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**MÁRIO MATOS**  
**ORLANDO GROSSEGESE**

**TOWARDS A TRANSCULTURAL CONSTRUCTION  
OF MEMORY**

Mário Matos



Universidade do Minho  
Centro de Investigação em Ciências Sociais

# TOWARDS A TRANSCULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF MEMORY

Mário Matos

## 1. “THE CURRENT UPSURGE IN MEMORY”

Since the 1980s there has been a notorious intensification of transdisciplinary research on cultural memories that still persists. What Aleida Assmann (2009: 17) wrote in 1999, in the first edition of her famous book *Erinnerungsräume* [Spaces of Memory], about the manifold “forms and transformations of cultural memory”, is still valid in its fourth edition, published ten years later: there is a “new dominance and ongoing fascination of the memory-paradigm”. This massive and persistent – academic and non-academic – interest in all kinds of cultural memory, critically considered by some scholars as a “memory boom” (Winter, 2000)<sup>[1]</sup> or in an even more radical view as a “fetishistic ‘memorialism’” (Nora, 2011: 437), is corroborated, on the one hand, by several recent editions of academic handbooks, companions and readers specifically dedicated to the vast and diversified field of memory studies<sup>[2]</sup>, and, on the other hand, by an intense proliferation of popular cultural forms and modes of capturing, narrating and disseminating the most diverse types of individual and collective memories.

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1 See also Benjamin Inal in this volume.

2 For example, Erll / Nünning (2010), Olick *et al.* (2011) or Pethes (2008).

There is a wide and complex range of different elements that explain what Pierre Nora (*ibidem*), in an article written in 2002, designates as “the current upsurge in memory“. While it is beyond the scope of this article to expose this complexity in an appropriate way, let us briefly outline only some of the reasons behind it.

The most obvious reason for this worldwide positive conjuncture in the production and studies of cultural memories has to do with what might be called the second media revolution. It is evident that the profound transformations induced by the different types of visual, audiovisual and digital media during the last century provide an enormous potential to record, remember and represent lived and living History. It started with photography in the last decades of the nineteenth century, then with the moving sound waves and images, first in the radio and later in the cinema and TV, until home video came along and the internet, which actually gives us the possibility to integrate and fuse in a simple way all those – historically speaking – previous media in one super- or hyper-medium. This increasing technical readiness in recording, preserving and transmitting private or collective memories amounts to an immense archive that undoubtedly provides substantial material and makes room for different approaches, not only in what concerns the social construction and / or cultural production of stories and histories, but also the analytical and reflexive research about that huge sum of memory-narratives.

Another reason for this contemporary “emergence of a ‘new wave’ of cultural memory studies” (Erl / Nünning, 2010: 7f) is less material and tangible. It is grounded in a more epistemological as well as political level. To put it shortly, we can consider the growing consciousness of the end of Lyotard’s *master narratives* as the main reason for the significant increased interest in every kind of memory. That means that the failure of a teleological way of thinking that conceived history as a (positive) linear evolution where the present was directly linked to the past and the future, on the one hand, and the collapse of authoritarian regimes with their inherent instrumentalization of history in order to create ideological and national discourses of identity, on the other hand, demanded and still demand the search for new ways to construct alternative identities which apparently do not obey the orders of hierarchical structures of political power. Since the discourse of traditional historiography was denounced by Eric Hobsbawm as a powerful construction for the *invention of tradition* and considered by Benedict Anderson as essential for the constitution of *imagined communities* serving nationalism, we conceive cultural memory as something that is shared by a

group (that might be national or not), but is not externally imposed. Hence it seems to be an acceptable solution for producing identity. Unfortunately, that alternative is not so straightforward, because history and memory are not at all separable spheres but are, in reality, inextricably linked together. In fact, this complex interconnection represents the crux of an interesting discussion and negotiation that actually takes place between the various research perspectives inside the manifold field of memory studies. But this is not the place to elaborate on this matter. In order to achieve the goal of briefly explaining the reasons for the current memory boom, it will suffice to mention the increasing doubts about the 'trueness' and 'authenticity' of official historiography and official narratives of national memory, which could be observed during the last decades.

This growing suspicion towards the traditional *master narratives* of the national(ist) and / or imperial(ist) historiographies is not merely speculative. Even if we focus only on the history of the twentieth century, we can identify at least two major transnational catastrophic events that nourish and legitimize the mentioned mistrust: the horrors of the Second World War and the oppression carried out by the so-called socialist regimes during the Cold War. If the breakdown of the 'socialist world' is an obvious cause for a kind of new Spring of Nations and the respective (re)construction of narratives of collective identity in Eastern and South-eastern Europe, where the claims for democracy and independence of formerly oppressed people and ethnicities unfortunately also led to the Balkan War in the last decade of the twentieth century, the darkest cloud of the past which still overshadows the transnational views and perceptions of present memory studies continues to be the Second World War. In particular, the extremely difficult reminiscences and remembrances of the Shoah that fill entire libraries on their own still haven't ceased the intensive work of recovering and mediating a memory that largely transposes all national borders and occupies individual and collective victims, offenders, witnesses and researchers from several different generations.

Considering the specific collective trauma caused by the horrific regime of the Third Reich and due to the fact that the generations who lived and experienced that period are gradually disappearing, it obviously doesn't surprise us that this increasing interest in the ways a (trans)national memory – in this case a (trans)national trauma – can be preserved for and transmitted to the post-holocaust generations finds a strong expression especially in the German *Kulturwissenschaften*. This research area about the Nazi period and the Shoah as "traumatic sites of memory", as "topogra-

phy of terror”, is notoriously represented by the works of Aleida Assmann (2009: 328-339), among many other prominent senior researchers, but also by many younger German scholars from different areas or German Studies researchers of various nationalities, as clearly shown by several contributions included in this book.

To complete this unavoidably simplified and schematized summary of the diverse reasons for our contemporary awareness of the high significance of collective memories in the complex question of identity, we also have to mention the global process of political decolonialization which lasted at least a whole century. Beginning in the late nineteenth century with the implosion of the colonial system in South and Middle America, continuing after the First and Second World War with the breakdown in several phases of the British Empire in Asia, and ending in the 1970s with the last European Empire – namely Portugal – in the African continent, this long and extremely complex process of collapsing imperial narratives and emerging of various different national discourses, which entails very delicate questions of ethnical identities far from being resolved, provided the ground for another very important, wide-ranging research field called Post-Colonial Studies. It is evident that this paradigm, which can be branched into several sub-areas related to Subaltern Studies and which expresses itself in the research work on ethnic minorities as well as on very different kinds of sub- or countercultures, has very close connections to Cultural Memory Studies as well. All those collective entities claim for the right of their difference, or, in other words, demand their own legitimizing narrative of identity which obviously includes the (re)construction of diversified, nearly uncountable sorts of cultural memories. This worldwide intense circulation and negotiation of symbols and narratives of identity is certainly one of the main characteristics of our contemporary world that may help us to understand the current memory boom.

## 2. CONCEPTS OF CULTURAL MEMORIES

But let us take a step back and briefly trace the germination of the modern notion of cultural memory. Like *Cultural Studies*, understood in the sense of the German *Kulturwissenschaften* that emerged as a research field in the beginning of the twentieth century, the various theoretical concepts of a collective or cultural memory came up about one hundred years ago. In a wider sense, memory studies have a long history that can be traced back to at least the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers who coined durable

metaphors and techniques for handling the complex phenomena of individual and collective remembrance. But if we refer to memory studies as a field of more or less systematic reflections on the mechanisms and functions of supra-individual memories (cultural memories), we can pinpoint the emergence of its modern configuration as a research area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was in that era of a notoriously epistemological crisis that a certain critical view on the official national historiographies, built upon teleological and heroic master narratives, emerged, opening up spaces for other collective memories of certain social classes or ethnical groups that didn't fit in those national stories / histories.

One of the most eminent and controversial thinkers of that time was Friedrich Nietzsche, who in his *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* [Untimely Meditations] of 1874 critically reflected "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" [Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Geschichte für das Leben].<sup>[3]</sup> Even if we can't consider him the founding father of modern research on cultural memory, it was Nietzsche who gave a very important – and thus very controversial – input to the reflexive interest in this phenomenon.<sup>[4]</sup> His assumption of a "surfeit of memory" that, according to him, functioned as a barrier for creativity and novelty, or, in other words, blocked the free evolution and 'real' progress of life and humanity, can effectively be seen as a starting point of a certain kind of vicious circle in which we still find ourselves today. By pointing out the need to forget, Nietzsche directed our attention to the fact that in order to live our individual and collective lives one has not only to remember but also to elude remembrance. But the problem is much more complex than it seems at first glance and opens up a wide range of questions that are still being discussed. Considering the catastrophic experiences of the twentieth century mentioned above, it is impossible to know how to deal with the dialectical aporia between the duty to remember and the right to forget. But it is also impossible to find answers to unsolvable questions like: What can or should we forget? Who has the legitimacy to decide what to remember and what to forget? How much do we need to remember and to forget to still feel ourselves as personal and collective identities? How can we select the meaningful information from an apparently never-ending archive, especially in the digital era? How to deal with our increasing multiplicity of different and simultaneous identi-

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3 For an English version of an excerpt from this programmatic essay by Nietzsche, see Olick *et al.* (2011:73-79).

4 About Nietzsche's contribution to the development of the memory-paradigm see, for example, Pethes (2008: 32-38).

ties in a globalized *and* glocalized world at the same time? These are the problems and questions that currently dominate the intricate discussions in the wide field of cultural memory studies.

Coming back to our intended short historical overview of the emergence of modern theoretical concepts of cultural memory, we will focus our attention on two thinkers, Maurice Halbwachs and Aby Warburg, who, according to Astrid Erll (2003: 158), were “the first ones to name and systematically reflect this phenomenon [of collective or cultural memories] within the frame of a modern theory of culture.” In this sense, they can be considered the “inventors” of the “two main traditions” upon which “the contemporary research about cultural memory” is based.

When, in 1925, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs published his study *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*, he provoked a rather polemic reception by his contemporaries.<sup>[5]</sup> This work about the ‘social frames of memory’ deconstructed the common theories of famous thinkers of that time, such as Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, who conceived the memory process as a strictly psychologist and individual one. Halbwachs argued that each personal way of reminding has an intrinsic, indissoluble relation to the social *milieu*. This means that the collective conditions of a certain group, like a family, a religious community, a professional or social class, inevitably determine a personal remembrance as something that is simultaneously shared and framed by a ‘collective memory’. This notion is also the title of his second book *Mémoire Collective*, on which he worked for over 15 years and was only published in 1950, five years after his death. Even if Halbwachs’ dichotomous concept of a collective memory as a social construction, which in his view should be strictly separated from history / historiography, has been exposed to several critiques over the times, it undoubtedly represents one of the fundamental studies for a research area he originally divided in three different levels: the theory of the social pre-conditions in which every individual act of memory is contextualized; the research on the forms and functions of specific generational memories; and the transposition of the sociologist concept of collective memory to the area of cultural heritage and the formation of traditions. To sum up Maurice Halbwachs’ indispensable contribution to current research on cultural memories, we can say that he had the clear notion that a collective identity doesn’t only function in a limited space and time but can also be mediated to further generations by human interaction and communication, as well as

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<sup>5</sup> See for instance Marc Bloch’s harsh critique in Olick *et al.* (2011: 150-155).

by different kinds of cultural and material artefacts, such as books, images, buildings, instituted knowledge, facts, etc. that create a common symbolic order.

Related to this concept of collective memory as a transposable symbolic order between different historical time frames, we have to mention at least another very important contribution that is often overseen in international research. In the 1920s, the German Historian of Arts and Culture Aby Warburg developed a theory of culture and memory – in fact it was quite a diffuse, fragmented concept, and not a “theory as such in an ordered form” (Gombrich, 2010: 104) – founded upon the idea that “social memory” [soziales Gedächtnis] basically consists of a procedural, collective construction and reconstruction of symbols. For him, and so differing from other cultural theorists of his time who focused mainly on oral and written narratives, those collective symbols are especially constituted by art, which he regarded as an “organ of social memory”, by images and other iconic artefacts, as well as by popular rituals and handcraft. In what concerns Aby Warburg’s works, it is also important to mention that his ideas are mainly based on a visual concept of cultural memory which he doesn’t conceive as a dead archive, but as a kind of repository of “mnemonic energy” [mnemische Energie]. In his understanding, this “savings bank” of icons, as he called it, can always be updated due to the media-like and especially pictorial anchorage of memory. In other words, visual art and artefacts understood as material traces of memory, as “engrams”, which “may, under suitable conditions, be reactivated and discharged” (*idem*: 106), permit fruitful exchanges and migrations between different places and times.

In order to conclude this brief overview of the important contributions by Maurice Halbwachs and Aby Warburg to memory studies, both dating back to the first decades of the twentieth century, we have to consider that they are absolutely fundamental to our contemporary concepts of cultural memories. There is no doubt that they anticipate more recent key notions in the current field of memory studies. They emphasize the possibility that a cultural memory can or should always be transformed and updated as well as the notion that culture and memory are constructive processes that always depend on their social conditions and media environment and that their uses can change according to the different times and spaces of cultural production and reception. This is quite revolutionary, especially if we put Warburg’s and Halbwachs’ theories into their own historical context, and later we will further consider their work in our reflections on the transcultural construction of memory.



### 3. NATIONAL “SITES OF MEMORY”

Another very influent concept of cultural memory is that of “lieux de mémoire”. In a monumental work, first published in seven volumes, between 1984 and 1992, the French Historian Pierre Nora registered and exploited nearly two hundred “sites of memory” he considered specifically symbolic for the French nation.

Nora shares with Halbwachs the idea that memory and history are not the same thing, as clearly demonstrated by the following quotation from the opening essay in the first volume of *Les lieux de mémoire*: “Memory, history: far from being synonyms, we become aware that they are in all ways opposites.” [Mémoire, histoire: loin d'être synonymes, nous prenons conscience que tout les oppose.] (Nora, 1984: XIX). But he doesn't totally share Halbwachs' belief in the existence of collective memories. Nora's sceptical – or perhaps even apocalyptic – vision can be summarized in the following sentence from the same foreword: “We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” [On ne parle tant de mémoire que parce qu'il n'y en a plus.] (*idem*: XVII).

Pierre Nora's project can therefore be seen as a last attempt to save or re-construct not a linear collective memory of a Nation whose society has allegedly lost the traditional relation to its History that used to function as the provider of a certain 'natural' group or national identity, but only emblematic pieces, symbolic fragments of a historically built identity. The sites of memory catalogued by Nora are therefore conceived as a kind of an open archive with a non-hierarchical collection of a myriad of elements that are in any way linked to the past of the French Nation and that every *citoyen* can now use in order to (re-)construct or (re-)activate his or her national memory that, in the author's view, was in danger of disappearing.

It's also important to point out that Nora's “lieux de mémoire” shouldn't be understood as places or sites in a strict topographical sense. It's true that they can be geographical or topographical places of memory, such as towns, rivers, landscapes, but also material artefacts, such as buildings, like the Eiffel Tower, flags, sculptures, images, artworks, etc., or even non-material, such as intangible and symbolical ones, like the philosophical texts of Descartes or Hugo, literary and legendary figures like Jeanne d'Arc, historical personalities or dates, the *Marseillaise* and so on.

This heterogeneous and multifaceted collection of sites of memory shows that Nora no longer offers a coherent and linear narrative of French History, but a long inventory or archive of signs, symbolic marks or traces

of an explicitly national memory and identity that, according to his own notion, should provide a certain kind of emotionally charged link between the traditional, academic 'history' and the diffuse popular memory.

Despite a certain theoretical lability, Nora's concept has been very successful, since it has been 'imported' by several different national scholars and publishers, like "in Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, and other countries will soon follow" (Den Boer, 2010: 22). But it has at least one weak point: it is basically conceived upon an essentialist vision, as if France had a "special position", "a French *specificité*, a kind of French *Sonderweg* compared to the English Monarchy or the German Empire" (*Idem*: 22). Indeed, Nora's perspective on the French past seems unable to recognize that "no European nation ever witnessed splendid isolation or any sort of quarantine", as Den Boer (*idem*: 24) rightly underlines. This sort of transnational blind spot and / or transcultural lack in Nora's sites of memory is exactly the point where we should critically retake and rethink his very influent concept.

In fact, there are already some interesting examples of a critical and therefore fruitful transposition of Nora's model. One of them, which we would like to expose here as a paradigmatic case, is its adaptation to the German project *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* (François / Schulze, 2009), first published in 2001. The bi-national constellation of the coordinators themselves, as well as the multidisciplinary approaches and the multi-nationality of the more than a hundred contributors, coming from Germany, Austria, Poland, France, the Czech Republic, Israel, Great Britain, Switzerland and the USA, is a first indication of a certain critical revision of the original French national concept which was transposed to the sites of memory in the German speaking cultural space. As the editors, Etienne François, professor of German and French History, and Hagen Schulze, professor of German and European History, highlight in the introduction, the transnational and transdisciplinary collective authorship is "certainly not irrelevant" but is an intended enrichment for the "open [and] pluralistic" project itself (*idem*: 21). Assuming a "decisively European alignment", they make clear that, explicitly against Nora's closed national concept, in the case of the German sites of memory, the intention could never be to map a "Germany closed in itself", but as a space of memory "opened to its neighbours and Europe" (*idem*: 19). Therefore, this concept contains a special focus on transnational "shared sites of memory" (*ibidem*), which means those sites that are significant not only for the memory of the Germans but also for that of its neighbours and which might be situated inside or outside the

(historically very fluid) political borders of the German nation, such as the Heldenplatz in Vienna, the Cathedral of Strasbourg, Versailles, Rome or Stalingrad, among others. The “constant inclusion of the vision from outside in its interplay with the vision from inside”, which according to the editors, are both “constitutive for the emergence and development of the German memory cultures” (*ibidem*), expresses in a very obvious way how Pierre Nora’s concept of national sites of memory can and should be rethought for similar projects by including an intercultural and transnational dimension which is naturally inherent to nearly every construction of cultural identity. The fact is that the foundational myths of several nations, for example conveyed through written texts, like the *Germania* by the Roman Tacitus, or heroic figures, such as the ancient Germanic Arminius from the battle of the Teutoburger Forest, are inexorably grounded on very diversified kinds of transcultural contacts. Consequently, any analysis of the narratives of memory and identity – even if it is still legitimately more or less conceived as a national (hi)story – demands that we take this cultural mobility into consideration. This paradigmatic example of the project about German sites of memory shows that it is possible to avoid an essentialist, closed vision of national cultural memories, if we think and represent ‘our’ collective pasts without excluding the intervention of the ‘Other’ in its construction.

#### 4. TRANSCULTURAL “SITES OF MEMORY”

If we consider, like James Clifford (1997: 17-46), that nearly all cultures are essentially “travelling cultures” which can’t exist for long periods without any intercultural contact, and that “roots” and “routes” are not only homophone but also semantically interdependent notions, then we have to transfer or, better, to re-place and re-territorialize Nora’s concept of national sites of memory into a *transnational* and *transcultural* context.

Mainly due to the physical and medial hyper-mobility of our days – a hyper-mobility that particularly during the last century has transformed at least a considerable part of humanity into ‘citizens of the world’ (it can be as bourgeois tourists or as poor migrants or even as political exiles) – the notion of cultural memory can no longer be conceived strictly inside the traditional borders of national states. This means that, as Zygmunt Bauman in his essay “From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity” puts it, we have to keep in mind that “(...) if the *modern* ‘problem of identity’ was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern*

‘problem of identity’ is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open” (Baumann, 1996: 18). So, if there is no doubt that the so-called globalization process has changed the world – and here it doesn’t matter if the changes are for the better or worse – and consequently also transformed our ways of conceiving the self and the Other, which is a dichotomy that obviously tends to break up in hybrid identities, then the time has definitely come to rethink the ‘nationalized’ categories of cultural memory.

But this doesn’t mean that we can or should globally give up the notions of history and / or memory of certain cultural regions and groups. In fact, globalization also has its other side: what Roland Robertson (1995) defined as “glocalization” finds its expression in a kind of worldwide renaissance of the interest in local cultural memories and traditions that seemed to be disappearing due to the growing standardisation induced by economic and cultural globalization. Together with the increasing cultural homogenization the claims for difference and for certain collective identities by all kinds of particular communities grow. Currently global cultural standardisation goes hand in hand with cultural fragmentation.

Another curious reversal effect of the so-called “McDonaldization” (Ritzer, 1998) or Americanization of the world-culture is what I’ve recently come to name as the global “kebabization”. Arriving by plane, train or bus in a strange town anywhere in the world, besides the local food offer, you will probably find a kebab-shop next to McDonald’s. My point of view is that this reflects the cohabitation or struggle between globalized Western and Eastern cultures. Or, if we want to put it in another, less dualistic way, we can also say that this sort of rivalry between hamburgers and kebab in the same area is an obvious expression, a very tangible materialization or manifestation of the transcultural hybridity which characterizes urban societies all over the world. There can be no doubt that we already live in a “Culture-Monde” (Lipovetsky / Serroy, 2008), in a kind of universal hyper-culture, which transcends all kind of borders. But at the same time we also live in a certain regional culture. A substantial part of the world’s population has at least two collective identities: a global one and a local one, and thus it goes without saying that it is simply unrealistic to continue conceiving cultural memory within the limited frame of a nation or a region.

Our every-day lives – and that means our identities – are coined by hyper-mediality, which brings us, 24 hours a day, millions of images of the ‘Other’ into ‘our’ own sweet homes through TV, the internet, the cinema or even by reading a book written by someone who doesn’t belong to ‘our’ national culture. Our daily lives are exposed to more and more multicul-

tural societies, which means, for example, if we only want to look at the positive side of this complex question, that we can have all the tastes and flavours of the world just around the corner in the multinational supermarkets and restaurants or hear all the different sounds and languages in the so-called 'world-music'.

As mentioned above, transcultural and transnational hyper-mobility is another main characteristic of contemporary life that finds its most obvious social, cultural and economical expression in mass tourism and mass migration. If the phenomenon of hybrid identities caused by migration is quite obvious, and this is what is usually articulated in the common statement of migrants that feel themselves situated in-between two cultures, the implications of tourism for the question of cultural memories and identities might be less clear. If we put aside all the understandable critique regarding the negative impact of mass tourism on local cultures, we can observe that it doesn't only lead to a standardisation but also at the same time to a differentiation and particularisation of certain sites of memory. Even if the preservation of regional or local cultural memories can be seen as a kind of artificial preparation for satisfying the exotic wishes of the tourist, it is true that due to politics and economics of conserving the social habits and cultural expressions of certain communities during the last decades, step by step, a sort of a global archive of cultural memories has been created.

The most important official promoter of this global memory is represented by the UNESCO program for the preservation of worldwide cultural and natural heritage. Since 1972 it has mapped over 850 "sites of memory" in the strict topographical sense spread over 140 countries, sites which billions of people, notwithstanding nationality, feel are a part of them too and therefore have to be treated with respect and responsibility by a global community. This effort signalizes that we are already gaining a certain conscience for sharing a global cultural memory, which obviously coexists with all the multiple national and local memories.<sup>[6]</sup>

The recent nomination by the UNESCO of the music genre *Fado* as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity represents the prolific interconnection between a certain 'nationalized' local memory and a worldwide cultural memory. As pointed out by the general coordinator of this Portuguese proposal, when he was interviewed by the newspaper *Expresso*, the fact that *Fado*, which traditionally symbolizes a kind of a collective Portuguese sentimentality and mentality, has now integrated what we could call

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6 See, for example, Lipovetsky / Serroy (2008).

in a mystical expression the ‘global soul’ and will produce, in what refers to matters of memory and identity, a double positive effect. On the one hand, it “helped us [Portuguese] to rediscover, (...) to better understand and consolidate, jointly, the fundamental role of *Fado* in our own view of ourselves, in our ability to be who we are, and that includes being permanently open to the world.” On the other hand, this inclusion of *Fado* into the “global treasure” of cultural heritage also means that “the Portuguese culture in general will attract international attention” (Expresso / Actual, 2011: 12). In other words, to put it in a less emphatic way: global cultural programs such as those supported by UNESCO do not only help to preserve and solidify local cultural memories and therefore enforce regional identities, they also contribute to their recovery for a transnational cultural memory which is undoubtedly characterized by a great number of different memories and cultural habits.

Even if it seems very difficult to give an appropriate expression to this very intense diversity and high complexity of a transnational cultural memory, it’s time to face that it cannot solely be constructed by the economic logic of global capitalism and marketing. Besides this visible aspect of a ‘triumphant’ globalization on the economic level, our conception of a transcultural memory must include not only a necessarily transnational remembrance of the Shoah as humanity’s biggest *trauma*, but also of the ‘small treasures’ of local cultures which may be buried alive if they are not perceived as integrative parts of a global cultural heritage.

## 5. INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION ...

... I would like to come back to the two important early theorists of the concepts of collective and cultural memories mentioned above. Both Maurice Halbwachs and Aby Warburg have also given their precious contributions to the construction of a *transcultural* concept of sites of memory I’ve been referring to. Aby Warburg’s last project was *Mnemosyne* (1924-1929), a composition named after the major goddess of memory in Greek mythology. It consisted of an exposition or exhibition conceived as a kind of world-art atlas that was composed by a vast series of very heterogeneous pictures of persons and assorted artefacts taken from different times and different countries. The intention was to illustrate the potential of a visual memory which would be able to form a transcultural ‘memory commu-

nity' shared by the two apparently very different continents and cultures of Europe and Asia.<sup>[7]</sup>

In 1941, an era of overheated nationalism and racism, the Jewish Maurice Halbwachs, who died in the concentration camp of Buchenwald in 1945, published a book that symptomatically didn't get the attention it deserved. *Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte* [Legendary Topography of the Evangelists in the Holy Land] is an extraordinary attempt to show, by diachronic analyses of several kinds of literary and iconic representations of the Near East, especially those in hundreds of mediaeval travelogues by pilgrims, how an explicitly transnational linkage of a topographical memory and a cultural heritage (in this case a religious one) can be transmitted over more than a thousand years.

Those are only two early examples that show just how necessary and possible it is to conceive the notion of *sites of memory* as a provider for human identity not based on a national viewpoint, but on the contrary, on a perspective that considers the real human condition in a multi- and transcultural world.

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7 For a visualization of Warburg's *Mnemosyne-Atlas* see: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/mnemosyne>.

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