

BEL SUOL D'AMORE - THE SCATTERED COLONIAL BODY



My grandmother with her children in Tripoli, 1950. My mother is the little one in the middle. A little Arab boy entered the frame just before the photographer shot the picture. But the intruder in the post-war Libya wasn't him.

During a preliminary visit at Pigorini Museum, chosen as our institutional partner, I noticed in a corridor the miniature of Sabratha, a Roman archeological site in Lybia. It caught my attention since my mother was born there, my grandfather being an archeologist involved in the excavation and anastylosis of Sabratha itself and other sites in the whole Italian colony. This object, temporarily stored in a corridor, belongs in fact to the former African Colonial Museum of Rome, closed to the public since many decades: the heterogeneous collection of this non-existing Museum is in fact scattered around the Capital, hosted in different locations, including the Pigorini museum, the Modern Art Galley, the Infantry Museum and the National Library. It gradually appeared to me as a body, dismembered and dispersed: the evidence of something we don't want to deal with. The Italian colonial "adventure" was in fact dismissed together with fascism, hidden under the comfortable narration and self-absolutory formula of "italiani brava gente", Italians good people. The fact that the colonies were "lost" at the beginning of the war eased the process of collective denial - moreover Italy never experienced a de-colonization process. These objects are sort of "undigested" remains, hidden in basements or locked in the archives, and because of their institutional orphanage they are not accessible. I felt the urge to bring them back to the public discourse, but how?

Beside these fetishes, the Italian Empire, although ephemeral, left behind a multitude of "Italian-Libyans", a community of former colonizers later turned into refuges and resettled in various locations across Italy.

To be a descendant of former colonizers - even if my grandmother had a critical understanding of colonialism, including its criminal implications - put me in a paradoxical position, my existence being originated by what I consider an historical injustice. This is why I'm extremely sensitive to such topics, and I easily detect the traces of "libytude" - such as the miniature of Sabratha under a plastic veil in the corridor of the museum. But this was only the beginning: right after Sabratha was unveiled I discovered that Gianfranco Calandra and Tina Gaudino, two employees of the Pigorini museum, were born in Tripoli, like my mother. I followed the path, in a crescendo of serendipity.