

Typoscript of the lecture on “History, Memory and Identity in Jordan” held by Prof. Irène Maffi at the Zentrum Moderner Orient. *Not for quotation without prior consent of the author.*

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Conference

Before starting my analysis of the Jordanian case, as anthropologists often do, I will begin my speech drawing upon an ethnographic example very far from the Middle East. I will refer to the study of Maurice Bloch, an important scholar and a specialist of Madagascar, who during several years has been doing fieldwork in the central-eastern area of Madagascar among the Zafimaniry. In an article published in 1998, he analyses the way the Zafimaniry of different generations remember an episode of the war of Independence in which they got involved. In 1947 the village of the community studied by Bloch was burnt as retaliation against the Malagasy rebels. This event which was a real tragedy for the Zafimaniry as they had to flee in to the forest and hide for two years in order to escape the French army was remembered and told from the old people to the next generations. As a result, the young people and even the children at the time Bloch was doing his fieldwork were able to remember the event and tell it with many details putting it in relation with the geographical places and the features of the landscape. The considerations of Bloch are numerous and complex. Here, I will only focus on two aspects he analyzes: I) the first one is that the memory of the old people is socialized and appropriated by all members of the community despite their age. Indeed, according to Bloch, even if they have not personally experienced the event, through the elders' narration, the younger members of the group can in some way re-imagine and thus live again the tragedy. Therefore, the memories of some members of the community, who represent the authority and the power inside it, become social, collective, shared memories as another Maurice, Maurice Halbwachs, had already theorized half a century before Bloch. What I want to stress is that memory or memories are social and always re-imagined and transformed and that they can be appropriated by individuals who are foreigners to the remembered events. Usually these memories are authoritative memories and belong to the elders or to the people detaining a certain kind of power inside the community. II) The second point mentioned by Bloch I would like to focus on is the bond existing between the landscape and also the material objects, as Maurice Halbwachs had already pointed out, and memory. Geographical places and the characteristics of the landscape are a powerful support for remembering and work as a kind of embodiment of group's as well as individual memories.

Now, these two conceptual aspects, i.e. the possibility of appropriating others' souvenirs and memories, and the relation between memories and material aspects of social life and environment will be crucial in my analysis of the Jordanian process of fabrication of the national past. Of course in the case of Jordan we are faced with a literate society not an oral one but, as Bloch stresses in his study, the differences concerning the specific points mentioned before is not substantial.

Today, I will tackle some issues I have been working on during the research I conducted in Jordan from 1997 to 2001 about the processes of fabrication of cultural heritage and their political significance. My work has been devoted, on the one hand, to the analysis of some aspects of the cultural policy of the State in order to fabricate a national past and a shared identity for the heterogeneous Jordanian population; on the other hand, my work has been devoted to the study of the cultural practices of other actors of the domestic arena such as private collectors, tribes, commercial enterprises concerned by the marketing of heritage, merchants and dealers of cultural objects, as well as ordinary people. The mentioned cultural practices concern material objects classified as cultural heritage either by Jordanian authorities or by other local actors. Thus, I have been analysing official historiography considered as a frame for interpreting the fabrication of cultural heritage, museography, official archaeological policies, and various forms of mediatisation of the *turath* such as conferences, exhibitions, television programmes, and production of "traditional handicrafts". As already said, I have also worked on the effect of the State's machine on the population. Among the various social actors I have taken into consideration I have focused particularly on the young generations. Therefore, I have been studying the school texts of history and civic education, the programme of school visits to museums and historical sites and eventually I have been conducting interviews with high school students in all governorates of the Kingdom. I will now centre my analysis on this particular aspect, hoping to show some mechanisms of the memory's construction in a relatively young post-colonial State which has proved (at least until now) one of the more stable of the Near East.

I will start with a souvenir! I will talk about the fragment of an interview I have made with a group of young students in the girls' high school of Wadi Mousa, the village at the entrance of the ancient site of Petra in southern Jordan. At the time, in the year 2000, I was doing collective interviews in all parts of the Kingdom, trying to understand if the important ideological apparatus created by the State in its effort to build a Jordanian nation with a shared identity and a common past was affecting the sense of belonging of the young generations. To be short, the fundamental questions I was trying to answer were the following: were the new generations feeling Jordanian? Were they

acknowledging a common past? Were they proud of their national history? Were they feeling members of a national community? Of course my point of view was centred on cultural heritage and the way it affected the young generation's imagination of the Jordanian past. Those were crucial questions since Jordan is a State created after the First World War by the British on a territory that had never constituted a unitary political and administrative entity and inhabited by a population which did not express any kind of "national" sentiments until very recently. Indeed, when it became an autonomous entity, the Emirate of Transjordan as it was called by the Europeans before 1946, had a very heterogeneous population: there were Bedouin tribes staying in its territory at some moments of the year, tribal peasants, (sedentary or semi-nomadic), and a very small urban population. Moreover, if the majority of the population was Arab, there were groups of Caucasians who came during the last period of the Ottoman Empire. Though the Arabs were mainly Muslim, there was (and still is) also a Christian minority. Later, the foundation of Israel and the annexation of the West Bank by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan made the demographic situation much more complex: at least half of the population was composed of Palestinians who were not recognized as such but as Jordanians coming from the West Bank of the Kingdom. (I remind you to the fact that after 1950 until the War of 1967 in Jordan the words Palestine and Palestinians were forbidden in public discourses, and this of course in order not to encourage the already strong Palestinian nationalism threatening the newly independent Jordanian State). The internal divisions of the Palestinian component are also extremely important to remember, if we want to understand the complexity of the Jordanian case, but I don't think here we can go into details. Let's just keep in mind that the Palestinians in Jordan do not constitute at all a cohesive bloc and that the people called Palestinians can have very different perceptions of their relation with the Jordanian State. We have also to recognize the existence of different Jordanian identities among the so called "real" (qoh) Jordanians since different forms of nationalism have developed in the country in relation with their attitudes towards the Palestinians and the Hashemite dynasty which reigns in the country. I would like just to remind those who are not familiar with the Jordanian history that the Hashemites were not from Transjordan as they are originally from Mecca and were conferred upon the thrones of Jordan and Iraq by the British colonizers only in the 1920s.

Going back to the interview with the young girl in Wadi Mousa, I asked the group of students she was part of what would they say to a foreigner ignoring everything of the country in order to give him or her significant information about it. The girl began to tell me about a trip she had recently made to Egypt with her family where she had met some young people of her age who did not know anything about Jordan. To give them an idea of the Kingdom's identity she had told them the history of Petra and of the Nabataeans who founded the famous city. She had also given a

description of the main Jordanian archaeological sites illustrating the long and glorious history of the Kingdom. According to her, she had been so convincing that her Egyptian hosts had planned to come to visit Jordan in the next months. It is true that the girl's discourse might be considered as a reaction towards the monumental archaeological sites she visited in Egypt during her trip and perhaps towards the discourse of the young Egyptians she met who were probably proud of their pharaonic past. Nevertheless, it seems very meaningful that the Jordanian student considered the national cultural heritage promoted by the State as the element capable of representing her country's identity.

In fact, this fragment expresses very well the results of my research. Indeed, my research has showed how successful the official State's apparatus has been in creating a Jordanian identity and a common past to which the various components of the population can refer, despite the internal divisions that can not be denied and that at some moments have threatened the existence of the Hashemite Kingdom (such as Black September in 1971). The majority of the students I interviewed - who were between the age of 16 and 18 - seem to have appropriated the official discourse of the State as they consider for example the Nabataeans as their ancestors in the same way the Lebanese consider the Phoenicians or the Iraqis (at least before the war) the Babylonians. The students I interviewed were able to retrace the national biography of the Jordanian nation from the Biblical Kingdoms of Edom, Moab and Ammon to modern time. Thus, they projected into the past the existence of a Jordanian entity attributing to it a historical depth which is the result of the process of fabrication of the modern nation State.

This process has its origin already in the colonial time as the Emirate of Transjordan was first founded. This is apparent if we look at the books written by some British officers during the 1920s and 1930s where we can find some of the ideas developed later by the post-colonial authorities. For instance, I can cite the idea that the Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom were to be considered among the first "Jordanian" State formations, i.e. that they were considered of as a kind of ancestors of the modern Kingdom This implicitly means that it is possible to refer to these kingdoms in order to prove the antiquity, the originality and the glory of the Jordanian past. The Nabataeans are of course another civilisation worth emphasising in order to prove to existence of a Jordanian nation in history. They were studied and admired by British and European archaeologists during the colonial time and in today's Jordan they are considered as the real ancestors of the local population, because they were Arab, came probably from Hijaz (we know that Arab tribes consider themselves as coming from the Arabian peninsula) and founded a flourishing kingdom whose borders coincide more or less with modern Jordan, at least according to the Jordanian vision. Almost all students I interviewed agreed that the Nabataean Kingdom constituted a crucial point in the Jordanian history.

Most of them had visited Petra or had at least seen the site in television programmes, and were able to give more or less the same information given by the students who had visited it. Generally speaking, 18 classes of the 21 I considered in my survey had visited the main archaeological sites and the museums of the country that appear on the tourist trails addressed to foreign as well as to native visitors such as the Hellenistic-Roman cities of Jerash and Gadara, the citadel of Amman, the Ayyubid fortress of Ajloun, etc. To these sites we have to add places that have a more Arab-Islamic character and are therefore mainly visited by Jordanian and/or Muslim tourists coming to the Kingdom: such as the various tombs of the Prophet's companions who died during the Islamic conquest of Transjordan fighting against the Byzantine army, as well as some sites of the battles, and the Islamic museum of Mazar (in southern Jordan). Without going into details, the results of the interviews I conducted seem to confirm that the school system has proved to be a very efficient machine in so far as it succeeded in disseminating the image of Jordan as a sort of open air museum. This means that the State's territory is perceived as an ordered and organized space where each place, each architecture, each monument might be conceived of as a room, a showcase or an exhibit of an immense imaginary museum. To use another metaphor, we can say that the national territory is conceived of as a divisible organism whose parts are organized in a specific way, each one having a particular anatomy and a particular biography. In other words, the State's land is changed into a symbolic body on which it is possible to recognize the traces of its development. In my opinion, the knowledge handed on in the schools plays a crucial role in the construction of the symbolic body of the nation and in the way the citizens perceive it.

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the presentation of the archaeological and historical sites in the school texts and the school visits allow tracing itineraries in the nation's space and time. They offer the students the opportunity to give a visibility to its territorial unity and to realize its continuity in time together with the possibility to identify themselves with the ancient civilisations, (their ancestors), that have inhabited this spatial and temporal entity. Thus the frontiers are traced imperceptibly through the mental and physical itineraries followed by the students in their school books and in the natural and monumental landscape. Therefore, there is no need of an explicit discourse about the national borders since they are traced in a more subtle and unconscious way.

Since the school visits cover more or less the entire Jordanian territory, they contribute to give a concrete dimension to the mental image of the state's physical existence, and to promote an affective bond between the young citizens and their homeland. These trips have two main functions: they allow the students to assimilate the national geography and they generate a homogenizing effect because of their standardized and repetitive nature.

I think now it is necessary to say something about what until now I have uncritically called the Jordanian identity. What is it? Is there something we can call Jordanian identity? Though, as all forms of identities, it is of course a contextual and changing one, I think we can speak of an official Jordanian identity which has been of course re-appropriated and adapted by the citizens according to their origins, their actual status and their group's and personal feelings. The process of fabrication of the Jordanian national identity has started already during the British Mandate as several scholars have showed when some of the cultural and social characteristics today considered as specifically Jordanian were created or at least emphasized for the first time. This process has going through several difficulties and has been subject to a number of adjustments during the Jordanian history in relation with the end of the colonial era, and the demographic and geographic changes that followed the foundation of Israel. The most important of these changes has been first the annexation of the West Bank in 1950 and later, in 1967, its occupation by the Israelis. The development of an armed Palestinian movement at the end of the 1960s, the civil war which culminated in Black September in 1971, and the social and political fractures these events generated in the Jordanian society are crucial, if we want to understand the process of nation building in the Hashemite Kingdom.

In short, it is possible to say that the Jordanian national identity is the product of a long process orchestrated by the Hashemite monarchy in order to legitimize its power in the Kingdom and to fabricate a sort of common cultural basis on which to erect the independent state. The creation of the national identity was not only due to the internal necessity of justifying the power of the ruling dynasty and cementing the Kingdom's population, but also in order to face the political challenge constituted by the existence of Israel and of the Palestinian national movement. Several components of the Jordanian identity are thus to be considered in relation with these two nationalisms that are of course antagonistic towards each other, and also towards the Jordanian one. For example, the Jordanian identity is presented as mainly tribal, nomadic and Bedouin, though the actual population is far from corresponding to these stereotypes. But we understand better this cultural *topos* if we think that the Palestinian national movement has depicted the Palestinians as a people of peasants deeply rooted in their land. On the other side, until recently, Israelis have tried to de-legitimize the existence of the Jordanian nation state affirming that it has no history and no identity: either its territory is seen as a part of the Promised land which should be annexed to Israel, or it is conceived of as a Palestinian state, an argument which is aimed at de-legitimizing the Palestinian claims of an independent state.

An interesting feature of the Jordanian identity or better pan-Jordanian identity, as some have called it in order to stress its fabricated nature, is that it has turned a negative characteristic such as the

tribal or even Bedouin character of its population into a positive one. Indeed even if the ideal type of the Arabs of the origins depicts them as Bedouin nomads with a tribal organization, these characteristics are traditionally considered as negative in the vision of the political centre. In fact, nomadism, and even tribalism were seen as negative social traits at the time of the Ottoman empire as well as by the public opinion of many (not all of course) Arab countries, since it is considered as a synonymous of backwardness. In Jordan, the official narrative stresses the tribal and Bedouin origin of the population which is clearly seen as positive and associated with the moral qualities of the citizens: hospitality, generosity, openness, courage, loyalty, etc. Thus, in the official touristic brochures, in public discourses, in television programmes, in tourist guides, and post-cards the Jordanians are symbolized for example by the soldiers of the Desert Patrol, the Bedouin component of the Jordanian army, or by the Bedouin women with their coloured dresses. And indeed many material objects related to the nomadic world and in part to the peasant one have become today symbols of the Jordanian identity: brass coffeepot, wooden coffee-grinder, camel saddles, Bedouin rugs, etc.

If cultural heritage is made also from this relatively modern objects representing what in Jordan is called “popular culture” (*turath sha’bi*), cultural heritage is made mostly by ancient objects and sites reminding to a much more distant past. This past, as I have showed before, plays a very important role in a post-colonial State looking for an internal as well as an external legitimacy which can be created by the very process of fabrication of a common past. Now the projection of the modern nation state into the ancient past allows creating the historical legitimacy of which a newly founded political entity with a quite different population is in need. It is important to prove the antiquity of the roots of the modern Kingdom as well as its continuity in time in order to face the political challenges represented by the internal fractures as well as by the external challenges such as Palestinian nationalism and the Israeli state. The past and particularly distant past offers the possibility to integrate all components of the population creating for each one a sort of special room in this imaginary museum I have mentioned before to which they can refer. I can make an example: although Jordan is an officially Islamic state, its pre-Islamic past is strongly emphasized and constitute of source of pride for the population. For instance, the Jordanian authorities encourage the study of the Roman and Byzantine past and have privileged the careful restoration of the important archaeological sites of this period that play a fundamental role on the tourist trails as well as in the school visits. For Christian Jordanians, this past is easier to appropriate since it represents the time before the Islamic conquest when “Jordan” was still Christian. To understand the complexity of the historical imaginations that a single period can generate, we have to remember that the same period and especially the beginning of the Islamic presence in the region constitutes as

well a good example of the “tolerance” and the “openness” of the Jordanian people since archaeology demonstrates that churches and mosques coexisted during more than a century. Implicitly, this means that the Arab conquest did not brought about the destruction of the Christian churches and therefore that the local Christians were allowed to kept their faith and practice their cult. This is a stereotype which often appears in official discourses and is used to confirm or to remind the audience to the fact that Jordan was always an open country at the crossroad of different worlds. Hence, the today’s mixed nature of the Jordanian people and of their culture as well as their capacity to integrate the foreign elements into their society is the product of history. Thus, the same period serves to justify different visions of the past that are all connected to the present and not necessary contradictory. Of course there are contradictions and it is especially the recent past which is more sensitive and more dangerous to represent. To find a consensual past is almost impossible if we come to the XX century and the events that took place in the region.

This is why, we can say that when we take into consideration modern history, the Jordanian identity is principally a Hashemite identity. There are two main reasons: the first one is of course that the Jordanian national identity is fabricated by the monarchy; the second one is that the dynasty is the pivotal element of all historical narration of the modern time, i.e. from the First World War until present time. The Hashemite family is the centre of all museographic or historiographic narration. The basic idea is that if Jordan exists it is because the Hashemites have founded it, constructed the modern nation state, and contributed to its social and economic development. Therefore, if we adhere to this version of the national identity, to be Jordanian means to be loyal to the Hashemites. And it is surely not a hazard if one of the conditions to acquire the Jordanian nationality when the Emirate was established was to swear allegiance to the Hashemite dynasty. I think I will stop here since we have no time to develop this topic further

As a conclusion, I would like shortly to go back to the points identified by Maurice Bloch about the Zafimaniry of Madagascar. Even if the scale of the two societies as well as their complexity is quite different, the elements identified by Bloch are crucial if we want to understand the processes that contribute to the construction of social memory in Jordan: on the one hand, the landscape and the material objects are inescapable embodiments or at least references that in some way allow to crystallize souvenirs and make them shared social representations in Durkheim’s terms. This is what I have tried to show about the function of archaeological sites, museums and objects in Jordan. On the other hand, the members of a society construct their memories through the process of appropriation of an authoritative memory which in several ways becomes social and shared. In the case of the Zafimaniry it was the memory of the elders, whilst in Jordan, since it is a literate society

the school machine plays a fundamental role which has to be analysed if we want to understand the characteristics of the contemporary Jordanian society. Yet, the oral aspect is also clearly present, though we did not analyse it here, and determines the existence of different memories among the population, despite the unified message the state transmits to its citizens. In this speech, I have briefly tackled the issue of school visits but text books are also crucial if we want to understand the content of the transmitted memory/history. Last but not least, I have perhaps to remind you that Jordan has obtained an outstanding success in the field of schooling, as internationally acknowledged by UNESCO, since 99% of the children (boys and girls) attend compulsory school and two third of them continue to secondary school. In other words, the schools are a powerful tool in the hand of the monarchy in order to produce and to hand over an official version of the national past which plays an undisputed function in the construction of what we might call the Jordanian citizen, since memory and identity, social and political, are inextricably intertwined.