

# The European Days of Jewish Culture 2023 Inspiring EDJC Session #5

## *From Memory to Family* By Luca Baraldi

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Luca Baraldi, an expert in cross-cultural analysis and strategic intelligence, has been involved in cultural analysis in the geopolitical field for over 15 years. He has conducted research on social imaginary making, on the relationship between politics and information manipulation, on strategic communication and business intelligence, on religious radicalization and narrative theories. Since 2018 he has been working on the digital economy and the cognitive impact of artificial intelligence on society and culture. Today he is a strategic advisor for numerous research centres and companies in the field of digital humanities, artificial intelligence, information manipulation and conspiracy theories. Since 2005 he has been working on Jewish heritage, Jewish history and the history of Jewish thought; he has given dozens of conferences at international level, to promote the pivotal role of Jewish culture in the development of European and world culture and has founded and promoted numerous initiatives for policy monitoring and prevention of anti-Semitic phenomena. TedX speaker ("Critical thinking and artificial intelligence"), he deals with geopolitical analysis for the Atlantis magazine and cultural evolution for the Mangrovia magazine. He is currently writing a book on cognitive enhancement technologies, neuroethics and the evolution of knowledge.

## **From Memory to Family**

It is a great privilege to be here today. Some of you already know me, others are seeing me for the first time today. For many years I have been dealing with the relationship between cultural evolution, social analysis and the impact of technological transformations. I will not use Powerpoint presentations, but I will be happy to interact with you, and even more so to let you interact with each other, after my short speech. My reflection has the sole purpose, or sole ambition, of opening questions, of reshuffling the cards, of trying to question the meaning of concepts that we often deal with passively. If in the end I managed to make you open a new question, or make you recover a lost sensation, I will have succeeded in my aim. I will not speak explicitly about Jewish memory, but I started from the ontological and cultural assumption of a worldview that is based on the imperative to remember. I won't talk explicitly about Jewish history, but I built the entire reflection starting from Jewish conceptual systems. As always, I believe that this tradition, this story, can provide great

interpretations for the time in which we are living. As always, I believe that the responsibility of tiqqun olam is a great opportunity for the world, as a driver of existential transformation, or simply as a restoration of individual responsibility for the future to come.

Today I will repeat some concepts over and over again, because I firmly believe that it is important to try to restore the non-rational and non-intellectual meaning of certain themes. Talking about memory is not just a theme of historical reconstruction, but a theme of the meaning of history. Talking about family is not just a topic of social policy, but a topic of protection of the profound and generative sense of individual intimacy. Beyond the hyperrationalization of social analysis, in some way, to reconstruct meaning we must reclaim the emotional dimension of history.

I would like to start from the phrase by Paul Valery that I included in the abstract of this lesson. Memory is the future of the past. Although it may seem like a simple, linear phrase, it expresses the complexity of a vision of the world and of reality which, perhaps without us realizing it, always accompanies us. Let's try to analyze it, breaking it down into portions. "Memory is the future". It may seem contradictory, I know, because talking about memory, which is the shadow of the past, as a projection of the future, seems like a paradox. In reality it says something clear, implicit, which is part of our growth process and our way of acquiring an identity. The present, what we are, is the result of what happened in the past. On the one hand our past, as individuals and as a community, and on the other that of the social, environmental, economic and geopolitical context. What does it mean, however, to say that it is "the future of the past"? It means recognizing and enhancing the ontological, physiological and cultural continuity of the temporal relationship between what has been and what will be. School, school books, have accustomed us to imagining time as a line, as a sequence of events. We have gotten into the habit of imagining history as a sequential concausality, as an infinite succession of cause-effect relationships, of which we can be spectators or accomplices. But if we try to change our point of view, to move our perspective one step to the side, or if we try to take a step back, we will see that that line is nothing more than the flat projection of a complex universe. Let's try, instead, to imagine the historical perspective of time as a ray of light crossing a spectrum. On the one hand we have an incoming ray, which passes through the prism, our present, our being here and now, and which breaks down into an iris of possible colours. History is not a sequence that unfolds, but a list of possible futures that unfolds. In this chromatic richness of the chromatic prism that opens, lies the existential richness of our different possibilities of being, or not being, depending on our ability to adapt, to learn, to choose. Giovanni Pico, 15th century philosopher, one of the founders of humanism and historical philology, founder and inspirer of the Christian Kabbalah, said that "every

person will be able to become more noble than the angels, or more miserable than the beasts, based on the choices they decide to do". This decision threshold gives meaning to time and releases the value of the future. Memory - our ability to make sense of what has been, and to re-semanticise it through the present - is the future of the past.

On the one hand we must focus on the challenge of memory as a lever for building our individual identity, and on the other the slow, dilated time of a collective memory, which is a secular, historical memory of anthropological transformation, which characterizes cultural identities in their transformation process. This tension, between the urgency of an individual identity that must answer the question "who am I today?", "how do I want others to perceive me?", "how do I want to represent myself in the world?", and on the other hand the question "How do I position myself in history?". A fast, individual time, and a slow, collective time. The fast time of memory is what leads us to define ourselves in a manageable, understandable geography that can be digested in our daily experience. It is the geography of the relationships we live, of the memories and life experiences we come into contact with. Today I am someone's son, I am someone's brother, I am someone's husband or partner, I am someone's father, I am someone's colleague, I am someone's student, I am someone's teacher. In this immediacy of relationships, I define my role, my individual identity. On the other hand, especially as we grow, once we leave the adrenaline of affirmation, we begin to question ourselves about our role in history. We begin to ask ourselves what our way of inheriting the past is, and on the other hand what our way of imagining the future is. The big question arises on this dynamic identity. In which space do my individual microhistory and the cosmo-social macrohistory of the world in which I live meet?

The family is the existential intersection in which time and space shape each other, give meaning to each other, reveal themselves to each other. It is the symbolic space that mixes the past and breaks it down into the plurality of senses. It is the filter that gives meaning to time, which transforms the present from a sequence of contingent moments into a range of possible futures. When we talk about family we must try to broaden the conceptual categories and question ourselves about the way in which our individuality enters the social dimension of the world. When we talk about family we are talking about the way in which our time, the time in which we live, interfaces and breaks into the space in which we live. Family life is the action of history that shapes geography. It is the action of geography that shapes imaginaries. It is the action of imaginaries that shape aspirations. It is the action of aspirations and shapes intentions.

Let's try to retrace this sequence: history that shapes geography that shapes imaginaries that shape aspirations that shape intentions. History, and the memory that represents it, to quote Valery's words, expresses the future of the past. It is precisely here that the family takes on meaning, in the way it gives substance to the very idea of our being in the world. The family is at the same time the product of the society in which it lives, the microsocial dimension in which each of us was born and raised, and co-creator of the history to come and of the society to come.

When we talk about family we are talking about the social dimension of our individuality, and at the same time the intimate dimension of our sociality. It is within the family space that our way of living the experience of existence learns, becomes contaminated, lets itself be inspired, lets itself be guided, and slowly learns to acquire its own space of autonomy. Talking about the relationship between the family (or family sociality in the construction of individual identity) and social memory, collective memory, means trying to understand what are the registers of translation between languages that characterize the intimate daily life of each person and the tensions in relationships with the social context in which one lives.

Let's try to break down and delve deeper into the evolution of the family dimension in its way of giving shape to the memory of the future. We've seen it before. The family expresses the action of history that shapes geography. Let's try to think about it: the family history of each of us, especially in a context that has a very dynamic conception of roots such as the Jewish social context, is a family history of movements, transfers, distant loves or work choices that take you far away. . It is the story of the search for new roots, the story of the search for new opportunities, or perhaps the story of escapes from a social, economic, political context, in which the conditions for expressing one's freedom do not exist. Every family is the story of a geography. Every family is the story of shifting horizons, of changing perspectives, of changing and chasing time zones, of changing passports. Every geography is connected to a socio-cultural, anthropological, religious context, which influences our way of thinking, which contributes to creating the architectures we use to organize knowledge. In the diversity of geographies, in the diversity of places, different values take shape. Each value system finds different ways to interact with a religious and cultural system such as the Jewish one, which has very different symbolic, ritual, food and mystical traditions. Even within Jewish history itself, geographies influence languages, influence symbols, influence rituals, even in a field that should tend to be homogeneous such as that of sacred rite. And instead the stories of Jewish families, over the centuries, have spoken different languages: not only the language of the places where they went to live, but contaminated, germinated languages that emerged from the context in which they lived. Yiddish, Ladin, Italian Judeo, and 1000 other hybrid languages which in the European, Mediterranean and

international context have led to the generation of hybridizations of new words and, with these new words, new symbolic systems. The history of social movements of families has shaped the space, and within each space has created different systems of representation. Proverbs change, humor changes, poetry changes, metaphors change.

We have seen that the family is the space in which history shapes geography and in which geography shapes the imagination. Every imaginary contributes to fueling the cultural and socio-psychological system with which every society learns to relate to the world. In different cultural contexts people learn to think differently. Certainly there will be a more intimate micro-historical education, within the family context, in which each person, each individual, each of us, has learned what to consider important or what to consider less relevant, in the hierarchy of events in everyday life. . At the same time, however, each of us, despite being born into a specific family context, had to deal with the macroscopic social context with which he shared his everyday life. Two children, two brothers, coming from the same family, who go to live in two different places - let's imagine in Saudi Arabia and Canada - will certainly have different stories, not only at a professional level, at the level of social relationships, at the level of management of the free time. But also on a more intimate level, of the ability to read the world, of the ability to generate instincts and expectations.

The diversity of geographies generates diversity of imaginaries, and the diversity of imaginaries fuels a diversification of aspirations. Starting from the family unit itself, the socio-cultural context in which a person finds himself living changes the way of generating aspirations, of projecting an ambition for change onto the future. Aspiration generates a diversity of intentions in the diversity of contexts. It could be transformed into a professional ambition, into a challenge of social utopia, into an ideal of civic struggle, it could become a vision for a political mission, it could become the vindication of a slow life choice in a limited space. The diversity of possible ambitions will allow each person to choose to become nobler than angels or more miserable than beasts. The social microcontext of the family that crosses spaces, which in spaces interfaces with geographies, imaginaries, aspirations and intentions, is a story that gives shape to the chromatic prism of memory, of its opening up to a ramification of possible futures. This is the point of contact. The family can be the prism that breaks down the ray of light, that welcomes the apparently linear and homogeneous ray of the past and transforms it into the potential for transformation.

Now, it is easy to understand that in the diversity of contexts each family must deal with its own history, with the history of what it has chosen to chase, or with the history of what it has chosen or had to choose to escape from. Each family manages in its own way, in the intimacy of sharing, in the



daily ritual of life stories, the wounds and successes that characterize existence. Each family chooses to manage emotions in its own way, certainly supported by the homogeneity of rituals, tradition and common languages. But it will be each family, in the balance of intimacy, in the lightness of domestic play, in the momentary right to sadness or gray areas in the way we face reality, to decide how to digest existence. It will be in the intimate space of the family that the ideas, concepts and categories with which we organize the complexity of the world take shape.

Memory, in its macroscopic, collective, social meaning, is the selection of one or some of the projections of the footprints left by the past. Memory is the selection of what deserves to be remembered, for personal, family, institutional and social reasons. Memory is a selection of the shadows and footprints of what has already happened. We said it at the beginning: each of us has a way of living the present that represents the projection of the choice of an identity, or the attempt to express an identity. Each of us chooses what we want to be, how we want to be perceived, how we want to represent ourselves. We could talk for hours about each of these nuances. Choosing how to be and choosing how to represent oneself are two very different themes, as we see well, for example, in the game of representations on social media. This choice of self-representation, positioned in the present of immediate consumption, interfaces with the legacy of an identity transferred from the past, which shapes our time and space, in most cases filtered by the history of our family.

After what happened last October 7, the theme of the family, of family ties as a driving force for the transformation of society, has dramatically regained a central role in public opinion. It is not possible to reflect on memory, without reflecting on the family. It is not possible to reflect on history, without reflecting on the humanity of the intimate core of the people around each individual who made history. It is not possible to talk about history, only considering it as the aggregation of a series of individual memories. Each individual is at the center of a network of relationships, but above all he is someone's son, someone's brother, someone's father. Humanizing memory means restoring the history of family intimacy of each individual. And it is not only valid for history books, but it is valid for self-awareness, for the choice of participation of each of us, in the microscopic or macroscopic society in which we decide to take part.

For this reason, today, I would like to ask you to do an exercise together. I would like to ask you to take a piece of paper and a pen. Try to think of three words, or three very short sentences, that describe who you are. It can be something very practical - I am a son - or something metaphorical - I am a builder. And then I would ask you to try to think of the word that best represents the flavor of domestic

intimacy. It can be a recipe, a ritual, a song, anything. And finally, I ask you to try to think of the word, or concept, that you would like to remain as the cultural heritage of your family.

Three words to describe yourself, one word to describe the domestic intimacy of the past, when you were children, and one word to describe the ideal legacy you would like to leave to your children, or grandchildren, or to generations to come. There are no right or wrong answers, but it is important to start over the memory as if it were something alive. The moment we have dehumanized memory, or intellectualized it, we will have lost the ability to connect it to the deepest emotions.

I had thought of offering you a more theoretical, higher reflection on the theories of memory, on participatory memory, on family sociology in historical analysis. Then I tried, in some way, to rehumanize the historians' theories. On the important threshold between a European Day of Jewish Culture on memory, and a new European Day of Jewish Culture on family, I looked for a point of contact. I didn't want it to be a theoretical point of contact, nor in any way to be like a reading of reality dropped from above. On the contrary, I wanted each of us to be able to identify with the safe and protective space of domestic intimacy. I wanted each of us to have the opportunity to reflect on the imprint that family history has left on our existence. I wanted each of us to have the opportunity to remember that even the ritual we have acquired was transmitted, after being selected, in our family context. I wanted each of us to have the opportunity to reflect on the fact that our ability to imagine the future depends on our family's ability to make sense of an evolving past. As always, I believe that the responsibility of *tiqqun olam* is a great opportunity for the world, as a driver of existential transformation, or simply as a restoration of individual responsibility for the future to come.

Today we talk about memory. Today we talk about family. But in fact, without us realizing it, we are talking about what it means for us to protect the humanity of history in its continuous transformation. In fact, we are talking about what it means for us to give meaning to life. And sharing life with those who contribute, every day, to give us a reason to fight, so that the memory of the future can be a memory of peace, of inspiration, of rediscovered humanity.