and his sharing allows the silence to be broken and the corrupt government officers to be exposed.

Under such an aspect, the film expresses the need not only to take responsibility for past military crimes but also for reciprocity and the identification with the 'Other', a theme developed in the relationship between the Spanish retired soldier and the Amazigh Berber characters. Berber young people oppose the indifference and the corruption of the local government, but it is José's return to the Rif and his shared memories as perpetrator and witness of the use of *iperita* that make a change possible. The film's narrative seems to tell us that the only way to construct a shared and better present is when memories of past wrongdoings are made expressible and are shared, which somehow reminds us of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's approach.²⁰

When the film was screened in a cinema in France, the public commented that such war memories were sometimes shared within families, but they were not spoken out openly, thus remaining lived memories without entering the collective and publicly shared form of cultural memories. One member of the public told the director: 'You have put it on stage and you have done something that we want to show to our children, to the whole world'—which underlines the necessity of the transgenerational and transcultural transmission of memory.²¹

As mentioned in the first part of this chapter in reference to Spanish theater pieces (Blanco 2007), the memories aired in the *Iperita* film also remain controversial. Scholars in Morocco and in Spain support the allegations that toxic gas was used in the Rif War, and Catalan parliamentary members supported by NGOs (such as La Asociación para la Defensa de las Víctimas del Gas Tóxico en el Rif, and the Amazigh World Assembly) have called on Spain to investigate such allegations. However, as of today no clear answer has been given, and scientific studies have not yet been carried out to verify the allegations that the use of chemical weapons has led to the high rate of cancer in the area.

Sharing Memories, Sharing Heritages?

As exemplified in the second strand of literary memorializing of the Africa-Europe encounter, merging memories and reciprocity can be used to go beyond filiation and essentialized identities to create a new common present. In the wave of decolonization, postcoloniality, and migration flows, power relationships continue to characterize the encounters between Africa and Europe, and cultural memory should be interrogated by a group of well-known questions—such as ‘what memories’, ‘by whom’ such memories are shared, and ‘for what kind of present’ are they selected or forgotten? A further layer of complexity is added by renewed (or hoped-for renewal of) collective memories and identities which are reinterpreted in old terms. A drawing appeared in one of the major Dutch newspapers, *NRC Handelsblad*, on 8 February 2018 and can be taken as an example to illustrate this point. The drawing represents a stylized tree whose reddish crown is in the form of Europe while the brownish trunk connects it to its roots, represented in the form of the African continent. This drawing accompanies an article on a book collectively published by Afro-European writers, entitled *ZWART, Afro-Europese literatuur uit de Lage Landen* (Black, Afro-European Literature from the Netherlands, Atlas Contact, 2018) and edited by Vamba Sherif and Ebissé Rouw. Although the text of the article is somewhat sympathetic with the endeavor of the writers and their demand to be ‘seen’ and recognized as Black European authors renewing the Dutch literary field, the image tells us another story. Africa is represented as ‘roots’, feeding the European ‘tree’ with its flourishing crown. In the iconic comparison, Africa looks barren and knotty; moreover, the dimensions are completely wrong, with Europe looking much larger and more imposing than the African continent. What this image shows is the reverse of what is called for by the proponents of the book. Europe is represented as the central locus of artistic creation, and mutual

recognition is not represented by the image of the draining of the fertile ‘sap’ from the South to the North. Moreover, the tree trunk in the drawing ‘links’ the continents through what we know is now the deadly Mediterranean Sea for many who try to migrate to the North, making—for those who are aware of it—the iconic metaphor of the sap nurturing the European crown untenable and showing the reddish crown colored by blood. Unfortunate and ill-fitting as this image is, it is not just a failing of the individual designer but the result of a long-term, internalized set of attitudes and collective memories. The drawing is in itself an expression of cultural memory: the ‘imperial reason’ constructed, imposed, and ‘lived’—albeit in diverging and opposing positions—in the experiences of many individuals worldwide since the Renaissance (Mignolo 2007).

The ongoing process of merging and mixing that hinges on individual and collective agency is our contemporaneity²² and—as indicated at the beginning in reference to my fieldwork encounter with Mr Goodwill Seth Tamakloe—cultural actors may use narrative tools already known and readily available for incorporating their and other people’s presence and expectations into their world. As to the Afro-European encounters, what we need is the political *will* for inclusion and the capacity to create a new narrative from multiple collective memories, searching for the nuances and incorporating diverging bodily-lived experiences, to foster the formation of a sense of shared, affective belonging. We need courage as well, to discuss again and again the many forms of exclusionary rhetoric that have been deployed in populist discourses by political figures in Europe and the United States who manipulate the anxiety created by contemporary merging and creolization to make claims for European traditions and whiteness, mixing and fusing these claims with anti-immigrant views. At the same time, such populism fosters anti-European feelings going beyond neo-national rhetoric and the strictures of present-day European Union economic and social politics to attack the emergence of a renovating project of Europeanism. ‘The very concept of European identity becomes useless or even counterproductive, if it is used to connote demarcation rather than solidarity with the Other’ (Passerini 2012: 132). Inclusion and sharing of contradictory Afro-European memories becomes, in this framework, a pivotal passage for an inclusive new world beyond totalitarian utopias and dystopias.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the conveners of the conference ‘Euro-African Memories: Colonial and Postcolonial Spanish Legacies in Morocco and Equatorial

- Guinea' (IMF-CSIC Barcelona, 14–15 March 2018), Yolanda Aínola-Cabrero and Araceli González Vazquez.
2. Ewe oral narratives of migration are usually defined as *xotutu*. The massive Ewe exodus was probably caused by the progressive expansion of other populations, probably the Yoruba (Amenumey 1997: 15–16, Gayibor and Aguigah 2005: 6–7).
 3. See Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson 2008.
 4. Mindock 2018.
 5. The Movimiento Panafricanista por la Reparación Africana y Afrodescendencia de Europa initiated the petition, addressing the Municipality of Barcelona: 'It demand that the Barcelona City Council remove the statue and name of the slave dealer and genocidal "Antonio López" in order to be renamed "Dr Alphonse Arceles" square in tribute to the medical doctor and activist for the African reparation.' The statue was removed in 2018. See 'Farewell celebration for the Antonio López statue' at https://www.barcelona.cat/infobarcelona/en/farewell-celebration-for-the-antonio-lopez-statue-2_620919.html
 6. See for example the article by Malik (2020).
 7. Selective remembering and forging of significant events are particularly evident in the case of Edward Colston's statue. His philanthropic actions (for members of the Whig party and of the Anglican Church only) were 'selected' by the local bourgeoisie at the end of the nineteenth century as a symbol of civic unity of the city of Bristol to be opposed to the nascent workers' claims (Dresser 2016).
 8. See Helsloot (2008) and Wekker (2016). Detailed description of the first contestations in 2008 and 2011, their repression, and counter-contestations are in Helsloot (2012).
 9. See for example the news 'Bedreiging om kleurenpiet: De lol is er nu wel vanaf' (Threat of Coloured Piet: The fun is now over) and 'Oldenzaler (73) weer Sinterklaas: 'Ik er witte Pieten meedoen stop ik'' (Oldenzaler (73) again Sinterklaas: 'I will stop if White Pies participate') (Loohuis 2018).
 10. Luisa Passerini (2008) 'Connecting emotions: Contributions from cultural history,' *Historia* 8: 121.
 11. See also Marie Salgues (2010) *Teatro patriótico y nacionalismo en España: 1850–1900*.
 12. English Translation: Kane 1972 (Trans. Katherine Woods).
 13. Samba Diallo discusses his 'hybrid' state at 112–113 and 158–161.
 14. We note that this novel presents Africans as caught between two worlds: modern Europe and traditional Africa. It thus reproduces the dichotomy set by the evolutionary progress approach, although from the perspective of Africans and in a critical form.
 15. Cailler (1982), Little (2000) and Lazarus (2004).
 16. Gugler (2003: 36–43), Rwafa (2015).
 17. 'We would do well to remember in any case that the others have spent a good part of their time trying to situate themselves in relation to the time of those who invaded them. And they have not tried to solve the problem in just one way. They have either reactivated ancestor worship [...] or projected themselves into the future.' (Augé 1999: 49)
 18. Antz (2011), Fornos (2011), McNec (2012).

19. The Republic of Rif was declared in 1921 against Spanish occupation and the French protectorate of Morocco established in 1912 and accepted by the sultan Yusef ben Hassan.
20. Hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were held in 1995–2002 under guidance of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The aim of reconciliation was to be attained through full disclosure of events and actors of violence by the perpetrators, who could then demand amnesty.
21. Cinema Jean Vigo, Gennevilliers (France). Film projection organized by the association Tamaynut France and by the Association des Travailleurs Maghrébins de France (ATMF) 16 November 2017. www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFmHNBBXySw
22. If there is a difference from the past, it is eventually in the intensity and frequency of present eclecticism. Marc Augé (1999: 110) sees the shrinking of time and space—the coevalness of all people—as a central characteristic of contemporaneity defined as 'supermodernity'.

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