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### Memorial sites in countries in transition to democracy

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#### ABSTRACT

This work is inspired and originated from an experience of cooperation with the Council of Europe, lasted from summer 2005 to the end of 2009, as a member of various delegations that have made observation missions in different countries, mainly belonging to the former Soviet bloc and the former Yugoslavia. In that capacity the author was able to witness firsthand the effects of a policy change on society, which was very rapid after the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event that is a symbol, in those areas, the watershed between two opposed eras. On the one hand, the domain of socialcommunist ideology and on the other that freedom so much dreamed, which later led to considerable social dislocation, very much evident today. The search for memorial sites and their significance is the theme that unites this trip, with the discovery of "intangible areas" but place over the places.

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Keywords: Memory, Site, Democracy, Transition

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## Introduction

This work is inspired and originated from an experience of cooperation with the Council of Europe, lasted from summer 2005 to the end of 2009, as a member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and in that role then a member of several delegations who have completed observation missions during the elections in various countries, especially former Soviet bloc and of the former Yugoslavia. In this capacity it has been often privileged to witness firsthand the effects of a policy change that has been very rapid since the fall of the Berlin Wall, which is symbolic event, in those areas, the watershed between two opposed eras. On the one hand the domain of socialist-communism ideology and on the other that freedom so much dreamed, which then led to considerable social dislocation, very much evident today. Election observation has thus become a pretext to investigate what emerged from the eyes of those who crossed the street, how they were dressed and what they bought at the town market or in the city supermarket, from the questions that you receive or the answers that were given or sometimes not given. From this we went to look for the symbols of the past and how they were censored or even obvious, to assess the local context, to try to understand how society had evolved over the past 20 years since the fall of the wall which physically few traces remain, but in some cases is still a clear line of demarcation, a place of memory universally known.

What kind of influence have had the progress, the real economy, open borders, exchange with other cultures in these societies accustomed to the soviet or to the Marshal Tito organization? Often they lead to create places of memory not always real, to create new symbols of aggregation, to destroy others. The site of memory indicates persistence, but often the change has become destruction.

We will try to assess how the places of memory are beginning to have a touristic appeal or unexpressed potentialities in this respect, as the local population live the attention of others to things that are symbols of the past for them or at least part of their everyday life. We will alternate two different angles, sometimes those of two different age groups, the elderly and the young people, the Soviets child<sup>1</sup> and the admirers of David Beckham and Zlatan Ibrahimovic: the firsts that after a life in the factories major symbols of the communist industrial power struggle to live with a miserable pension, but with the memory of a past, and the seconds that are living of dreams and on one's wits, chasing the West, but often not being able to follow the gear, or, in other cases those of men and women.

It will be a trip, ideal for the reader, real for who wrote about it, that will also get other travel experiences, however, linked to countries where democracy ,in the Western sense, can not be said to be rooted like Iran.

With regard to the historiographical orientation used in this work and the use of sources should be noted that:

- The reference is to the social history, that is, the history of the civil society. If the traditional history was based on the subject and the subjectivity of historical agents was considered rational and autonomous, for the social history subjectivity and culture are not rational products, but representations or expressions of the social context in which the causes of action are based. The social reality is always inserted in the consciousness of individuals, who organize it, through its conceptualization and is configured in a specific social context with its own historical logic<sup>2</sup>. The *new historians*<sup>3</sup> therefore consider the categories in terms of a

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<sup>1</sup> Usually with the words "soviet child" the International community identify who, in the previous Soviet Countries, completed or had part of their studies under the communist regime.

<sup>2</sup> Calanca D. (2010), *Fotografie di famiglia e percorsi di ricerca storica*, in Abruzzo contemporaneo N°36, Istituto Abruzzese per la storia della resistenza e dell'Italia contemporanea

<sup>3</sup> Cabrera M.A.(2001), *On Language, Cultural and Social Action*, in *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 40, Wesleyan University p.86 ss.

complex network of relationships nor objective nor subjective in nature, but generated by a specific historical phenomenon, with its own rules of operation and change.

As part of this work then you will look first to the concept of social imaginary, as it has been defined by Charles Taylor: "For social imaginary we mean something deeper than the intellectual schemes people can take when they reflect on the social reality with a detached attitude. I think, rather, the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how their lives are intertwined with those of others, how to structure their relationships, expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations"<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, Taylor adopts the term "imaginary" referring "to the way ordinary people "imagine" their social contexts, which often does not translate into a theoretical concept, but is conveyed in images, stories and legends"<sup>5</sup>. Social imaginary, to understand the meaning of the normal expectations that one has towards the other and leading to a flow of social practices that make up social life.

### 1. The Council of Europe and its bodies

The Council of Europe is a political organization created in 1949, which has as its primary goals the promotion of democracy and human rights throughout Europe. It consists of 47 Member States, ranging from Western Europe, to the former Soviet Republics and the Balkan States. It maintains its headquarter in Strasbourg, and has not to be confused with the Union or the European Parliament, that consists of "only" 27 of the members of the Council of Europe, but has the same standard of recognition, with the flag with 12 stars of Europe on a blue background.

While not all Member countries are also part of the European Union, all adhere to the United Nations or the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), a supranational instrument of primary importance in conflict prevention and management of crisis that arise from frozen or active conflicts. Right at the end of the Republic of San Marino Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which lasted from November 2006 to May 11, 2007, the two international organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (Memorandum of Understanding Between the Council of Europe and the European Union - Strasbourg 11 May 2007) setting out their respective responsibilities in order to avoid overlap in the action and define common actions or shared procedures. In this way the Council of Europe and European Union have agreed to intensify their relations in areas of common interest, with particular attention to "the promotion and protection of pluralistic democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, legal codes The political and legal cooperation, social cohesion and cultural interchange"<sup>6</sup>, all in compliance established during the Summit in Warsaw in 2005<sup>7</sup>.

The Council of Europe has thus confirmed the relevance of its mission in nearly 60 years after its establishment, identifying itself as the oldest multilateral organization in Europe, with the ability to have as member states all nations born from the dissolution of the Federation Yugoslavia and the former Soviet bloc, with the exception of Belarus, whose membership is blocked by sealing position on respect for fundamental human rights<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor C. (2009), *A secular age*, Harvard University Press

<sup>5</sup> Taylor C. *op.cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum of understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union, done in Strasbourg 11th of may 2007. [www.coe.int/t/e/legal\\_affairs/legal\\_co-](http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_co-operation/steering_committees/cdpc/Documents/1Mémorandum_d'accord_CE_UE_anglais_signé.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [www.coe.int/t/dcr/summit/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dcr/summit/default_en.asp) The third summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe – Warsaw 16/17 May 2005.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dc/press/news/20100724\\_sg\\_belarus\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dc/press/news/20100724_sg_belarus_en.asp)

The main bodies that make up the Council of Europe and some of which have already been several times referred to, are:

The Committee of Ministers (CM), decision-making body of the Council of Europe that is composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all Member States or from their Permanent Diplomatic Representatives in Strasbourg.

The Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), is one of the two main statutory bodies in which are represented the parliaments of all States Parties for a total of 636 parliamentary members, and develops recommendations and texts for the Committee of Ministers, Governments and Parliaments of the 47 nations represented. The Parliamentary Assembly, the first assembly of its kind in the history of our continent, has developed over the years and open to signature some important treaties that are helping to create a system of supranational European law.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, whose leaders like to call the guardian of democratic foundations in Europe, acting in the field of devolution of power to regional and local levels of government is the other elected body of the Council of Europe. It is composed of locally elected representatives of the 47 member countries and its main task is to monitor the development of democracy at local and regional levels, including encouraging political dialogue between national governments and regional authorities, and supporting cross-border cooperation at local and regional level. The Council of Europe has always recognized the crucial importance of democracy at local and regional level, starting from the fundamental premise that "freedom is both a requirement of the individual and a national need and that local autonomy must meet the aspirations of all Europeans who live in cities as in small villages, in regions such as central and peripheral, and across national borders"<sup>9</sup>.

In this sense, it also puts the protection of places of memory, the roots of the local community, often symbols of the origins of the community that lives around the place.

Other bodies of the Council of Europe are: the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) who sees in it represented about 400 NGOs and brings the voice of civil society in the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, body of judgment that consists of a number of judges equal to the number of Member States and whose work is regulated by the *European Convention on Human Rights*<sup>10</sup>. It considers appeals lodged with it after the conclusion of the judicial process in the country called into question. Where the appeal was accepted, the Court delivers judgments of conviction for the member State of the Council of Europe that is forced to adapt its legislation.

Recently, it has risen to the headlines in Italy for the appeal in order to abolish the crucifix in public schools. In addition to these bodies there is the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which while not having executive powers plays an important role as a fully independent institution, in promoting education, awareness and respect for human rights in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. The management of the whole organization is in the hands of the Secretary General who is elected for a five year term by the Parliamentary Assembly with a strict selection process of candidates<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.coe.int/congress>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/D5CC24A7-DC13-4318-B457-5C9014916D7A/0/ENG\\_CONV.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/D5CC24A7-DC13-4318-B457-5C9014916D7A/0/ENG_CONV.pdf)

<sup>11</sup>

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=RegulationsSG&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

## 2. The organized society

In the missions carried out on behalf of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in the period 2005 - 2009 were visited a large number of nations born from the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, or located in the Balkans. More particularly, reference is made to Russia (Siberia, specifically), Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, for the first group, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia (FYROM), Albania, Slovenia, Croatia for the second. In these countries we have seen symbols, places, linked to the history of centuries or result of recent history of the twentieth century as the mausoleum of the Albanian dictator Hoxha and squares named after Skanderbeg, the Albanian hero whose statue is located in Skopje, but also in Podgorica or in other Balkan capitals.

In both groups identified above, we can find countries with Christian roots, despite the different denominations, or Muslim, and this already partly differentiated social behavior of different places in particular as regards the status of women.

One can, however, see a radical difference between the development of the former Soviet society than the Balkans (with the exception of Albania that experienced the historic post-war isolation policy), with the latter generally initially more developed through a policy of openness of the socialist system comparing with the absolute ban on tourism and on the "uncontrolled" exchange with people from the West.

It should first be clarified the context in which these trips were born and how they were organized. All was born in order to observe the progress of elections, usually at local and regional level sometimes at parliamentary. The missions were always conducted by members of Congress, then elected to local and regional level as part of Municipal, Regional or County Councils, presumably unaccustomed to understand the needs of citizens and their degree of satisfaction. Typically, these missions are designed to observing how the election process performs, from preparation to highlight the event, consisting of polling day itself. Subsequently, the delegation produces a report for the Congress and, in case of non-compliance with the established principles of direct democracy and covered by the resolutions of the Council of Europe and the main instruments of the Venice Commission<sup>12</sup>, we proceed to the vote in the Plenary Session of a document of recommendations for national authorities in order to, for example, improve legislation, review what was not considered as effective or democratically correct, increase Gender Equality<sup>13</sup>.

However, there is a part of the observation that falls outside of the fees established by institutions, though obviously interfacing with them, and often covering purely subjective impressions that are harvested from contact with local people who twenty years ago were under authoritarian regimes or were citizens of dissolved nations, for logics connected with ethnic, religious, traditional basis, who look to the neighbour as the other to stay away from or to get away from it in a traumatic way.

Often we met people who have lived in a few years a very rapid social change, with transition from economies typically communist-style to social market logic with historical passages briefly described above.

We have generally observed cities entirely populated by old, non-elderly but old worn out from working in the countryside and now guardians of young grandchildren, whose parents emigrated in search of jobs and economic stability often denied by the underground or from non-integration in their destination.

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<sup>12</sup> Opinion no.190/202 CDL-AD (202) 23rev "Code of good practice in electoral matters – Guidelines and explanatory report"; Adopted by Venice Commission during its 52<sup>nd</sup> Session (Venice, 18-19 October 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Study no.369/2006 CDL-AD (2006) 021 "Election evaluation guide"; Adopted by the Council for Democratic Elections in its 17<sup>th</sup> meeting (Venice, 8-9 June 2006) and by the Venice Commission in its 67<sup>th</sup> Session (Venice, 9-10 June 2006).

They are often the two groups of people, old people than ever have the right to be elderly and young who will never have direct and constant warmth of the parents, to form the basis of some of these nations, especially in Moldova and Ukraine, and especially in rural areas often characterized by villages that rarely rise to the logic of the aggregate urban community with common areas for meeting daily, but more spread out over vast lands and placed in homes in poor condition, very distant to each other.

The religious connotation may affect the behavior of local populations as mentioned above, especially the balance between man and woman.

In this context it should also be placed the viewing of historic sites, places that speak of tragic memories, sometimes historical, others symbolic. Certainly never indifferent.

During the first mission in Azerbaijan, conducted in 2006, there have been some interesting events related to Muslim tradition. Azerbaijan, north of the Islamic Republic of Iran is in fact a Muslim country, albeit with a religious connotation lived in an apparently secular way and without the presence of a "state religion" as in the neighboring country<sup>14</sup>.

This means that there are no special places of memory related to religion, that connotation is found in many former Soviet republics, where many symbols of the faith have had for decades a systematic ostracism.

One exception is the Maiden's Tower in downtown Baku, built in the twelfth century and still view, by the elderly, as a symbol of invincibility that stands on the edge of Icheri Sherer, the old city, now surrounded by more modern buildings and much more affluent, home of the nouveau riche, the new bourgeoisie tied to the government and to oil industry of the Caspian Sea. The symbol for the youth is no longer the Maiden's Tower, but the shopping malls of major Western brands, place of short-term memory or a symbol of rapid social change.

The Muslim approach, however, makes sure, in a sort of "place of virtual memory" which is tradition, custom, that women in areas outside the capital Baku can not reach the polling station alone, but always accompanied by a male of the family that, as candidly admitted in a rural village of the chairman of a pooling station, can advise on what to do and avoid the typical errors that incur at those latitudes, a human female. In the villages outside the capital, places of memory almost never are a tourist attraction, except for a few scattered sites or monuments, but little publicized and known. The memory is linked to the persistence of traditions that do not rise to the presence of a unifying or symbolic site.

In Moldova, the population is estimated to be approximately 35 to 40% emigrated abroad in search of fortune and in this group of people stand out young women who often are forced to leave the small children or adolescents to their grandparents and, if lucky, return to see them once a year. Part of the men also work out of the Country, most of all in building yards scattered around Moscow, so close to the small Republic, once the cradle of agriculture and viticulture of the Soviet Union and now the State perpetually on the verge of structural poverty, with the thorn of Transnistria to the east that now, although not independent, can not be considered part of the State and the Autonomous Region of Gagauzia in the south, wedged between Romania and Ukraine, where the national language is Romanian like the Gagauz, a Turkish idiom of the Ural-Altai group spoken by about 250,000 people in the world, and Russian, but little used and less taught in public schools with the absurd condition of young people who are citizens of Moldova but growing up without knowing the language spoken in the capital of their country and prefer, if they can, emigrate to Moscow to be bricklayers because they know Russian, and of course the Gagauz, and are, in this way, less foreigners in Moscow instead of their state.

Gagauzia is a small strip of land where in the nineteenth century, the Tsar decided to confine the people of Turkish ethnic origin from the whole Empire, a small strip of land which has suffered since that time and where the symbols of the Soviet Union still dominate

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<sup>14</sup> The Azeri – Anglo Youth Society (2005), *Azerbaijan: 100 Questions answered*, Baku.

everywhere, and where those who has been "Soviet citizen", remember that period as a time when at least the families were united.

Moldova is a place where even now for the elderly is still too expensive to request an ID, and this allowed them to use, to vote, the old passport with the CCCP logo and a stamp with the current residence place inside the front cover. There are statues of Lenin everywhere there is a school or a public building and the few times that they are absent are replaced by busts of Marx. Outside of major cities there is no running water and to meet the need of the population is used a network of wells that have at times shapes that recall the past relationship, such as the one met and photographed in which the form tried to repeat quite closely the walls and towers of the Kremlin.

The persistence of the symbols of the Soviet Union, the true witnesses to the memory of the twentieth century, is a typical characteristic of Moldova, which will be found, excluding the architectural aspects that are present everywhere, just once in Armenia, where the main square in Yerevan presents on some fences the hammer and sickle.

In Albania still persist in the bunkers that dot the area, built by Hoxha to defend against "invaders" and now places "widespread" reminiscent of the time.

In Kosovo, religion has been the spark for the conflict and war, but now we can see that the woman is closest to the classical Western model, with a little persistence of subjection to man. Do not forget, however, that throughout the period of conflict that characterized the Balkans over the past 20 years, ethnic rape has always been one of the most atrocious methods of warfare, stating the persistence of the predominant male model of the female figure. The insult to women through rape becomes an offense against the community, to the extended family that we find at large in the definition of ethnicity. The predominance of the male attacking the female side of the opposite community to undermine the foundations of that group in hope, in addition to "stain" or "branding" the woman to conceive a child who does not have pure genes of the opposing ethnic group<sup>15</sup>.

In general in the places we visited we have been able to observe different familial relations, the patriarchal family with the man who "guide" the woman often illiterate or otherwise in a condition of subjection, the dispersed family with the woman who, with the gain of the work abroad, allowed the family living at home even if, often, the family is actually a group of children left there by parents with the elderly who look after them. Once again it is the traditional symbol of memory.

In Kosovo, the places of memory are also the places of pain. The symbols of an ethnic war where it was necessary to destroy the material testimonies of diversity. So the Serbian Orthodox monasteries have been completely destroyed and the ruins are still strewn with landmines, representing that ethnicity to hunt, but that remains under the protection of international landmarks such as the monasteries of Pec and Decani, this last, particularly revered for his great Catholicon and the presence inside of the carved sarcophagus of King Stephen the Saint, entered in the UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004 as a site of Serbia from which Kosovo self declared his independence<sup>16</sup>.

Moldova above described is perhaps the cradle of the marked bond among young and elderly not always detectable elsewhere. Precisely because of the massive emigration of adults over the past 15 years, many children grow up and grew up with grandparents as the only adult reference. Grandparents, that in spite of the physical aspect of people suffering from hard work, the burden of the farmers or work in the factories of the Soviet Union, are often men and women between 40 and 50 years, as could be demonstrated observing the documents shown to the polling station, then an age where in Western Europe in crisis for a low birth rate often we have children barely teenagers or we are searching for a first late pregnancy.

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<sup>15</sup> Pasic E. (1993), *Violentate*, Armando Editore, Roma

<sup>16</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/724>

This cohabitation makes then that elementary school-age children or teenagers or a little less than twenty years old are growing with the reference of grandparents relatively young, but often illiterate or with low literacy, having dual kinds of behavior. On the one hand we can observe the persistence of a form of respect for the elder of the family that is respectfully accompanied to the pooling station or in public places and let to be the first through the doorway, while on the other there is the estrangement of young people when are in a group with the derision of elder people being alone on a bench, the first social victims of the general impoverishment of the country.

A continuation of family respect that is not in line with the classic mutation of the Western societies in which the youth group often does not recognize any authority to the elderly and even relegated them to the boundaries of society.

In Kosovo, visited in November and December 2007, traces of the recent war can still be felt in the actions of people but also in trivial actions, such as the display of election advertisements, , in which a ban on carrying weapons inside the polling stations, widely taken for granted in the West, still goes out with the smoking ban, this widely disillusioned. It is in reality still so torn, where the Orthodox monasteries, as mentioned above, must be protected as a symbol of the religion of the hated Serbs, as if the faith of those who live there usually is worst weapon of many bombs, which the Young people want to live a different life and ask, are interested, now accustomed to contact with "Westerners" and to the study of English that can them open a door to a "safe" job, common dream of many of their peers in that west they yearn for without knowing how it really is. Young people who seek to live as if there had never existed ethnic massacres between them, areas closed to transit because still full of landmines, black granite tombstones engraved with above the images of their peers in uniform often planted in the ground at the enter of villages, makeshift cemeteries to bury kids who will never be men.

The place that celebrates the memory of death is in practice an aggregate of many sites spread out from the villages or along roads. The black granite is the symbol of memory, as if the streets of the country were in fact a monumental Via Crucis.

The ban on carrying weapons in the polling stations are a "tradition" of the area and it was possible to observe them also in Macedonia (FYROM) in March 2009, just eight months by another election in which young people were sent to the polls armed and during which some gunfire erupted during the consultations. In this case the young were the expression of different ethnic groups of origin in a conflict that saw the ethnic Albanians face with the most numerous Macedonian, with groups of Turkish origin as spectators.

Ethnicity, although in the period of observation have not been detected any particular problems, it is so clearly evident, that a bridal shop in downtown Skopje exhibits on display, besides the usual virgin white, a dress embroidered with fiery red eagle with two heads decorating the skirt, so as to transform the young bride in an Albanian flag, which claims its own space in a country where being Albanian means to belong to an ethnic minority and linguistic diversity, even if the language was recognized as official State language in recent years. Even at a time such as marriage, then, the figure of a young woman is here exploited for political purposes, turning a private event in a public claim, a suit in a symbol, an ethnic connotation in an insurmountable wall if you search for a "inter ethnical" marriage. The suit is, in this case, an instrument of memory that goes far beyond the site.

Emblematic in terms of images captured the reality encountered in Armenia, another country in distress, another poor country after the collapse of the Soviet Union, seeking an opening on the outside, having regard to the frozen conflicts with neighboring Turkey and Azerbaijan and the proximity of Georgia. The capital Yerevan is full of building sites but in the windows of a photographer are shown off images of times gone by, soldiers posing and covered with Soviet medals, athletes treated for national glory, a little girl whose photograph draws the mind to the packaging of chocolate "Alenka", a certainty since the days of Stalin, the dark and handsome man with the fur hat close to an Armenian of the diaspora, Charles Aznavour. This



are images that we can see few steps from the Cinema Theatre Moscow, where old structures national symbol of Stalin's memory, a time devoted to earnest performances, now are home to the projections of the last Batman movie where the young Armenians, perhaps even more than their western counterparts, the evening went mad, as we saw during the visit which took place there in 2008.

Armenia is still reminiscent of the diaspora and the massacres of the beginning of twentieth century and the young grandchildren of those who then fled and are now U.S. citizens or even French, return to celebrate the memory of their ancestors by releasing doves in the direction of Mount Ararat, considered by Armenians their sacred territory but now part of Turkey, with a border still closed after nearly a century by those tragic events<sup>17</sup>. The Armenian Church of France or the Armenian National Committee of America organize trips in the country of origin of their ancestors, to bring young people to the traditions of their fathers, but in reality it often turned into tourists armed with a camera to capture what in the civilized United States or in the multiethnic France they wouldn't find anymore.

But the wars that continue to disfigure the Caucasus, as in recent years has been the case with the crisis between Georgia and Russia regarding the North Ossetia, continue to leave their trail of dead young men who are also revered in high schools where a time they studied, with their photographs on display to everyone's prayer as their blood-soaked uniform donated by parents to ensure that their son lost forever in the battles in Nagorno Karabakh is not lost even oblivion of the living. In this case, the hall of a school becomes a place of remembrance for the young people who pass in front of that uniform.

The journey between these realities also leads to the memory of some observed situations in Serbia, where it seems normal for a young farmer take out for a walk, in remote rural areas, a pig on a leash, or in Albania, a few hours from us, where the old woman who should be assisted to be able to vote as illiterate leads us to take note of the contrast with the images of Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Israel and the West Bank, divided by a wall with border crossings, and where young people, as happened with a wall that disappeared 20 years ago, continue to protest with artistic expression, painting murals, perhaps hoping one day to be able to meet, young Palestinians and Israelis, as do the young people of neighboring nations, sharing passions, culture and all that can be shared without hatred and violence. The site boundary is transformed into a place of tears, made a sad pilgrimage and sadness for the visitor.

Returning for a moment in Armenia, specifically at the entrance of Geghard Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage site largely excavated in the rock, we could meet elderly farmer women, who now support the family improvising stalls where they sell to pilgrims and tourists cakes and dried fruit, having changed their rooted way of acting in becoming traders, as the logic of the market requires.

The historical site, sacred symbol of memory and faith becomes the market for tourists or pilgrims, according to a long-standing practice that identifies these figures as a potential consumer and thus a source of income, even in places like Geghard, where there are put in place sophisticated strategies of tourism marketing.

Certainly the labor market and training in these former Soviet nations is far away from the model so well narrated by Vittorio Notarnicola in 1962 on the pages of "L'Europeo", when describing the education system that, according to the industrial growth of East Germany, had to create an annual high number of specialists said: "The factory of the men was in front of us, below us, around us. For two miles in all directions, we saw roofs, facades, domes made of aluminum, glass towers, smokestacks of University of Dresden, the factory of men indeed. At this school, the German Democratic Republic, the communist Germany request, each year, two thousand engineers and scientists: two thousand well educated brains to do

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<sup>17</sup> Dadrian Vahagn N. (2003), *Storia del genocidio armeno. I conflitti nazionali dai Balcani al Caucaso*, Guerini e Associati Milano

some work and also trained to accept whatever the system and the custom of the State and to enter easily in it"<sup>18</sup>.

### 3. The Islamic Republic of Iran, a benchmark

After having analyzed some connotations that could be detected in various Nations visited, we look now, as a comparative term other than our western point of view, to a society often discussed, but with deep cultural roots. Iran, visited in 2009, not on behalf of the Council of Europe, is actually and officially named the Islamic Republic of Iran, its geographical location and its history can be safely classified as a "bridge between the Arab world and Asian world, although not belonging to either" .

Formerly known as Persia<sup>19</sup>, it began to be called Iran after the Shah Reza Pahlavi said the international community to identify the country with that name. Only afterwards it will be recognized also the maintenance of the ancient name. This is significant for the period (assuming the name of Iran took place in 1935), aimed at an alleged modernity, leading in public documents that will affect the status of women, as the edict issued in 1937 by Shah, known as the edict of "disclosure", which forced women to unveil, today for many a symbol of repression. Even the name of a Country is memory, tradition, often a source of contention as the name Macedonia among FYROM and Greece.

But is the veil, now widespread and compulsory throughout the country, a symbol of memory, an immaterial place but connotative, being everywhere in the state.

Significant in this regard was the observation of old photographs in museums and in the former royal palace, where the women, "revealing" and forced to be photographed, are ashamed of themselves and tried to cover their faces with hands, returning to the persistence of an attitude natural for them, they, forced to change the way of clothing until there forced to wear<sup>20</sup>. The veil is seen by Westerners as the denial of femininity, the subjugation of women to the male that governs society. On the streets of major cities of Iran is now seen that many girls, while respecting the rule of the veil, wearing it like an habit and often, if the economic situation allows them, using famous luxury brand and expensive ones. Often they are silk stoles full of colours, almost transparent, which makes those faces with deep eyes even more mysterious.

We certainly can not say that the obligation to wear it is a win-win situation, but it is significant that women interpret with femininity, 30 years after the Khomeini revolution, and with irony, let us say it, flirting, the precept.

If all the countries visited, as we discussed, above are characterized by a progressive removal of religion, imposed by the ruling regime for a long time, and now find themselves having to deal with the discovery of faith and the return of persons, including young people, to the tradition of the church, especially the Orthodox one, the opposite has happened in Iran, where the religion has become one with the state, often used to stay holed up in power and destroy what is different.

And are religious sites that become point of reference and guardians of memory, especially historical ones like Isfahan, Shiraz, and Qom, where the great mosques, they are still active or not, affect the lives of all and become the fulcrum, that also lead to become the place where hold a class for a singing lessons or a drawing one, with those young people who conduct open-air art lesson in a mosque in Isfahan, drawing billboard hanger and back sheets have reported posts in English, as many teenagers their western counterparts, the words "love is

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<sup>18</sup> Notarnicola V. (with pictures by Evaristo Fusar) "La fabbrica degli uomini" in "L'Europeo" 1962 nn.15-16

<sup>19</sup> Petrillo P.L. (2008), *Iran*, Bologna, Il Mulino

<sup>20</sup> Axworthy M. (2010), *Breve Storia dell'Iran*, Einaudi Editore

sick," love is a disease that two teenage girls show to the photographer, perhaps unaware that they will be reported in a paper in the West and not only in the memories of travel.

In Tehran there are still traces of the 80 anti-US struggle, with walls of entire apartment buildings that depict rain of bombs with the Stars and Stripes. The memory in this case is propaganda and the guides take their Western clients to visit these places of memory.

The Iranian society maintains a strong differentiation between north and south and between urban and rural areas. The existence of faiths different than the Muslim makes some locations unique and characteristics<sup>21</sup>. It's so that you can observe the existence of Christians - Armenians districts in Isfahan, which retain their customs but have also to observe the requirements of the country<sup>22</sup>. Like Yadz are clearly persistent signs of the cult of Zoroaster and it is significant to note that even in ancient rituals associated with death there were also a division, for this religion, on the basis of gender. In fact, when a Zoroastrian died he/she should never come into contact with the ground and once the funeral ended with the placement of the body, naked, in the middle of two towers, one reserved for men and one for women and children, so that the birds could strip the flesh off the corpses.

The persistence of this religious precept has now had to deal with the hygiene standards of mortuary police, while maintaining the concept of non-flesh contact with the ground, the change occurred included the construction of the Zoroastrian cemetery in the valley adjacent to the towers, cemetery where the bodies were lowered into sarcophagus built in concrete in the trenches.

The one in Yadz is the major communities of Zoroastrian Iran and worship the sacred fire always kept burning in the temple of the city, a symbolic site of the city, a place of religious memory, which is the core aggregation of citizens<sup>23</sup>.

It 's interesting to see how the religious and political authorities Muslim-inspired that govern the country show extremely tolerant and dialoguing attitude with the community, also in Kerman, as noted above about the existence of the Armenian Church in Iran, unlike the model of repression and messages that the media report in the West.

Tehran is a city where you can see strange buildings with facades repainted in green and representing trees and parks to give them a more pleasant look. This last aspect is reminiscent of that observed in some parts of Tirana, where the mayor Edi Rama, who has ruled the city since 2000, has sponsored students from the local Academy of Fine Arts with their creativity to make it colorful condominiums built in gray cement during the years of Hoxha.

Moving from Isfahan to Tehran you can stop in Qom, already mentioned above, the holy city where is buried and venerated Fatima, grandson of the seventh and sister of the eighth Shiite Imam, and where Khomeini, who lived here a long time, led the country after seizing power in 1979.

Suddenly, coming into this city, where religion guides everything absolutely and life revolves around the great mosque full of pilgrims, it is noted what was not seen elsewhere: a clear and absolute separation of roles between men and women and the total religious conditioning of society<sup>24</sup>. And here the mosque is a place of memory around which everything revolves.

During the visit to the mosque we found courtesy of the nice people who helped the women of our group, already wearing the veil, for sure in a way a lot more clumsy than local women, to cover themselves completely leaving only the face. It has been interesting to discover an Islam of courtesies, even in a city of fundamentalists, where if a veil slipped, because badly

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<sup>21</sup> Cancian A. (2008), *L'Iran e il tempo una storia complessa*, Ed. Jouvence, Roma

<sup>22</sup> Strazzari F. (2010), *Dalla terra dei due fiumi. Iran-Iraq. Cristiani tra l'integralismo e la guerra*, EDB

<sup>23</sup> Safa-Isfahani Nezhat (1980), *The Rivayat-i Hemit-i Asawahistan: A study in Zoroastrian Law*, Harvard Iranian Se.: No.2

<sup>24</sup> Guolo R. (2004), *L'Islam è compatibile con la democrazia?*, Laterza Economica

pinned, someone always came with a smile to put it back in place. It was certainly perceived as the distrust that the images we receive on media let us immediately stiffened, while the locals, unaware of our mental patterns and devoid of television images have accepted us for what we were: people who visited a sacred place according rules<sup>25</sup>.

Children sing for joy at every meeting and in Persepolis pre-adolescents or adolescents students asked with happiness to Western groups to take pictures together, happy to be in the spotlight in that immense archaeological site where were laid the foundations of their history.

It 's also interesting the order and the silence in which pupils listen to the teacher to discover the powerful echoes of the dome in the Mosque of the Shah (or Imam, according to a different historical period) of Isfahan singing a psalm. the students at the end thanks with a discipline that has become almost unnatural for us, but persists in this society.

And those children are observed during lessons in a madrassa, with their shoes outside the door of respect for the sacred place. They can not get out, having to study the sacred text, even when the Imam goes with his tunic draped in wind. The children are brought into the holy place, the place of memory, so that they maintain the traditions intact, potential perpetrators of the strength of the nation.

In conclusion of this work, but not at the end of a topic, we want to stress again how often the place is not the monastery or the ruins of war or the archaeological site, but a place hypothetical and unreal, in the heart of every human being met . The real discovery of the tourist, the foreigner, is not in a visit to a place, beautiful even, a celebrated masterpiece, but certainly static work, but in taking the true meaning, through the local population, of the symbols of memory, the memory of places.

We discovered how in their hearts is a common feeling and how a gesture is a collective memory, a shared non material place. This is the wish to the visitor: to understand others' feelings in an unfamiliar area not return with the memory not of a place but with a set of sensations and impressions that make the place unique because it is "lived" and not only "visited".

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