



SECTION: FILIATION NARRATIVES IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

## Tracing ancestral trauma: Filiation and postmemory in *The Bracelet of Fire* by Beatrice Saias-Magrizou

*Rastreando o trauma ancestral: Filiação e pós-memória em A Pulseira de Fogo de Beatrice Saias-Magrizou*

*Rastreando el trauma ancestral: Filiación y postmemoria en El Brazalete de Fuego de Beatrice Saias-Magrizou*

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**Abstract:** The article explores the Greek novel *The Bracelet of Fire* (To Vrahiolis Fotias, 2009) by Beatrice Saias-Magrizou as an example of contemporary filiation narrative. Based on the author's family history during the Holocaust, the novel reconstructs the experiences of a Jewish family from Thessaloniki and their deportation to the concentration camps. Once home to one of Europe's largest Sephardic communities, Thessaloniki witnessed the near-total annihilation of its Jewish population. Although fictional, the novel is rooted in historical reality, tracing a lineage of trauma passed down through generations. We read the novel as a filiation narrative in the sense Viart describes: "the account of the other as a detour to reach oneself." Narration serves as a means of self-definition, where identity is examined through the lens of inherited memory. Merging autofiction, testimony, and postmemory, the novel creates a space where personal and collective histories intersect (Viart, 2019, p. 27). Thus, narratives of filiation can serve as both individual and collective engagement with the past (Kenny, 1999, p. 420) by conveying traumatic memories through storytelling. The novel's popularity in Greece, and its 2023 adaptation into a television series, indicate an increasing cultural willingness to confronting the silenced past.

**Keywords:** Filiation narrative; Holocaust literature; intergenerational trauma; postmemory.

**Resumo:** Este artigo analisa o romance grego *A Pulseira de Fogo* (To Vrahiolis Fotias, 2009), de Beatrice Saias-Magrizou, como um exemplo paradigmático da narrativa contemporânea de filiação. Baseado na história familiar da autora durante o Holocausto, o romance reconstrói as experiências de uma família judaica sefardita de Salônica e a sua deportação para os campos de concentração. Salônica, outrora lar de uma das maiores comunidades sefarditas da Europa, testemunhou o aniquilamento quase total da sua população judaica. Embora ficcional, o romance está profundamente enraizado na realidade histórica, traçando uma linhagem de trauma transmitido entre gerações. Lê-se o romance como uma narrativa de filiação no sentido definido por Dominique Viart: "o relato do outro como desvio para chegar a si mesmo". A narração torna-se um meio de autodefinição, em que a identidade é explorada através da memória herdada. Combinando autoficção, testemunho e pós-memória, o romance cria um espaço no qual histórias pessoais e coletivas se entrelaçam (Viart, 2019, p. 27). Assim, narrativas de filiação podem constituir formas de envolvimento tanto individual quanto coletivo com o passado (Kenny, 1999, p. 420), transmitindo memórias traumáticas através da narração. O sucesso da obra na Grécia, bem como a sua adaptação televisiva em 2023, revela uma crescente disposição cultural para enfrentar este passado silenciado.

**Palavras-chave:** narrativa de filiação; literatura do Holocausto; trauma intergeracional; pós-memória.



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**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza la novela griega *El Brazalete de Fuego* (*To Vrahioli tis Fotias*, 2009), de Beatrice Saias-Magrizou, como un caso paradigmático de narrativa contemporánea de filiación. Basada en la historia familiar de la autora durante el Holocausto, la novela reconstruye las experiencias de una familia judía sefardí de Salónica y su deportación a los campos de concentración. Salónica, que albergó una de las mayores comunidades sefardíes de Europa, fue testigo del aniquilamiento casi total de su población judía. Aunque ficcional, la obra está profundamente anclada en la realidad histórica, rastreando una línea de trauma transmitido a lo largo de las generaciones. Leemos la novela como una narrativa de filiación en el sentido descrito por Dominique Viart: "el relato del otro como un desvío para alcanzar el yo." La narración funciona como una forma de autodefinición, en la que la identidad se examina a través de la memoria heredada. Al combinar autoficción, testimonio y posmemoria, la novela crea un espacio en el que convergen las historias personales y colectivas (Viart, 2019, p. 27). Así, las narrativas de filiación pueden servir como formas de compromiso tanto individual como colectivo con el pasado (Kenny, 1999, p. 420), al transmitir memorias traumáticas a través del relato. Su éxito en Grecia y su adaptación televisiva en 2023 indican una creciente disposición cultural a confrontar este pasado silenciado.

**Palabras clave:** narrativa de filiación; literatura del Holocausto; trauma intergeneracional; posmemoria.

## Introduction

Over the past thirty years, various subgenres of narrative prose have developed within the vast literary landscape. Philippe Lejeune's pivotal work *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (1975) represented a significant milestone in the exploration of autobiographical forms as a way of engaging with the self. In his foundational article "Filiations littéraires", Dominique Viart (1999, p. 116) discussed the rise of a genre he proposed to term *filiation narrative*. Subsequent developments of this framework, including Viart's notion of the filiation narrative, highlight this transition from self-writing to self-awareness through the lens of lineage: "The individual of our time can only come to know themselves through the detour of the other" (Viart, 1999, p. 123). In the following years, this narrative mode established itself as a fruitful subgenre in the auto-biographical realm, encompassing a spectrum that spans from the referential to the imaginary (Dytrt, 2023, p. 41).

The theoretical framework of filiation narratives, as described by Dominique Viart, refers to a form of literary texts that engage with the transmission of memory, family legacy and personal and cultural identity through intergenerational relationships. They are closely associated with the literature of memory, however, they do not merely serve as autobiographical accounts; instead, they function as relational self-writings, frequently featuring a narrator's quest for understanding their ancestral identity. As Viart and Vercier (2008, p. 80) note, "the account of the other – father, mother, or another ancestor – serves as a necessary detour to reach oneself and understand one's place within this legacy: thus, the filiation narrative acts as a substitute for autobiography". They constitute a literary mode through which subsequent generations engage with memory and inherited trauma. Building upon these foundational studies, this paper aims to examine how filiation narratives represent a meaningful evolution of life writing, where the self is approached indirectly, through revisiting familial and collective pasts.

This journey to the inner self through the perspective of another, mediated by memory and history, is what resonates strongly in the context of *The Bracelet of Fire*<sup>2</sup> by Beatrice Saias-Magrizou, a contemporary Greek novel that exemplifies this narrative mode, making lineage itself the epistemic path to identity. Based on the author's family background<sup>3</sup>, the story unfolds the tumultuous experiences of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki during the Holocaust as seen through the eyes of a young Jewish boy named Iosif, whose life is shattered amid historical evolutions. The narrative thread begins with vivid depictions of family life before the Second World War, continues with the recounting of the persecution and displacement of Iosif and his loved ones to the extermination camps, follows his struggle for survival and culminates in his eventual return to the life he left behind, which he now tries to piece back together. Mediated through the

<sup>2</sup> All translations from the original texts are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup> It is the story of the author's father, Iosif Saias, born in 1926 into a Jewish family. Deported to Auschwitz, he was held hostage for three years under the number 116257. He was tortured and subjected to inhuman experiments conducted by Dr. Mengele, yet he ultimately survived and returned to his native Thessaloniki.

vehicle of her father's voice, the author unravels the memories and narratives of her family, which, functioning as a living site of trauma, continually shape both her personal and collective identity. This is, as Hoffman (2004, p. 25) writes, "the paradox of indirect knowledge" that haunts the post generation – a generation that inhabits the open wounds of their parents' and grandparents' traumatic experiences. Thus, the novel offers a compelling example of filiation narrative as a literary response by subsequent generations to engage with memory and inherited trauma.

Our memories carry a unique timeless power; they retain the capacity to establish a connection between our individual and collective pasts, between the history of our heritage and the history of our personal lives. As Hirsch (2008, p. 107) notes in her research of postmemory, while events happened in the past, their effects continue into the present. It is exceedingly difficult to separate the past from our present: it stands there, suspended in our silences, echoing in our thoughts and experiences, ultimately shaping who we are. At the same time, the memory of the past can also serve as an antidote to the struggles and anxieties of our present. Toni Morrison compares memory to water and observes:

All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory – what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our 'flooding' (Morrison, 1990, p. 99).

This flooding, drawing from oral accounts and familial memory, sets the novel at the intersection of private trauma and collective memory. As such, it serves as a prime example of how filiation narratives have the potential to blend personal experiences with cultural and historical remembrance. According to Halbwachs (1992, p. 22), memory is social and context-dependent, and the collective memories of a culture stabilize identity narratives for the next generation. This interaction allows the novel to explore trauma

transmission beyond the individual level, showing how personal and familial histories intersect with broader historical events.

Beatrice Saias-Magrizou's *The Bracelet of Fire* stands out as a powerful example of this genre, as it not only recounts a family's survival story but also redefines Holocaust memory within a Greek-Jewish context. The protagonist's experience is not isolated; it connects with the history of Jews in Thessaloniki and the consequences of the Holocaust, illustrating how private mourning converge with public memory work. Literature thus becomes a vehicle for both preserving intergenerational trauma and fostering identity formation.

Grounded in three key axes—postmemory, filiation as a strategy for self-understanding, and the interplay of intergenerational trauma and collective memory—this article seeks to examine how *The Bracelet of Fire* navigates the complex relations between family, identity, and culture while contributing to the reconstruction of the Holocaust public memory in Greece. The aim is to highlight the way in which literature, framed within the theoretical lens of filiation narratives, weaves together personal memory and historical heritage, while simultaneously offering tools for self-understanding.

## 1 Historical and Cultural Context

The city of Thessaloniki, formerly referred to as the 'Jerusalem of the Balkans', was once home to one of the largest and most active Sephardic Jewish communities in Europe. By the early 1900s, Jews constituted over half of the city's population (Çoban, 2007, p. 84), profoundly participating in its cultural, economic, and intellectual life. Tragically, this flourishing community faced near-total annihilation during World War II, as the Nazi occupation resulted in the systematic deportation and extermination of approximately 60,000 Jews in the concentration camps. Fewer than 2,000 Jews managed to survive (Bowman, 2009, p. 94). Overall, 96 percent of Jews from Thessaloniki were murdered (Kavala, 2018, p. 183). The magnitude of this devastation has left

a deep scar, not only on the survivors but on the city's collective identity.

Despite the enormity of this tragedy, the Holocaust remained largely marginalized in the Greek public discourse for many years. The trauma of the Jewish population was either silenced or absorbed into the general narrative of national suffering, to the point it became nearly erased from Thessaloniki's postwar memory. This long silence surrounding Greece's Jewish heritage can be attributed to a combination of historical, cultural, and political factors. The demographic devastation of Greek Jewry left few survivors to bear witness, while the urban erasure of Jewish property and spaces, such as the destruction of the historic cemetery, further deepened cultural amnesia. In the turbulent postwar years, Greece's focus shifted to rebuilding a fractured nation amid the civil war (1946–1949) and strengthening national identity, often overshadowing minority experiences and discouraging open commemoration. Survivors, grappling with their personal trauma while facing pressures to assimilate, rarely spoke publicly.

Under such circumstances, the continuity between individual memory and the collective narrative of self and nation is disrupted (Lori, 2016, p. 2). Only in recent years has the devastation of Thessaloniki's Jewish community started to re-emerge more prominently in public, academic, and cultural domains in Greece with organized efforts being put into publication and dissemination of the genocide (Christou, 2024, p. 211). This revival has also been shaped by the descendants of survivors, who, driven by what Viart (1999, p. 137) terms a need for self-definition through narrative as well as by a moral obligation to bear witness, have increasingly chosen to write and share their family stories. Saul Friedlander, while reflecting on the redemptive and healing aspects of Holocaust literature argues that "[...] there is a growing sensitivity to literature and art. The voices of the second generation are as powerful as the best work produced by contemporaries of the

Nazi epoch. This sensitivity is not limited to the community of victims" (Friedländer, 1992, p. 263).

In filiation narratives, second or third generation narrators reconstruct collective trauma not through direct experience, but instead through storytelling and imagination. Beatrice Saias-Margizou's *The Bracelet of Fire* takes shape within this shifting landscape. Drawing on her family's experience, it serves as a literary revival of a previously silenced history. The novel follows the story of her father Iosif, a young boy from an upper-class Sephardic<sup>4</sup> family in Thessaloniki. With the escalation of anti-Jewish legislation and Nazi persecution, the family is eventually deported to Auschwitz. Iosif survives the camp and makes his way back to his homeland, where he must confront the trauma of loss and rebuild his life amid a society that has undergone profound changes. Published in 2006, *The Bracelet of Fire* achieved remarkable success, within this broader context of renewed attention to Jewish history in Greece. Its popularity culminated in 2023 when it was adapted into a prominent television series by ERT, the National Broadcasting Corporation. The series introduced the narrative to a broader audience, offering a compelling depiction of the Sephardic experience during the Holocaust. Shortly after the series was first broadcast, the Greek newspaper *Ethnos* published:

The new ERT1 series, *The Bracelet of Fire* broke all previous records on ERTFLIX, having been released on the broadcaster's digital platform on 25/1/2023. It may seem unbelievable, but the series' eight episodes garnered over one million views in just one week, boosting ERTFLIX's traffic by 49% compared to the previous week (*Ethnos Journal*, 2023).

The enthusiastic reception of the work signifies a transformation in how Greek society reconnects with a past that had remained neglected for decades. The sheer success of the novel highlights a change in the cultural landscape where previous silenced narratives—such as the erased Jewish heritage of Thessaloniki—are being reintroduced into the national consciousness.

<sup>4</sup> Sephardic Jews, also known as Sephardim are a Jewish diaspora population associated with the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal). The term is derived from the Hebrew word Sepharad (lit. 'Iberia').

According to the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1980, p. 80), collective memory "retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive". Similarly, Frederic Bartlett (1932, p. 309), who introduced the idea of the reconstructive nature of memory, states that "with the individual as with the group, the past is continually re-made, reconstructed as a function of present interests". In this sense, *The Bracelet of Fire* is not a mere personal or family chronicle but also serves as a means to rearticulate collective historical memory. It marks the beginning of a new era where filiation narratives serve as a form of resistance to collective amnesia and historical erasure, ensuring that memory is preserved and intergenerational trauma is passed on.

In sum, drawing on Heux *et al.*'s (2023, p. 7) theoretical approach, collective memory shapes identity by nourishing a sense of unity within groups, both at the family and national level. In this context, filiation narratives emerge as a literary strategy that allows the descendants of the victims to confront historical oblivion, reclaim histories that have long been silenced, and negotiate their own position within a continuum of memory and identity.

## 2 Filiation Narrative as a Means of Self-Understanding

Among the key features that form filiation narratives, as defined by Viart and Vercier (2008, p. 80), is their ability to serve not just as acts of remembrance but also as pathways to self-discovery. Instead of merely narrating the lives of parents, grandparents, or other ancestors, these stories embark on a reflective journey through the other in order to uncover the inner self. The past—whether it evolves around family history, cultural context, and historical events—acts as a lens through which identity is explored and transformed. In this sense, the story of the other becomes an essential step to gain a greater comprehension of one's position within a lineage. *The Bracelet of Fire* is a prime example of this narrative form. While the story mainly focuses

on Josef during his childhood and adolescence, it is presented through the author's perspective, as Beatrice Saias-Magrizou reconstructs her father's memories to bridge the distance between generations. In doing so, she forges a deeper understanding of her personal and cultural identity, situating herself both within the Jewish diaspora and as an inheritor of Holocaust memory. In the sense of filiation narratives, the novel functions as a dialogue between past and present: by narrating her father's experiences, Saias-Magrizou not only preserves family and collective memory but also engages in a process of emotional self-discovery. As she recounts the story of the tattoo on her father's arm, a mark she had seen since childhood,

-What is this? A vaccine for some disease? asked again Mikos, who could barely tolerate pain, especially needles.

-So that you never forget! the hostage replied fiercely and went on pinching Miko's wrist, wiping away the blood from time to time [...] The blue ink had to be applied with precision so that the numbers would stand out clearly. And indeed, the numbers were etched onto the wrists of the Saias brothers, to remain there forever: 116255 for Mikos, the first to be marked, 116256 for Davikos and 116257 for Iosif- numbers that became fully legible three days later, once the swelling in their hands had subsided. From that moment on, they were told they no longer had names. They were numbers. Nothing but numbers (Saias-Magrizou, 2006, p. 202).

the symbol becomes a bridge connecting her to her ancestral trauma and her own identity, a living trace of the family's history and a means to understand herself.

Writing can function as a method for depicting and better understanding traumatic memory and may serve as an external regulatory tool for reshaping and thereby coping with it (Felman; Laub, 1992, p. 153). Additionally, these narratives provide a counterbalance to the fragmentation of both individual and collective identity, addressing the loss of self on both levels. As far as the Holocaust-related writings, they can also serve as a means for the authors to mourn relatives they never met and as an attempt to comprehend their own Jewish identity (Aarons; Berger, 2017, p. 144). Magrizou, likewise, is called to process

the pain, loss, and remorse associated with the Holocaust experience, even though she did not live through it directly, as she reflects:

Mikos, in the week following his return from the camps, began to rediscover human habits, human feelings.

-I didn't mourn my wife and child. I didn't mourn my father, he told Roula one day, tears streaming down his face. And Davikos and Iosif? I am afraid for them. It is unjust that I'm alive.

Roula looked at him with affection.

-We will mourn them together. We will hold a yeshiva<sup>5</sup> in the synagogue and pray for their return! And as for what you say, it is not unjust that you live. You did not choose this. God wanted you to live!

-Don't speak to me of God, Mikos cut her off harshly. But five days later, seeing his brothers arrive, he lifted his eyes to the heavens and cried out: Praise be to You, my God; blessed is Your name! (Saias-Magrizou, 2006, p. 222).

Iosif's journey serves not only as a testimony of survival but also as a means for the narrator to come to terms with her family's legacy. The concept of *postmemory* refers to how the next generation relates to the personal, communal, and cultural traumas experienced by those who came before, often feeling as though these deeply transmitted experiences behave like memories (Hirsch, 2008, p. 106). In simpler terms, it describes how second or third generations connect with events that occurred prior to their births and have been passed down to them. By giving voice to the silenced or fragmented stories of the previous generation, Magrizou partakes in a postmemorial act: she grapples with memories she did not personally experience but that nonetheless shaped her identity. She frequently evokes scenes in which people, objects, or places carry a profound weight of memory—like the family's cherished piano, still preserved to this day, on which Frida, the eldest daughter, "had remarkable talent and was completing her studies" (Saias-Magrizou, 2006, p. 59) and which she would play at the traditional Shabbat<sup>6</sup> family gatherings; or the mensa<sup>7</sup>, the Bat Mitzvah<sup>8</sup> bra-

celet belonging to Benuta, which lends its title to the novel. The author recounts: "Iosif passed away in October 1995. Since the day the bracelet was found, his daughter has worn it, as it arrived that very day as a gift from Grandma Benuta for her coming of age" (Saias-Magrizou, 2006, p. 253). These references function as a kind of material framework where narrative becomes a means of identity exploration.

Importantly, the novel does not end with either deportation or liberation. Instead, it unfolds into the aftermath—the return to Thessaloniki, the deep sense of alienation from a society that has erased its Jewish community, the enduring family ties and the endeavor to rebuild a life from scratch.

Now, at their gatherings, they were a large family with many children. With voices, with laughter, with jokes, with songs and dance, always accompanied by the piano, which Frida would play. And each family had its own Betty, a tribute to the deep affection the siblings held for their mother, Benuta. Within each family, the same philosophy prevailed, born from the trials and sorrows of their parents' lives: that life is precious, and each day, each hour, must be lived and savored. That you must not withhold from your loved ones the love and the gifts you are able to give (Saias-Magrizou, 2006, p. 246).

It becomes obvious that *The Bracelet of Fire* questions prevailing narratives of heroism and national unity, presenting a deep personal account of loss, survival, and the need to reclaim one's past in order to fully inhabit the present. In the case of traumatic memories, this journey into the past through writing can function as an involuntary yet essential path to reconciliation with oneself in the present. As contemporary trauma theorists suggest, the textual testimonies of those who have suffered trauma carry therapeutic power (Kurtz, 2018, p. 8).

This perspective illustrates how personal and familial memories can serve as tools for self-discovery, particularly for the descendants of survivors who strive to piece together fragmented family history and acquire a sense of

<sup>5</sup> Jewish memorial service.

<sup>6</sup> The weekly day of rest and worship in Judaism, observed from Friday evening to Saturday evening.

<sup>7</sup> A twisted gold bracelet ending in a snakehead, traditionally given to Jewish girls as a gift on their Bat Mitzvah.

<sup>8</sup> Jewish coming-of-age ceremony for thirteen-year-old girls, marking them as adult members of the community.

belonging. As Eva Hoffman (2004, p. 103) points out, the transmitted memory of the Shoah for post-survivor generations is "an example of an internalized past, of the way in which atrocity literally reverberates through the minds and lives of subsequent generations". Consequently, the act of storytelling transforms into a means of identity formation, where filiation is a narrative construct, shaped, rediscovered, and reimagined through the lens of memory.

### 3 Trauma and Transmission: Personal and Collective Dimensions

Within the framework of filiation narratives, the Holocaust assumes a unique place in exploring the transmission of generational trauma, given the inconceivable atrocities committed by a civilized nation (Harris, 2020, p. 71). Reflecting on this process of transmission, Marianne Hirsch (2008, p. 109) highlights that the children of survivors experience their parents' trauma not as direct witnesses but as recipients of their narratives, silences, and emotional echoes that inevitably shape their own personalities. Building on this concept, Austrian American psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg has noted that, symptomatically:

The need to discover, to re-enact, or to live the parents' past was a major issue in the lives of survivors' children. This need is different from the usual curiosity of children about their parents. These children feel they have a mission to live in the past and to change it so that their parents' humiliation, disgrace, and guilt can be converted into victory over the oppressors, and the threat of genocide undone with a restitution of life and worth (Kestenberg, 1982, p. 101).

In this sense, the filiation narrative goes beyond a mere testimony of past events; it is a commitment to preserve and reconstruct the memory through writing. Authors seek to transmit trauma while allowing their artistic creativity to flourish through a range of innovative narrative techniques (Aarons; Berger, 2017, p. 145). The narrative structure captures the tension between distance

and proximity, between imagination and firsthand accounts. Beatrice Saias-Magrizou's novel precisely engages with this approach: while the story focuses on her family's real-life experiences, it is crafted by a daughter who inherits and reimagines her father's painful past. Reflecting on her father's horrifying experience as a human guinea pig in Dr. Mengele's experiments, she recounts,

They knew that experiments were being conducted in Block 10. [...] Mikos, Davikos, and Robi watched Iosif in terror as he was led away, following the doctor. They saw him again three days later: he was bent over in two, walking slowly, holding the lower part of his abdomen. They helped him lie down.

-Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu<sup>9</sup>, Robi whispered by his side all night long.

When Iosif awoke, he told them what he had been through. They had taken him to a room, stripped him, and tied him hand and foot to a bed. Frozen with fear, he heard the clinking of scalpels and scissors right before he felt the cold incision on the right side of his abdomen. A scream escaped him when they ripped out his appendix—perfectly healthy. The doctor had wanted to see whether this young man would survive such an operation without anesthesia. As they stitched him up, Iosif felt his mother beside him, as if he were a little boy again, telling him a story:

-It was, querido mio<sup>10</sup>, summer of 1917... (Saias-Magrizou, 2006, p. 213-14).

Even in the recollection of the most intimate and painful scenes, Magrizou treats this sensitive subject gently. She won't diminish trauma to the point of being a spectacle and won't glamorize survival. Instead, she gives a testimony that is considerate of the suffering and the dignity of those who survived it, as well as recognizing the deep scars transmitted to the subsequent generations.

The novel delves into the mechanisms of how trauma is passed down through generations even in subtle ways, with silence emerging as a key form of transmission. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, many survivors retreated to a prolonged reluctance to give voice to their experience. Silence was their coping mechanism. However, postmemory is often based on silence rather than

<sup>9</sup> The opening phrase of the central Jewish prayer, meaning "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God!". It originates from Deuteronomy 6:4 in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>10</sup> My darling, in the Ladino dialect that Sephardic Jews use.

speech, on the invisible rather than the visible (Hirsch, 2001, p. 9). The child of Holocaust survivors, as psychologists Auerhahn and Prelinger argue, "may assimilate the parent's trauma both by what is said and done and by what is left unsaid" (Jabès, 1990, p. 62). The silence of Iosif and his brothers upon returning, the family's hesitation to inquire about their experiences, the emotional numbness and the sense of alienation they feel in a city that has been moving on without them, all demonstrate that trauma consists of not only what can be remembered but also of what remains unspoken.

Mikos was the first of their own to arrive. Their once tall, rather stout brother had become a gaunt man. His sisters struggled to recognize him. He looked at them with a vacant stare, and words escaped his mouth with difficulty. They had to question him to extract any information.

-Miko, our father—what happened to our father?

-Se mourió<sup>11</sup>, he replied, almost coldly.

-Hanna, your wife? The little one? Frida asked.

-Mourió, todos mourió, Mikos went on. David and Iosif might still be alive. [...]

-How, what happened? Tell us, Mikos, tell us! his sisters cried out in tears.

He looked at them strangely, as if he couldn't understand why they had broken down in sobs, as if he had no feelings. He too, like all the captives, had covered himself in a stony shell in order to endure [...] No one asked anything about his life there. There would be time later. [...] But for in truth, no one wished to talk about it for many years (Saias-Magrizou, 2006, p. 221, 225).

Viard's (2010, p. 97) concept of *le silence des pères* is programmatic here. It refers to the narrative power of a father's silence and the way it serves as a driving force in narratives concerning family lineage. Paternal refusal or impotence to narrate produces in the daughter a compulsory mission to speak. For the post memory generation, this silence becomes both a strain and an invitation: to seek, to imagine, to narrate. Through archival research, family testimonies, and memory reconstruction, the author transforms inherited trauma into a structured narrative, giving shape and meaning to what might otherwise remain an

unspoken burden.

At the core of *The Bracelet of Fire* lies the intersection of personal and collective memory. The novel portrays both the immediate suffering caused by the Holocaust—the brutality of deportation, the shattering of families and communities, and the dehumanizing existence in Auschwitz—as well as its enduring consequences. Iosif's experiences in the camp, the loss of his loved ones, his fight for survival, and his eventual return home all serve as representations of his personal anguish. However, these events also reflect a larger historical tragedy: the eradication of Thessaloniki's Jewish population. While treating highly personal and individualized experiences, authors of filiation novels also transmit a sense of communal trauma, thereby illustrating the complexity and necessity of memory in the postmodern context. This also echoes Halbwachs's (1980, p. 46) notion of the connection between individual and collective memory: he argued that "it is the individual, as a group member, who remembers". By fictionalizing her family's suffering, the author can recreate a past that is intimate yet historically significant, intertwining her personal legacy with the broader trauma of the Holocaust. The latter is revealed here not as a sealed chapter in the past, but more likely as a continuous process, handed down in the present through narration, emotion, and cultural memory.

This dual aspect is crucial. At one level, *The Bracelet of Fire* offers a deeply intimate story about the loss of family, the strength to endure, and the journey back. On another level, it brings to light the shared trauma of a community that has been nearly erased from national memory. Consequently, this trauma is both personal and communal, with its transmission taking place through storytelling—whether testimonial or fictional. A constant movement is thus established, in many filiation narratives, between the singular and the collective, between individual history and the history of the century (Viard, 2019, p. 27).

Halbwachs (1992, p. 99) suggests that collec-

<sup>11</sup> Dead, in the Ladino dialect that Sephardic Jews use.

tive or cultural memory is a 'living memory' and reflects a reconstruction of past experiences in the present state with a host of cultural meanings in the present. He argues that autobiographical memory is grounded in collective memory, asserting that the story of our life is part of history in general (Heux *et al.*, 2023, p. 3). In this line of thinking, individual memory is always a point of view on collective memory (Gensburger, 2016, p. 397). *The Bracelet of Fire* ultimately illustrates that trauma can be passed down through generations, serving not only as a source of self-healing and belonging but also as a form of moral and emotional obligation. In working with the memory of the Holocaust in the present day, it is not only a matter of recalling the past horrors of history but also of reflecting on their significance for future generations and how this legacy can be passed on in a way to infuse transformative meanings into their consciousness and values (Walden, 2015, p. 1). Through this story, the author establishes a narrative bond between herself, her ancestors and to the world at large—a connection that imposes continuity, remembrance, and collective identity despite historical discontinuities.

#### 4 Cultural Reception and the Role of Public Memory

*The Bracelet of Fire* was a mainstream phenomenon in Greece, both as a book and as a successful television series adaptation. It garnered significant attention and acclaim for its poignant depiction of a lesser-known aspect of Greek history: the extermination of the most vibrant Sephardic communities in Europe. The historical truth that over 90% of Thessaloniki's Jewish population were killed in Nazi's concentration camps has tended to be suppressed in official histories. For decades, the memory of this community was excluded from Greece's national heritage. This double success—both literary and audiovisual—underlines the book's cultural significance and denotes a key shift in the Greek public's attitude towards its Jewish past:

For the first time in years, a domestic television production dares to confront the subject of

Greek Jews with courage and without emotional manipulation. It addresses a topic that has remained a source of enduring and inter-generational pain—one that no one has dared to touch without risking accusations of reviving the ghosts of a shameful past in times of peace. It is significant that a television network has chosen to invest in a series that does not shy away from a vast and profoundly painful chapter of our history (Galanopoulou, 2023).

The national broadcaster's choice to produce and fund this adaptation is an indication of reviving cultural interest in addressing one of the most neglected aspects of national history. In doing so, the Saias family's history and that of their community found its way into households across the country, reached a broader audience, managing to finally incorporate the long forgotten Jewish memory into the public debate in Greece. The TV series, which preserved much of the novel's emotional richness and historical fidelity, played a crucial role in bringing this memory to the forefront. It offered a visual and emotional framework that allowed the audience to connect with the Jewish experience of persecution and displacement—not as a remote European tragedy, but as a Greek story rooted in Thessaloniki's own neighborhoods, families, and names.

This public acknowledgment of *The Bracelet of Fire* as a cultural and historical landmark is also part of a broader movement across Europe. In recent years, most countries have started to confront the darker aspects of their pasts—colonialism or fascism, say—more insistently. Greece's rising interest in Holocaust remembrance, along with the roles of its citizens in that past, can be seen as part of this international movement towards the engagement of collective memories. The French newspaper *Le Monde* greeted the project with enthusiastic acclaim:

In Greece, a series finally addresses the fate of the Jews of Thessaloniki. *The Bracelet of Fire*, which traces the fate of a Jewish family during the 20th century, premieres on the public television channel ERT. It is the first fiction work in Greece to tackle this chapter of the country's history (Rafenberg, 2023).

Magrizou's text is not just reconstructing memory but is also in the process of reshaping it. As

sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1980, p. 80) suggests, "collective memory is continually reconstructed in the present". Her novel and its reception have helped shatter a long-standing silence and make possible a deeper understanding of Greek identity—one which includes Jewish voices and narratives. By inviting the readers and audience to witness the events, the story of *The Bracelet of Fire* becomes a vehicle for cultural reflection, intergenerational dialogue, and collective healing.

### Final Considerations

*The Bracelet of Fire* is an excellent model of a filiation narrative—where the quest for one's origins becomes a path toward self-knowledge, intergenerational transmission, and historical awareness. In her own recollection and family story, the author presents a narrative that not only memorializes the victims of the Holocaust of Thessaloniki in the search of her own identity but also constitutes an act of narrative reclaiming, bringing back to life once muted voices into the record of culture and history.

The novel illustrates the intense connection between personal and collective trauma. The reader learns through the Saias family about the transmission of violence, displacement, and survival through generations. The novel creates a space for postmemory—what Marianne Hirsch (2008, p. 112) has labeled the mediated memory of trauma inherited by descendants—illustrating how inherited grief is processed through storytelling, weaving a path toward reclaiming family legacy and leading to self-discovery. Moreover, the novel emphasizes the abiding power of filiation narratives to bridge temporal distance, further echoing Hirsch's concept of postmemory as a connecting force between present and past. The narrator's voice, grounded in the author's own family history, acts as a witness to historical trauma while also engaging with contemporary identity concerns.

Beyond its emotional and personal appeal, *The Bracelet of Fire*'s popularity also testifies to the power of literature in the building of collective memory. This idea fits with the theoretical framework proposed by Winter and Sivan (1999,

p. 6) that it is the very act of communication that allows the transformation of the individual dimension of memory—which they term as passive memory—into a collective one. By presenting a Jewish narrative within the city of Thessaloniki, the novel enhances a wider and more expansive notion of Greek identity. It provides a new sense of cultural affiliation for the offspring of Holocaust survivors and provokes discussions about memory, trauma, and national history in contemporary times. According to Roediger and Abel (2015, p. 3), such collective memories are likely to stimulate identity and shape political and social discourses. Filiation is not a simple testimonial relay; it is a narrative labor where the descendant assumes the duty of memory. In doing so, *The Bracelet of Fire* connects individuals and communities and transforms silence into voice. It serves as a reminder that memory is not static but that it is dynamic and fluid and that when recovered and retold, it can be a force of acknowledgment, empathy, and healing across generations.

Taken together, this article contributes to current debates on memory and filiation by illustrating how Beatrice Saias-Magrizou's *The Bracelet of Fire* redefines filiation as an active narrative practice rather than a fixed literary sub-genre. Building on the novel, it demonstrates how selfhood is constructed through the histories of others, how trauma is passed down as postmemory and transformed into ethically restrained narration, and how personal memory is incorporated into collective frameworks, allowing a civic re-inscription of histories that have remained long forgotten. Finally, it seeks to advance the growing international conversation on filiation narratives by foregrounding a Greek Holocaust story, often absent from global memory discourse, situating it within a broader transnational framework of postmemory and intergenerational trauma.

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