The AesthEt(h)ics of the Fragment
Jewish Memories and Co-Creative Mapping Practices

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Abstract: *This chapter discusses the use of the fragment as ethical and aesthetic practice in working with difficult memories. The idea of an »AesthEt(h)ics of the fragment« is elaborated, drawing inspiration from two artistic practices: an exhibition dedicated to the 1938 census of the Jews in Milan, Italy, and a short documentary film of objects that survived their owners who drowned in the Mediterranean. Framed by Rothberg's conceptualization of memory as »multidirectional« and in recent shifts in map studies, the chapter illustrates some examples of creative maps produced in the context of research-creation practices. These creative maps chart the stories of the interviewees' as well as the position of the researcher in relation to them. The chapter is complemented by two visual essays that allow the reader to experience an »immersive form of knowing« and to grasp both the magnitude of the (tragic) events and the unique fragments that constitute them.*

Keywords: *Memories; Migrations; Fragment; Aesthetics; Ethics; Research-creation; Creative Mapping*

Introduction[1]

What is a map? What are its essential elements? What are the purposes of a map? Over the last few years, I have discussed these questions on several occasions, with students and colleagues alike. The question of maps and mapping in Jewish Studies has in fact become a crucial aspect of my own exploration of issues of memory and migration from an anthropological perspective.[2] The answers I collected point precisely to the variety of ›things‹ that can be called ›a map‹: a tool for documentation

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2   Piera Rossetto, Dwelling in Contradictions: Deep Maps and the Memories of Jews from Libya, in: Ethnologies 39 (2017) 2, 167–187; Piera Rossetto/Martina Melilli, Mapping Memo-

and presentation; a visual text and a tool for orientation; a drawing, a representation of space and land; a puzzle and an instrument of domination; an artefact that needs a clear index and legend and good graphic design. Maps can lead to treasures but also hinder new discoveries, suggested one of my students; maps show where you have been and where you can potentially go, remarked another. In their intuitive form, these definitions embrace the many turns and directions in which map studies have developed in recent decades, especially under the influence of critical cartographies since the 1980s and 1990s[3] and the new cultural perspectives elaborated in so-called cultural cartography.[4] For the purposes of this contribution, I would like to recall the ›post-representational turn‹ in cartography,[5] which conceives of maps essentially in terms of process: »For post-representational map-thinkers, maps are always mapping practices that unfold, emerge, and happen; thus, they are thought of and experienced as processes.«[6] Moreover, as migrations and memories of them are the subject of these pages, I would also like to mention the most recent theorizations of maps in the subfield of mobilities and the humanities.[7] Consider, for instance, how cultural geographer Tania Rossetto, by thinking about the movement of maps in terms of process, elusiveness, and reimagination, expands current conceptualizations of maps as navigational devices and unveils the potentialities of adopting mobility as a dense and elastic concept.[8] Finally, it is important to note the growing field of narrative cartography, which shows the vibrant and prolific relationship between maps, narratives, and metanarratives.[9]

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ries, Charting Empathy. Framing a Collaborative Research-Creation Project, in: From the European South 8 (2021), 145–151.

3   John Harley, Deconstructing the Map, in: Cartographica 26 (1989), 1–20; Denis Wood, The Power of Maps, New York, Guilford Press 1992; Chris Perkins, Cartography – Cultures of Mapping: Power in Practice, in: Progress in Human Geography 28 (2004), 381–91; Jeremy W. Crampton, Maps as Social Constructions: Power, Communication and Visualization, in: Progress in Human Geography 25 (2001), 235–52; Jeremy Crampton/John Krygier, An Introduction to Critical Cartography, in: ACME An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies 4 (2006) 1, 11–33.

4   Denis Cosgrove, Cultural Cartography: Maps and Mapping in Cultural Geography/Les Cartes et La Cartographie En Géographie Culturelle, in : Annales de Géographie 117 (2008) 660/661, 159–178.

5   Rob Kitchin/Martin Dodge, Rethinking Maps, in: Progress in Human Geography 31 (2007) 3, 331–344.

6   Tania Rossetto, Not Just Navigation: Thinking About the Movements of Maps in the Mobility and Humanities Field, in: The Cartographic Journal 58 (2021)2, 183–195, 185.

7   Peter Merriman/Lynne Pearce, Mobilities and the Humanities, in: Mobilities 12 (2017) 4, 493–508.

8   Rossetto, Not Just Navigation: Thinking About the Movements of Maps in the Mobility and Humanities Field.

9   Sébastien Caquard/William Cartwright, Narrative Cartography: From Mapping Stories to the Narrative of Maps and Mapping, in: The Cartographic Journal 51 (2014) 2, 101–106; Sébastien

This incomplete list of conceptual and methodological turns in map studies highlights how the task of pinpointing what a map is (and the same could be said for the concept of memory, both collective and individual) can be quite an arduous one. Indeed, such multifarious terms require us to make explicit how we use them in relation to specific research aims. This contribution, which stands somewhat apart from and yet in dialogue with the others in this collection, conceives of maps and mapping essentially as cultural products and practices that generate an »immersive form of knowledge«. With this term I refer to a co-creative, multidisciplinary environment which allows for »retuning our ears to the world«, or—in Wright Mills' words— trying to translate the »›personal troubles‹ of biography into ›public issues‹ of history and society«.[10] Better than any a priori definition, the combination of this chapter and the two visual essays that follow should provide a concrete idea of what I consider to be an immersive form of knowledge and why it might also be relevant for the specific topic of Holocaust education and digital practices[11] in the bourgeoning subfield of Holocaust geographies.[12]

Taken together, the chapter and the two visual essays bring the three authors—an archivist, a visual artist, and a Jewish Studies scholar—into conversation. The conversation aims to reflect on why to turn to maps and mapping when dealing with »difficult pasts«,[13] with recollections as well as silences of painful events on different scales, including those related to the Holocaust.

The conversation features a multiplicity of voices and methodologies around the issue of working with difficult memories. It combines texts and images, as well as theory and ethnographic practice. The visual essays[14] present two artistic practices,

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Caquard, Cartography I: Mapping Narrative Cartography, in: Progress in Human Geography 37 (2011) 1, 35–144; Robert E. Roth, Cartographic Design as Visual Storytelling: Synthesis and Review of Map-Based Narratives, Genres, and Tropes, in: The Cartographic Journal 58 (2021) 1, 83–114.

10   Les Back, The Art of Listening, London, Bloomsbury 2007, 7, 10.

11   Laura Brazzo/Reto Speck, Introduction, in: Laura Brazzo/Reto Speck (eds), Holocaust Research and Archives in the Digital Age (Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC, n. 13, August 2018), V–XIII.

12   Anne Kelly Knowles/Tim Cole/Alberto Giordano (eds), Geographies of the Holocaust, Bloomington, Indiana University Press 2014.

13   Robin Wagner-Pacifici/Barry Schwartz, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past, in: AJS 97 (1991) 2, 376–420; Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, Commemorating a Difficult Past: Yitzhak Rabin's Memorials, in: American Sociological Review 67 (2002), 30–51; Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi/Chana Teeger, Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting, in: Social Forces 88 (2010) 3, 1103–1122.

14   Luc Pauwels, Conceptualising the ›Visual Essay‹ as a Way of Generating and Imparting Sociological Insight: Issues, Formats and Realisations, in: Sociological Research Online 17 (2012) 1; Roes Remco/Kris Pint, The Visual Essay and the Place of Artistic Research in the Humanities, in: Palgrave Communication 3 (2017).

the installation *...Ma poi cos'è un nome?* and the documentary *MUM, I'M SORRY*. Each deals with distinct and yet similar forms of difficult memories: notably the first act of antisemitic legislation in Italy in 1938 and the tragic deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean. What the two practices have in common, however, is the search for ways to address the difficulties inherent in the process of collecting, preserving, and disseminating such memories. Inspired by these artistic practices, the chapter discusses the use of the fragment as an ethical and aesthetical practice to produce an »AesthEt(h)ics of the fragment«, understood as a form of immersive knowledge and of deep mapping in the context of difficult memories.

From a theoretical point of view, the conversation takes place in the framework of Rothberg's conceptualization of memory as »multidirectional,« that is »as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative«.[15] In *Multidirectional Memory,* Rothberg took Holocaust remembrance as a »paradigmatic object of concern [...] to demonstrate the stakes of the past in the present«, and to show how the Holocaust »has enabled the articulation of other histories of victimization«.[16] In this vein, the conversation will present the difficult memories of the Fascist persecution of the Jews in Italy (considered in Brazzo's contribution) to explore the extent to which the challenges facing Holocaust remembrance and education in our time mirror the concerns of those dealing with other contemporary tragedies (as exemplified in Melilli's visual essay). Both address the challenge of how to hold together the scale of the phenomenon and the uniqueness of each victim, a challenge very much present in Holocaust Studies.[17]

Mapping memories: the fragment and the whole

When I started approaching maps and mapping in relation to the memories of and about Jewish migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, what I lacked was not enthusiasm for maps, but perhaps clarity, a concrete idea of »what makes a map a map«[18] in my research context. My research focuses on Jewish migrations from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) in the twentieth century from the perspective of anthropology of memory. It is a complex historical phenomenon that, over the course of a few decades, almost ended the Jewish presence in these

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15   Michael Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of De-colonization, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, 3.

16   Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decoloniza-tion, 6.

17   Susan Rubin Suleiman, Paradigms and Differences, in: Aomar Boum/Sarah Abrevaya Stein (eds.), Holocaust and North Africa, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2019, 214–219.

18   Denis Wood, What Makes a Map a Map?, in: Cartographica 30 (1993) 2&3, 81–86.

regions.[19] In an effort to grasp the collective meaning of these migrations, as if they were a single, homogeneous phenomenon, a kind of ›whole‹, scholars have adopted terms such as exile, expulsion, uprooting, or accomplishment of a political or religious ideal, although such grand narratives, as Jewish Studies scholar Dario Miccoli points out, are increasingly contested.[20] In fact, recent historiography demonstrates that this phenomenon, or rather cluster of migratory phenomena, defies any clear-cut categorization and can only benefit from an interdisciplinary perspective of analysis.[21]

By studying a collection of about 100 interviews with Jews from Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran who settled in Milan between the 1940s and the 1980s,[22] I was able to identify some of the major historical turning points that triggered migrations (such as the changes in Egyptian and Libyan politics that led to the de facto expulsion of Jews from Egypt and their forced departure from Libya in 1967). However, between the lines of the individual stories, I also discovered complexity, heterogeneity, and contradictions embedded in the memories and performances of memory of this cluster of migratory phenomena, which is precisely the knowledge I am trying to gain. Is there a way to reconcile the fragment and the whole? And is there a way to communicate this knowledge to a wider public, in forms other than the usual academic ones?

Two experiences deeply influenced my understanding of the two terms—the fragment and the whole—that do not go hand in hand. The first was a physical experience I had in Milan, Italy, walking under and through an imposing structure full of names, the installation *...Ma poi cos'è un nome?* featuring the names and personal data (data portraits) of thousands of Jews surveyed in Milan in 1938 (see Brazzo's visual essay following this chapter). The installation consisted of a monumental steal structure covered with a panel of data portraits. The digitization of the census transformed the names (and all the biographical information that goes with them)

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19   Frédéric Abécassis/Jean-François Faü, Le monde musulman: effacement des communautés juives et nouvelles diasporas depuis 1945, in Antoine German/Benjamin Lellouch/Evelyne Patlagean (eds.), Les Juifs dans l'histoire, Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 2011, 815–840.

20   Dario Miccoli, The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa: a Historiographic Debate, in: Middle Eastern Studies, 56 (2020) 3, 511–520.

21   Natan Katz/Lisa Moses Leff/Maud S. Mandel (eds.), Colonialism and the Jews, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2017; Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, Turning Points in the Historiography of Jewish Immigration from Arab Countries to Israel, in Israel Studies 23 (2018) 3, 114–122; Aviad Moreno, Beyond the Nation-State: A Network Analysis of Jewish Emigration from Northern Morocco to Israel, in: International Journal of Middle East Studies 52 (2020) 1, 1–21; Piera Rossetto, ›We Were All Italian!‹: The Construction of a ›Sense of Italianness‹ among Jews from Libya (1920s–1960s), in: History and Anthropology, DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2020.1 848821.

22   Piera Rossetto, Mind the Map: Charting Unexplored Territories of In-Visible Migrations, in: Journal of Jewish Culture and History 23 (2022) 2, 172–195.

into data and made them available to the public and to researchers in a process of data democratization that Brazzo defines as an ethical practice. Indeed, as I found myself immersed in and almost overwhelmed by the enormous structure that bends over the visitors I felt as if I could grasp the vast scale of the phenomenon, the whole, in a sense.

However, these names were at risk of remaining invisible, overshadowed by the magnitude of the racial census. How to translate this amount of data—a particular difficulty of digital documentation—into a visual narrative capable of restoring the uniqueness of each story and fate? Through the aesthetic practice—data portraits and the installation—visitors could physically, emotionally, and rationally immerse themselves in a wall full of names/data portraits, that is to say individuals, each of them with their own personal story. In fact, by approaching a specific data portrait with the legend in hand, I could reconnect with the individual human being: was it a man or a woman, young or old, did they survive or not etc., almost sketching the contours of the visage that belonged to that name. In this way, visitors could measure the scale of the discriminatory act and get closer to the fragment of each individual life. In this sense, the installation managed to hold together the scale of the phenomenon and the uniqueness of each victim, echoing the words of Susan Rubin Suleiman: »The Holocaust victimised not nameless masses but individuals, each with his or her unique history within a collective.«[23]

The second experience that helped me to immerse myself in the experience of the fragment and the whole was a digital one: the documentary MUM, I'M SORRY, directed by Martina Melilli, which the artist herself discusses later in this contribution. Again, I found myself virtually immersed and emotionally overwhelmed by the fragments left behind, the objects that survived their owners who drowned in the Mediterranean. In the documentary, Melilli films the work of forensic scientist and anthropologist Cristina Cattaneo, who tries to find the name that belongs to certain a face. Once again, we are confronted with »individuals, each with his or her unique history within a collective«.[24] In the documentary, Melilli shows her use and understanding of the fragment as aesthetic and ethical practice to deal with difficult stories of forced migrations across the Mediterranean. The individual stories of contemporary migrants—»those who did not cross the sea«[25]—vanish, swallowed by the water. Along with their bodies, their names disappear, and with their names, the uniqueness of their life stories. How can the memory of this tragedy be rescued from the oblivion created, among other things, by the scale of this phenomenon and its

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23   Susan Rubin Suleiman, Paradigms and Differences, in Aomar Boum/Sarah Abrevaya Stein (eds.), Holocaust and North Africa, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2019, 214–219, 216.

24   Rubin Suleiman, Paradigms and Differences, 216.

25   »Those who did not cross« by Levi Westerfeld, https://visionscarto.net/those-who-did-not-cross

media exposure? In MUM, I'M SORRY, Melilli dives with her camera into the objects that survived their former owners, the objects that were recovered with the corpses: photographic portraits, a watch, a mobile phone. The viewers find themselves immersed in the single object/fragment, navigating these deadly remnants, trying to connect with the people who once owned them.

Both practices feature what I call the »AesthEt(h)ics of the fragment«. By ethics I mean, anthropologically, the researcher's responsibility »to acknowledge and communicate the emotional engagement of ethnography«,[26] and by aesthetics I refer, in cartographic practice, to an experience related to »our ability to develop a certain kind of knowledge through our feelings« and »to our senses«[27]: the senses expressed by the testimonies, my own senses as mobilized by the testimonies, and the senses of the audience.

It seemed to me that the idea or metaphor of »deep mapping«—as »an experience that begins when you step off the ›bus‹ and begin to explore data more deeply«[28]—was particularly suited to the kind of challenging knowledge I wanted to capture: holding onto the whole journey and its individual and unpredictable twists and turns. But how to translate this metaphor into a concrete map or a concrete mapping practice?

Thinking spatially, thinking visually

Cartographer Sébastien Caquard and his colleagues have noted that »memories do not land well on maps«,[29] at least not on maps based exclusively on the Cartesian plan. Efforts in this direction have also been made by Geographic Information Systems (GIS) researchers. They have applied GIS to represent narratives visually[30] and

26   Katherine Carroll, Representing Ethnographic data Through the Epistolary Form: A Correspondence Between a Breastmilk Donor and Recipient, in: Qualitative Inquiry 21 (2015) 8, 686–695, 693.

27   Daniel Ribeiro/Sébastien Caquard, Cartography and Art, in: John P. Wilson (ed.), The Geographic Information Science & Technology Body of Knowledge, 2018 DOI: 10.22224/gistbok/2018.1.4

28   Mia Ridge/Don Lafreniere/Scott Nesbit, Creating Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives through Design, in International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing 7 (2013) 1–2, 176–189, 185.

29   Sébastien Caquard/Emory Shaw/José Alavez/Stefanie Dimitrovas, Mapping Memories of Exiles: Combining Conventional and Alternative Cartographic Approaches, in: Sarah De Nardi/Hilary Orange/Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto/Danielle Drozdzewski/Steven High (eds.), Memoryscape Handbook, Routledge, 2019, 52–66.

30   Mei Po Kwan, From Oral Histories to Visual Narratives: Re-Presenting the Post-September 11 Experiences of the Muslim Women in the USA, in: Social and Cultural Geography 9 (2008) 6, 653–669.

discussed its practices and methods in feminist research.[31] The main criticism of the use of GIS in the humanities is its limitation in representing the human experience of places and the emotions associated with them. A humanistic alternative to GIS has recently been developed in the field of Holocaust Studies, introducing »inductive visualization« to explore the »embeddedness of social process and relations in space«.[32]

Scholars have proposed non-conventional forms of mapping, such as the »sensibility map«,[33] and have worked with artists to develop personal maps of experience and memory.[34] These attempts are part of the many creative and non-conventional ways of supporting »the descriptive function in human discourse linking territory to what comes with it«,[35] which is another possible definition of the map. In my field of research, »what comes with the territory« includes personal and collective experiences of displacement and attachment; longing and belonging; the meaning people make of their migratory trajectories, if not of their entire lives.

Inspired by creative and sensitive approaches to mapping in the context of life story representations, I invited a range of experts to work together to explore how the form of the map—whether creative, deep, or thick[36]—fits with the knowl-

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31   Mei Po Kwan, Feminist Visualization: Re-Envisioning GIS as a Method in Feminist Geographic Research, in: Annals of the Association of American Geographers 92 (2002) 4, 645–661; Marianna Pavlovskaya/Kevin St. Martin, Feminism and Geographic Information Systems: From a Missing Object to a Mapping Subject, in: Geography Compass 1 (2007) 3, 583–606.

32   Anne Kelly Knowles/Levi Westerfeld/Laura Strom, Inductive Visualization: A Humanistic Alternative to GIS, in: GeoHumanities 1 (2015) 2, 233–265; Levi Westerveld/Anne Kelly Knowles, Loosening the Grid: Topology as the Basis for a More Inclusive GIS, in: International Journal of Geographical Information Science 35 (2020) 10, 2108–2127.

33   Elise Olmedo, Cartographie sensible, émotions et imaginaire, in : Visions cartographiques – les blogs du Diplo, 2011, https://blog.mondediplo.net/2011-09-19-Cartographie-sensible-emotions-et-imaginaire ; Elise Olmedo, Cartographie sensible. Tracer une géographie du vécu par la recherche-création, Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 1, Paris, 2015 ; Elise Olmedo/Sébastien Caquard, Mapping the Skin and the Guts of Stories – A Dialogue between Geolocated and Dislocated Cartographies, in: Cartographica 57 (2022) 2, 127–146.

34   Sarah Mekdjian/AnneLaure Amilhat/Szary/Marie Moreau/Gladeema Nasruddin/Mabeye Deme/Lauriane Houbey/Coralie Guillemin, Figurer les entre-deux migratoires. Pratiques cartographiques expérimentales entre chercheurs, artistes et voyageur, in: Carnet de géographe 7 (2014), 1–19; Stefania Benini, Tra Mogadiscio e Roma: Le mappe emotive di Igiaba Scego, in: Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies 48 (2014) 3, 477–494.

35   Denis Wood, What Makes a Map a Map?, in: Cartographica 30 (1993) 2&3, 81–86.

36   »On its most basic level, ›thick mapping‹ refers to the process of collecting, aggregating, and visualizing ever more layers of geographic or place-specific data. Thick maps are sometimes called ›deep maps‹ because they embody temporal and historical dynamics thorough a multiplicity of layered narratives, sources, and even representational practices. […] thick maps are conjoined with stories, and stories are conjoined with maps, such that ever more complex contexts for meaning are created. As such, thick maps are never finished and meanings are

edge—whether complex, diverse, or contradictory—embedded in the memories of and about North African and Middle Eastern Jews. Until recently, no research had attempted to »think spatially« or »think visually«[37] in order to capture the complexity of the memories and identities of Jews from these regions who underwent this migratory experience.

The result is a series of different creative maps, cultural products inspired by the process of mapping, focusing on the spatial dimension of personal and shared memories. This perspective allows to grasp, beyond the mere movement of migrants through space, the deep existential implications of leaving, encountering, and inhabiting places for individuals and groups.[38] The creative maps produced involve different human senses: from seeing, to hearing, to touching. In this chapter, I will briefly discuss some of them.

The first one, the *Storyboard of Rachele Abravanel*, was created by the visual artist Martina Melilli on a physical support (100 x 70 cm). It shows Melilli's exploration, through images and texts, of the life story of Rachele Abravanel, a Libyan Jewish lady, and in this sense it represents a form of mapping, an attempt to navigate Abravanel's life trajectory.

Born in Tripoli in 1922, Abravanel was forced to leave her native country with her family in 1967 and settled in Milan, Italy. Rachele was one of the about 6,000 Jews who remained in Libya after the mass exodus of most of the country's Jewish population between 1948 and 1952. In fact, Rachele stayed until the situation became unbearable in the summer of 1967. Rachele's story is not particularly exceptional. Indeed, in many respects it is an »ordinary story«.[39] However, beneath the memories of an ordinary life spent in the family she was born into and the family she started as a young woman, lie the roots and paths of an intense and long life. Through the prism of her life, we are invited to observe, from a micro perspective, the impact of many global events on individual fates: the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the migration of many Sephardi Jews from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean towards the western Mediterranean after the end of WWI; the Italian colonization

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never definitive. [.] Thick maps are not simply ›more data‹ on maps, but interrogations of the very possibility of data, mapping, and cartographic representational practices«, Todd Presner/David Shepard/Yoh Kawano (eds.), HyperCities. Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London 2014: 17, 19.

37   Martyn Jessop, The Inhibition of Geographical Information in Digital Humanities Scholarship, in: Literary and Linguistic Computing 23 (2008) 1, 39–50, 44; Johanna Drucker, Graphesis. Visual Forms of Knowledge Production, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London 2014.

38   The outputs are accessible as digital products on the platform dedicated to the research project (https://www.pierarossetto.eu/eijm-creative-mapping/).

39   Florence Haegel/Marie-Claire Lavabre, Destins ordinaires. Identité singulière et mémoire partagée, SciencePo. Les Presses, Paris 2014.

of Libya; the Second World War and anti-Jewish legislation; the establishment of the State of Israel and the subsequent mass migration of Libyan Jews; the proclamation of the independent Kingdom of Libya, and the economic boom brought about by the discovery and exploitation of oil in Libya, to mention but a few.

While the *storyboard* is configured as a form of visualization that embraces Rachele's life with as much content as possible, giving as much space as possible to her memories, the second creative map, *Mindili (my handkerchief)*, is radically different, with only a few visual elements.[40] However, it is precisely the scarcity of elements that points to Melilli's aim: to create her vision »of Rachele's map, her hypothetical treasure map depicting the most precious things in her memories. A map I imagine she would have kept in a handkerchief, one she always kept in her pocket or tied around her neck or hair. Both for protection and to ensure she could always find the right road.«[41] Specifically, *Mindili* is a map embroidered on a handkerchief that originally belonged to Rachele Abravanel. The light blue surface of the handkerchief, which symbolically evokes the Mediterranean Sea, contains the most relevant spaces in Abravanel's narrative and significant dates associated with them: Tripoli, the city where she was born in 1922; Darnah, a port city in eastern Libya, where she moved with her husband soon after their wedding in 1948; Milan, where she settled after fleeing Tripoli in the summer of 1967 and where she remained for the rest of her life. It was at her place in Milan that Abravanel was interviewed in 2012 in the context of an oral history project.[42] Several objects are also embroidered on the handkerchief, linked to specific memories of Abravanel. On the map in the vicinity of Tripoli, the viewer sees a bomb that Abravanel used to keep on the top of her wardrobe as a means of self-defence, as the political situation in the country became particularly unstable towards the end of the 1940s. Near Darnah, which was, in Abravanel's words, »paradise«, Melilli chose trees that represented the natural beauty of the valleys and hills that Abravanel could still describe in great detail and with a generous smile on her face, as I could notice watching the video interview. Near Darnah, the viewer also sees a rose which, as Abravanel recalls, she used to receive almost daily from an elderly Arab gardener. The last embroidered object, close to Milan, is a cup of coffee. As we watched the video interview, both Melilli and I were struck by the final frames. Abravanel tries unsuccessfully for the umpteenth time to offer the interviewers a cup of coffee. Each time they refused. When we discussed this detail with her daughter, she confirmed that hospitality had always been a vital part of her mother's way of life: her house was always open to anyone who arrived and food was always ready. In her nineties at the time of the interview

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40   Rossetto/Melilli, Mapping Memories, Charting Empathy.

41   Rossetto/Melilli, Mapping Memories, Charting Empathy.

42   *Edoth Oral History Project* by the CDEC Foundation, https://www.cdec.it/ricerca-storica-e-pro getti/aree-di-ricerca/edoth-ebrei-del-mediterraneo-e-del-medio-oriente/

and quite frail, she could only offer a cup of coffee. We could empathize with the project staff and imagine the pressure and need to fit appointments and interviews into a compressed schedule. However, we both felt uncomfortable, imagining how Abravanel might have felt frustrated in her desire to be hospitable. This incident made me think about the way I enter the homes of interviewees, and, symbolically, how I approach their stories. This »sensuous map«[43] activates not only Abravanel's recollections but also my own self-reflexivity as a researcher, making me reflect on the attitudes, inclinations, and cultural repertoires I bring into the field.[44]

Rachele Abravanel's story underwent another transformation when I asked Verena Resch, a graphic designer, to transform Melilli's *Storyboard Rachele Abravanel* into a digital product. Melilli's storyboard, realized on a physical support with printed photos and post-its for comments and explanations, had a limited circulation. Resch's challenge was to transform this hand-made creation into something that could transcend physical borders. *Digital Storyboard* is Resch's interpretation of Melilli's original visualization. Accustomed to working in the life sciences, Resch's main challenge was dealing with so much text. As she told me while discussing her experience with Rachele's story, the most common recommendation she gives to her life science clients is to keep text to a minimum. When she realized that the text, the story, was at the heart of this project, she understood that this advice did not apply in this case. Resch found a technical solution to improve readability and express the eventfulness and non-linearity of Rachele's story.

Within the project's framework, the *Digital Storyboard* represents a way of engaging with the digital turn in memory research[45], as well as the exponential growth of digital projects in the context of the history of Jews from Arab and Muslim countries. A similar aim inspired the digital visualization *Mapping Roots, Charting Routes*, which addresses the entire collection of interviews mentioned above with Middle Eastern and North African Jews who settled in Milan between the 1940s and 1980s.[46] The corpus includes 48 women and 60 men. *Mapping Roots, Charting Routes* can be navigated by setting different filters: gender, home community, identity documents, year of settlement in Milan, and place and cause of departure. The general map highlights the journey from the country of origin to Milan. By clicking on individual itineraries, dashed lines display intermediate trips and individual portraits open up. In addition to the anonymized personal data of the traveller, the individual portrait includes the

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43   Tania Rossetto, The Skin of the Map: Viewing Cartography through Tactile Empathy, in: Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 37 (2019) 1, 83–103.

44   Stanley Brandes, The Things We Carry, in: Men and Masculinities 11 (2008) 2, 145–153.

45   Joanne Garde-Hansen/Andrew Hoskins/Anna Reading (eds.), Save As… Digital Memories, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2009; Danielle Drozdzewski/Carolyn Birdsall (eds.), Doing Memory Research. New Methods and Approaches, Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore 2019.

46   The visualization is the result of the collaboration with Sara Radice, visual designer and Fabio Sturaro, software developer.

country of origin of the family members, the identity documents they possessed, the languages spoken in the family, as well as professional activities and the reason for departure. More information will be added to this section as the project develops. The map is accompanied by a series of graphs and charts that present the information in an aggregated form: according to the community of origin, that is, the country of origin. For instance, the graphs show the correlation between the personal identity claimed by the interviewee and the identity documents held by their family. Through this sample of interviews, the digital visualization *Mapping Roots, Charting Routes* attempts to depict the overall complexity of the phenomenon of migration while paying attention to the peculiarity of each journey. It is an attempt to capture the ›whole‹ and the ›fragment‹ in an effort to get closer to the meaning that people make—and made—of their journey as individuals, but also as part of a larger collective. In a way, this is what digital humanities is about: keeping the human experience at the centre while experimenting with computer assisted technologies to elaborate, visualize, and connect the data of and about that very human experience.

Conclusion

»Certainly«, as Dario Miccoli observes about contemporary Jewish migrations from the North Africa and the Middle East, »if one were to search for the exact year, day, or event that caused the end of this world and therefore the departure of the Jews from North Africa and Egypt, one would not find it«.[47] Indeed, these migration stories »took place in cities as distant as Tangiers and Alexandria, in different years—around 1948, in 1952, 1956, or even 1967—and were the result of a series of events that determined the departure and migration of these Jewish diasporas, as well as the beginning of a new kind of postcolonial existence«.[48]

According to spatial and digital humanities scholars, mapping »offers a different way to achieve the goal of capturing complexity«.[49] Following this understanding of maps and mapping, I tried to get closer to the meaning that people make of their migration trajectories and life stories (as expressed in interviews and testimonies)

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47   Dario Miccoli, A Sephardi Sea, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2022, 2.

48   Miccoli, A Sephardi Sea, 2.

49   David J. Bodenhamer/John Corrigan/Trevor M. Harris (eds.), The Spatial Humanities. GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2010; David J. Bodenhamer, Narrating Space and Place, in: David J. Bodenhamer/John Corrigan/Trevor M. Harris (eds.), Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2015; Todd Presner/David Shepard/Yoh Kawano (eds.), HyperCities. Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London 2014.

through non-conventional forms of mapping[50] in a context of »research-creation«: »an approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creative process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media [art forms].«[51]

Given their ability to bring visitors and viewers closer to both the fragment and the whole (to »immerse« them in), I interpret the creative maps realized in the project as a form of immersive knowledge. In the digital age, immersive is most often related to the experiential nature of virtual reality technology, which has also been invested in Holocaust remembrance and education. However, I propose to understand immersive knowledge as a co-creative, multidisciplinary environment, a way of »retuning our ears to the world«, trying to translate—in Wright Mills' words—»the ›personal troubles‹ of biography into ›public issues‹ of history and society«.[52] In this sense, mapping as a process is a powerful tool for training in the words of sociologist Les Back, our »Art of Listening (…) an imaginative attention [that] takes notice of what might be at stake in the story itself and how its small details and events connect to larger sets of public issues«.[53]

Each of the people involved in the research-creation project listened to the recollections and testimonies with a specific cultural ›repertoire‹ in mind and from a certain position, more or less familiar with the life histories of the interviewees, or more or less distant from them. As anthropologist Michel Trouillot affirms: »The past is only past because there is a present, just as I can point to something *over there* only because I am *here*. But nothing is inherently over there or here. […] The past – or more accurately, pastness – is a position.«[54]

In this sense, the creative maps briefly discussed here map the interviewees' story as well as our own positions in relation to them. They map how interviewees »put things together«[55] in their narrative, but also how we, as researchers and practitioners working with these memories, draw »constellations of memories«[56] from

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50   Olmedo/Caquard Sébastien, Mapping the Skin and the Guts of Stories.

51   SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council)—Canada https://www.sshrc-crsh .gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#a22

52   Les Back, The Art of Listening, Bloomsbury, London 2007, 7, 10.

53   Back, The Art of Listening, 7.

54   Michel Ralph Trouillot, Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History, Beacon Press, Boston 2015 [1995], 15.

55   Harvey H. Goldberg, Dynamic Jewish Identities. Insights from a Comparative View, in: Harvey E. Goldberg/Steven M. Cohen/Ezra Kopelowitz (eds.), Dynamic Belonging: Contemporary Jewish Collective Identities, Berghahn Books, Oxford 2012, 1–27, 9.

56   Piera Rossetto Piera, ›We Were All Italian!‹: The Construction of a ›Sense of Italianness‹ among Jews from Libya (1920s–1960s), in: History and Anthropology, 2021.

them. As we follow the migrants' trajectories, their whole journey, we can choose to get off the bus at different points and this produces different maps. It is the combination of different scales, senses, and gazes, I would argue, that enables the process of deep mapping. In this sense, I think it is fruitful to think of »deep mapping« not in terms of »what it is« but rather »when it occurs«, as we listen to the ways in which migrants make sense of things, and as we strive to do the same. Remembering that this effort we make is »part of an embrace with and connection to the dance of life with all its heavy and cumbersome steps. It is an aspiration to hold the experience of others in your arms while recognising that what we touch is always moving, unpredictable, irreducible and mysteriously opaque.«[57]

Fig. 1: Storyboard Rachele Abravanel, by Martina Melilli. 2020, Forex® PVC 100×70 cm.

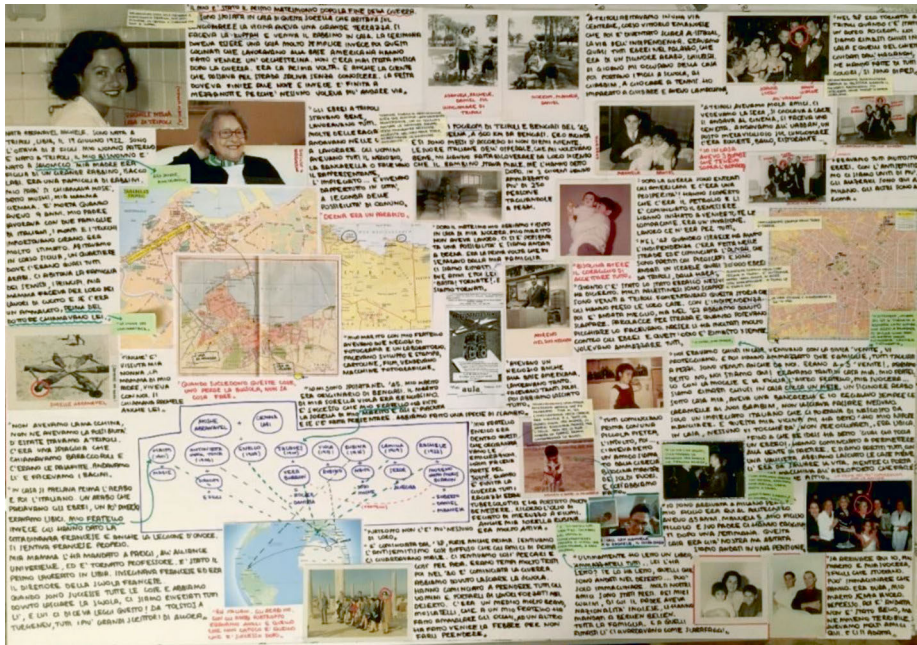57   Back, The Art of Listening, 3.

Fig. 2: Embroidered Mindili (my handkerchief), by Martina Melilli (2021).

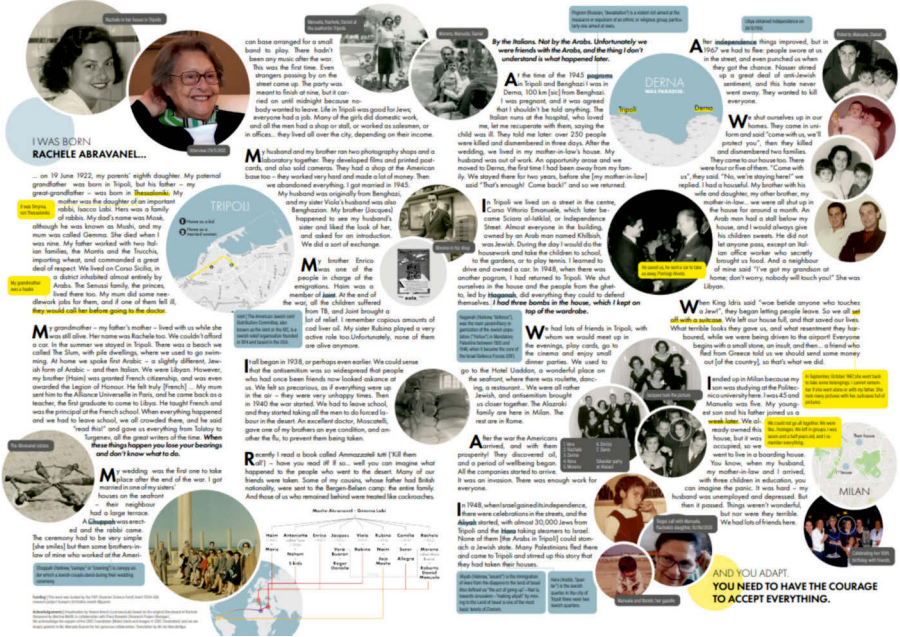*Fig. 3: Digital Storyboard, by Verena Resch (2020).*

Fig. 4: Screenshot from the digital visualisation Mapping Roots, Charting Routes by Piera Rossetto,
Sara Radice, Fabio Sturaro (2021).

Fig. 5: The charts display, for each community of origin represented, the correlation between the countries of origin of the interviewee's parents (inner circle) and grandparents (outer circle). Digital visualisation Mapping Roots, Charting Routes by Piera Rossetto, Sara Radice, Fabio Sturaro (2021).
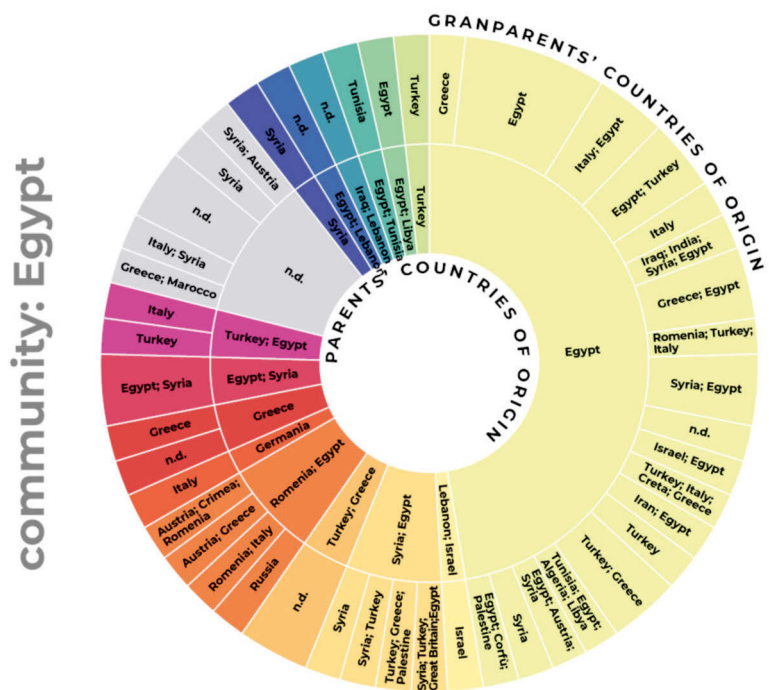
Fig. 6: For each community of origin, the charts show the correlation between the personal identity claimed by the interviewee (inner circle) with the identity documents possessed by the interviewee's family (outer circle). The outer circle Identity documents include different sorts of personal identification documents possessed by the interviewee and/or family members, such as passports, laissez-passer and personal identity card. The inner circle Identity displays the many combinations interviewees resort to in order to express their personal belonging(s). Digital visualisation Mapping Roots, Charting Routes by Piera Rossetto, Sara Radice, Fabio Sturaro (2021).