

Sabina GIORGI, [La Sapienza-Università di Roma](#), Wardrobes as memory boxes in the Moroccan families : A study of home spaces and objects of everyday life

This study is based on a data corpus collected in the course of my PhD fieldwork, an ethnography of Moroccan households in Italy and Morocco (Giorgi, 2008). The project was carried out over three years (from 2005 to 2008) and studied three Moroccan households in Rabat and Salè and three Moroccan families in Rome. I will focus here on the families who hosted me in Morocco, allowing me to participate to their everyday. The ethnographic project as a whole produced different types of documentation: interviews, video recordings of everyday activities, home video-tours (Giorgi, Fasulo, 2013) and extensive field notes.

One of the specific aim of the research was to understand how families represented their own “cosmology” through the use and the appropriation of the material culture they collected and arranged in their homes. My perspective was to consider material culture within the home “both our appropriation of the larger world and often as the representation of that world within our private domain” (Miller, 2001, p. 1).

The first major theme arisen from the study of the three Moroccan households was a common absence of any “personalization” of domestic spaces, in the sense that houses did not reveal the biographies of the families. This homogeneity may be better interpreted if paralleled to the *mise-en-scène* of a collective “cultural memory” (Assmann, 1992), where families represented and reproduced symbols and formalizations (for example, by displaying Coran’s *suras* in the “*grand salon*”). Moroccan households seemed to safeguard the anonymity of families. The “visible home” hid the family private memories.

The participation to the daily life of the Moroccan families and the interviews with their members led me to the discovery of special repositories of family memories that were collected and shared, but only with intimates. All three Moroccan families preserved biographical memories linked to objects in similar memory boxes: the wardrobes housed in the parents’ bedrooms. They were the core both of personal and family identity. They contained heterogeneous objects: “family relics” (Dassié, 2010), idiosyncratic gifts, traditional clothes, women’s wedding suitcases, personal collections, books, souvenirs. These objects told individual stories but - at the same time - showed a specific way to collect and preserve memories that had the effect to re-inscribe each biography in an collective *ethos*. The latter suggests what aspects and events of life one needs to cherish in memories (births, weddings, etc.). Other objects told painful stories of subversion against this collective *ethos*. In this case, wardrobes became boxes of memories not yet pacified.