



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

TRABALLO FIN DE GRAO

GRAO EN LINGUA E LITERATURA INGLESAS

Título do traballo:

**“Is it better to speak or to die?” Silence and identity
in André Aciman’s *Call Me By Your Name***

Autor/a:

Sheila Duarte Clase

Titor/a:

María Alonso Alonso

Santiago de Compostela, 26 de xuño de 2025

Curso académico: 2024-2025

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 “¿Es mejor hablar o morir?” Silencio e identidad en la obra *Llámame por tu nombre* de André Aciman

Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redacta-lo TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]

Call Me By Your Name is a novel by André Aciman published in 2007 that tells the coming-of-age story of an adolescent boy named Elio. While he spends the summer of 1983 in his family’s house on the Italian Riviera, the arrival of an American guest named Oliver will change Elio’s life forever. The teenager narrates the events that occurred that summer and how they unleashed a journey of self-discovery towards his queer identity. Nonetheless, taking into account the setting of the novel, revealing his own identity is a challenge for the protagonist, which creates several speeches that are relevant by their implicit meanings. In this final degree dissertation, I intend to analyse the key silences of the characters and establish a connection between the unspoken and the idea of identity. Therefore, I will start by introducing the novel and the key concepts that I will be working with, such as ‘identity’, ‘silence’, and ‘queerness’. Finally, I will then analyse these concepts in relation with the novel by André Aciman. In order to write this final degree dissertation, I will be using diverse sources of information that will help to create a theoretical framework and support the thesis argument: how silences both hide and reveal characters’ identities. Some of the theorists I will be referencing are Stuart Hall, Marianne Hirsch and Judith Butler.

Santiago de Compostela, 13 de decembro de 2024.

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Resumo

Título en galego: “Is it better to speak or to die?” Silencio e identidade na obra *Call Me By Your Name* de André Aciman

Título en español: “¿Es mejor hablar o morir?” Silencio e identidad en la obra *Llámame por tu nombre* de André Aciman

Título en inglés: “Is it better to speak or to die?” Silence and identity in André Aciman’s *Call Me By Your Name*

Abstract:

Call Me By Your Name is a novel by André Aciman published in 2007 that tells the coming-of-age story of an adolescent boy named Elio. While he spends the summer of 1983 in his family’s house on the Italian Riviera, the arrival of an American guest named Oliver will change Elio’s life forever. The teenager narrates the events that occurred that summer and how they unleashed a journey of self-discovery towards his queer identity. Nonetheless, taking into account the setting of the novel, revealing his own identity is a challenge for the protagonist, which creates several speeches that are relevant by their implicit meanings. In this final degree dissertation, I intend to analyse the key silences of the characters and establish a connection between the unspoken and the idea of identity. Therefore, I will start by introducing the novel and the key concepts that I will be working with, such as ‘identity’, ‘silence’, and ‘queerness’. Finally, I will then analyse these concepts in relation with the novel by André Aciman. In order to write this final degree dissertation, I will be using diverse sources of information that will help to create a theoretical framework and support the thesis argument: how silences both hide and reveal characters’ identities. Some of the theorists I will be referencing are Stuart Hall, Marianne Hirsch and Judith Butler.

Keywords: *silence, identity, coming-of-age, queer studies, Jewish memory*

1. INTRODUCTION

From the very beginning, I never had a clear idea of what I would choose to do my final degree dissertation about. However, when the time came to choose a topic, I knew I wanted it to be about *Call Me By Your Name* (2007). I discovered this novel when I was still in high school and it was probably one of those books that really made me appreciate English literature. Therefore, it felt only right to use the knowledge I gained during these past four years of college to read it and analyse it from a more critical and scholarly standpoint. Notwithstanding, I did not exactly know what I wanted to focus on for the dissertation, but my mind kept travelling back to one of the most famous quotes from the book "Is it better to speak or die?". It was not until we started to talk about the idea of silence in postcolonial literature that an idea for the dissertation occurred to me. We talked about Spivak's idea about how although the subaltern can speak, they will not be heard. Some of the examples we saw were the protagonist of Anna Burns' *Milkman* and the character of Frieda in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*. Those silences said something about who the characters were: colonised subjects, feminine subalterns, lower-class individuals. This concept had already been explained before in another course called *Conceptos fundamentales de Teoría Literaria e Literatura Comparada*, also in a postcolonial context. Although Aciman's novel does not deal with postcolonial issues, the idea of silence stuck with me, because it was not that the characters in the novel could speak but would not be heard, it was that they did not want to be heard. In postcolonial studies, Professor Manuela Palacios González mentioned how tea in postcolonial literature is not just tea, but proof of a British colonial past, which we could see in Padmanabhan's play. In my own understanding, the silences or implications in speech in *Call Me By Your Name* are

just like the tea in postcolonial works, they mean more than what they seem to be at first.

This is how I decided on my initial hypothesis: silences are used to conceal identities but at the same time reveal them. The same way tea means that the British were there, using indirect speech to hide who one is entails an initial desire for concealment motivated by an external cause. This means that if we trace back to what may have motivated that silence in the first place, we may discover the identity that the person wanted to hide. My objectives with this analysis were to reveal more in-depth characters and to be able to read a work beyond what it initially showed to the reader. I wanted to pay attention to the complexity of the characters and their speech, but also to understand their behaviour and how it relates to their different identities. Moreover, since I considered from the beginning that their silence was due to external social conflict about their identities I was interested in analysing how outside opinion ultimately influences and shapes the portrayal of individual identities. I think *Call Me By Your Name* is the perfect subject of study for this theory because it deals with many instances of silence in connection to different identities.

This novel tells the love story between two men during a Summer in the Italian Riviera in the 1980s. Elio Perlman, the protagonist and the first-person narrator, is a 17-year-old boy who goes every Summer with his parents to the town of B. to a vacation house they own. Since his father is a scholar and professor at a university, he likes to invite graduate students or recently graduated academics for six weeks, so that they help Mr. Perlman with his work. Oliver is the summer guest of 1987, a 24-year-old post doctorate philosophy student who will start teaching at the University of Columbia in the Fall. Despite their rough start, Elio and Oliver start to spend more time together and their friendly relationship soon becomes more than that as they start a

soulmate-like relationship. By the way Elio narrates the story, the reader will learn very shortly after the beginning of the story that Elio feels attracted to Oliver. Therefore, the real question is whether Oliver feels the same way about Elio. Instead of chapters, the novel is divided into four parts, and throughout the first part, the status of their relationship is very ambiguous. It is quite uncertain if they like or dislike each other. Nonetheless, since Elio narrates their story from years in the future, he normally hints the direction in which things will go, so it becomes clear that they will eventually have a more sexual/romantic relationship. The story is constantly accompanied by Elio's obsessive and infatuated behaviours towards Oliver, as he constantly creates and narrates fake scenarios that never happened. When they finally confess their feelings to the other, they began a secret relationship since they are both aware of the public view on homosexual relationships at the time. Part two will focus on them starting their relationship, but also in their internal conflicts with their queer identity in the context of the novel. For example, there are several instances in which Elio seems to feel disgusted at the idea of being with Oliver. By the end of this part, however, their symbolic status as soulmates is consolidated. Then, in part three they go together on a trip to Rome before Oliver leaves in which we can see a more open relationship as they are not as self-conscious to be seen as a couple in the city as they were in the town of B.

The last part is the one in which they have to say goodbye, since Oliver is going back to the United States. Nevertheless, Elio fills the void of uncertainty by narrating different time jumps in which they meet again in the future. Firstly, Oliver visits the Perlmans for Christmas that same year and tells them he is going to get married next Summer. Secondly, two years after 1987 Elio sends a letter to Oliver informing him of the death of a dear friend of them in B. and he replies. Thirdly, nine years after the letter, Oliver visits B. with his wife and two children but Elio is not present, so they talk

on the phone. Then, fifteen years after 1987 Elio visits Oliver at his office in university and they go for a few drinks. Oliver invites Elio to have supper with his family so that he can meet them but Elio declines. Lastly, twenty years after they first met Elio and Oliver see each other again in B. and the novel ends. These time jumps have the function of explaining Elio and Oliver's separate lives after the Summer of 1987.

In order to carry out the analysis of this novel in connection to my hypothesis about silences and identities I will start by establishing a strong theoretical framework that explores silence and the different identities that I chose to focus on: queer, Jewish and cultural. First of all, I will explore the phenomenon of silence through Bindeman (2017), who has a book titled *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art*, in which he analyses the different uses and representations of silence. Furthermore, I will connect silence with identity through an analysis of Butler's (1997) study of censorship in *Excitable Speech* and Foucault's (1978) exploration of the silencing effect that taboos have in speech in *The History of Sexuality*.

After reviewing the studies about silence, I will begin with the second part of my theoretical framework, the examination of the different identities that will be subject of study. By understanding the history and portrayal of these identities, we can establish a motivation for silence. Firstly, I will investigate the public opinion around homosexuality during the 1960s, as explained by Hocquenghem (2009) in *El deseo homosexual*. I will also explore some of the ideas proposed by Butler (2010) in *Gender Trouble* that comment on aspects around homosexuality and heteronormativity that will be relevant in the analysis of the novel. Secondly, in order to establish a link between silence and Jewish memory I will focus specifically on the consequences of the Holocaust in the memory of European Jews. Hirsch's (2008) theory on postmemory in her article "The Generation of Postmemory" will be a very important key concept in this part of my study. Besides, I will also explore Rothberg's (2009) *Multidirectional*

Memory to understand how different identities and memories may interact with each other. In this section I will also review Marcus' (2021) article "'In the Key of Loss': Aciman, Guadagnino, and *Call Me By Your Name*", which deals with important biographical information about André Aciman, which will prove to be important in the understanding of the novel, especially due to his experience with exile and nostalgia. Furthermore, I will add some extra findings between queer identity and Jewish memory as explained in Roden's (2019) article "Queer Jewish memory: André Aciman's *Call Me By Your Name*". Lastly, I will use Hall's (1996, 1997) studies *Questions of Cultural Identity* and *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* that deal with the ideas of culture and identity. These will be useful to explain how identities are formed and how languages are an important part of cultural identification.

All in all, the theoretical framework will help to understand how silences can conceal and reveal identity. When identities have been historically oppressed, then their existence is erased from speech. Silenced identities will be forced to bend the limits of discourse, so that they can exist indirectly in speech. The implications that this indirect speech creates are what I will be analysing in my final degree dissertation. By exploring the ideas that will be presented in the following theoretical framework, I will be able to find a motivation for silence in *Call Me By Your Name* and thus, proving my initial hypothesis that silence both conceals and reveals an individual's identity.

2.- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this theoretical framework I will begin by explaining how silence can be understood as indirect speech, since I want to analyse the characters unspoken implications in the novel. In order to do this, I will look at some different interpretations and typologies that have been studied about the phenomenon of silence. Besides, I will take into consideration the consequences that violence has on language. This will help us comprehend how silence in speech can have a deeper meaning than just mere quietness and how it must be interpreted to understand its origin. More specifically, I will look at silences as a way of hiding one's experiences and one's identity. In relation to this, I will analyse the idea of censorship, because it is one of the most common techniques of silencing speech and repressing freedom. Moreover, I will investigate how turning an identity or a topic into a taboo is an effective way of erasing it. For this specific section, I will read about the taboo surrounding sexuality.

Then I will begin to examine the three identities I will be exploring in the analysis of the dissertation: queer identity, Jewish memory, and cultural identity. I will study these identities in terms of their relationship with silence, particularly the queer and Jewish identities. I want to discover why they have been continuously silenced and hidden by individuals. In order to do this, I will revise the public history and experience of homosexuals during the 1960s and 1970s and how their treatment influenced the expression of their sexual identity. Besides, I will explore the consequences of antisemitism, more specifically the Holocaust among generations of Jews and in collective memory. Not only will we deal with the Jewish memory originated with the Holocaust, but also the feelings of nostalgia caused by exile, since both of them define the Jewish identity. In the case of cultural identity, my approach will be more related to

linguistic and cultural differences between individuals and the way in which these identities are formed.

2.1.- The Phenomenon of Silence

The concept of silence is generally understood as lack of sound. Nonetheless, silence is not only found in quietness but also in speeches when we consider the implicit meaning in words. In indirect speech silence is all that remains unsaid and hidden in that inexplicitness. Therefore, I will be focusing on the instances of silence that establish a connection between silence and discourse, since what we find in André Aciman's novel are not exactly instances of utter silence, but implications in meaning in the characters' words. Namely, we are concerned with the silence and implications that emerge from indirect discourse. Steven L. Bindeman (2017) has a book dedicated to the different manifestations of silence titled *Silence in Philosophy, Literature and Art*. Bindeman proposes that silences "can center us in the here and now and also take us far away from it" (1). The reasoning behind this is that silences can help us focus on our surroundings or drift away in deep thought to a state of contemplation. However, Bindeman's statement can be understood as silences acting as a link between the moment of silence and what triggered its use. Thus, silence hides in the present meanings that originate from a past. For example, a person might not be able to express aloud a certain topic due to their personal trauma in the present. However, the silence they keep takes them back to another moment in time, the one in which that traumatic event occurred to them. The reason they are silent now originates from something not in the present. Therefore, silence captures its subject between the present moment and the weight of memory.

Judith Butler (1997) discusses further the effect of violence and trauma in speech in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, as she says that “certain kinds of violence disable language” (6). This quotation argues how silence provoked by violent acts may not be a choice, but an involuntary traumatic reaction. Consequently, a person forced into silence by their own suffering “loses the ability to document in language the event of torture” (6). If the event becomes unspeakable, the only proof of said event is the silence that remains in its place. Furthermore, according to Bindeman, silences beg “to be broken, leaving in its wake words pregnant with meaning and demanding to be said” (2). What words cannot say, silence reveals. This is why he says that silence is an alternative form of indirect speech, because “[s]ilence enables us to mean more than we actually say [...] reaching past the limits of language” (147). It gives “access to important and hitherto inaccessible aspects of human experience” (3).

Bindeman distinguishes between two types of silences: disruptive and healing (3). Disruptive silence is that one which exists in linear time and exposes the limitations of language to express certain ideas or arguments. It is practical because it redefines and expands discourse and speech. Healing silence, on the other hand, exists beyond language and is atemporal. It is a spiritual type of silence, one that does not need words. While disruptive silence disconnects being and world, as it exposes the limitations of language when describing phenomena in said world, healing silence connects self and world because it is a type of contemplative state that simply does not need the use of language.

Furthermore, Bindeman introduces scholar Bernard Dauenhauer’s typology of silence. Firstly, Dauenhauer talks about two categories of silence linked to performance: intervening silence and fore-and-after silence. The former is “what punctuates the words and phrases in speech” (5), such as the pauses in comedic

timing. The latter is the type of silence right before a performance and the silence after it finishes. Secondly, Dauenhauer suggests the type of deep silence, unrelated to performance. He clarifies that “deep silence can occur only if some other form of utterance is associated with it” (5). Dauenhauer explains three modes in which deep silence can happen, although there are many more. The first one is the deep silence between intimates, whether lovers or enemies, which scarcely requires the intervention of words. Bindeman says that this silence “communicates more than the words do” (6). The second form is liturgical silence, a type of silence related to religion and prayer. The last type is different from the previous two, the silence of the to-be-said: “It tests all that has been said, and in doing so it performs the normative function of validating or invalidating what has been uttered before it” (6). Bindeman adds that all the three silences from Dauenhauer’s typology can have either a positive or a negative emotional impact.

Moreover, Bindeman studies Dauenhauer’s phenomenological approach to silence. This scholar differentiates between muteness and silence saying that “unlike muteness, true silence necessarily involves conscious activity” (5). In other words, silence is a language on itself, as it holds message. However, and considering Bindeman’s interpretation of Kleinberg-Levin’s reflection on silence and language, “silence without the creative capacity of human consciousness to make something of it is utterly meaningless” (9). This means that silence will remain a simple phenomenon unless its meaning is interpreted by humans through language or artistic expression. Besides, Kleinberg-Levin believes that there are silences that can be penetrated and that have been motivated by a diverse number of personal experiences (9). This interpretation concludes that silence is deeply related to a person’s own experiences and, therefore, their identity.

2.2.- Silence and Censorship

When an identity becomes taboo in a culture or society, the speech that surrounds said identity must be censored and silenced. In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* Judith Butler defines censorship as “the restriction of speech” (1997: 127). In her study, she introduces two types of censorship: the explicit and the implicit (130). The former is the one implemented by political regulation; the latter is the one that encourages the censored item to be culturally taboo. Implicit censorship creates the unspeakable. Nevertheless, Butler argues how censorship can never be completely successful in its purpose, “because the text in question takes on new life as part of the very discourse produced by the mechanism of censorship” (130). Therefore, by trying to silence these speeches, censorship acknowledges their importance and fails to fulfil its mission, as Butler says in the following quotation:

The failure of censorship to effect a complete censoring of the speech under question has everything to do with (a) the failure to institute a complete or total subjectification through legal means and (b) the failure to circumscribe effectively the social domain of speakable discourse. (132)

In spite of the efforts of the law to silence a certain type of speech, it will never be able to fully control individuals or the public discourse. However, Butler argues that the censorship of speech is the byproduct and not the real aim of censorship itself (133). The true power of censorship is the subjectification of individuals “according to explicit and implicit norms” (133) and speech suffers as a result. It regulates the whole domain of speakable discourse because censorship wants to shape it according to a chosen norm. Therefore, individual speech will be determined by the rules of that

domain and will be subject to its norm. In Butler's words: "The question is not what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all" (133). Butler points out that, according to Jacques Lacan, "entrance into language comes at a price" (135). Becoming the subject of a linguistic norm, entails obeying its rules, such as the limits established by censorship of what is unspeakable and what is speakable. If a subject gets close to overstepping those limits, they could be banished to the realm of the unspeakable (139). In contrast, "the subject who speaks within the sphere of the speakable implicitly reinvokes the foreclosure on which it depends and, thus, depends on it again" (139-140). As a result, the subject is inevitably caught between the limits of the speakable. In order to escape from them the subject must expand the language beyond its limits through the exploitation and redefinition of those boundaries (140). Finally, Butler concludes that, although it is censorship that restricts agency, it also makes it possible:

This paradox does not refute the possibility of decision, but merely suggests that agency is implicated in power; decision becomes possible only on the condition of a decided field, one that is not decided once and for all. This prior decision performed by no one does not foreclose agency, but constitutes the foreclosure that first makes agency possible. (141)

In other words, there must be a set of rules for agency to exist, because they enable decision-making. Agency is one's capacity to act; thus, it must exist in a context shaped by law and rules. For instance, a subject of linguistic norms must follow its rules and respect its boundaries of the unspeakable. Nonetheless, it is through language that a subject gains the ability to redefine those very boundaries.

2.3.- Silence and Sexuality

In his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault (1978) investigates the theme of silence in relation to themes of sexuality. He believes that sexuality as a taboo topic was especially strong during the 19th century (Victorian era) and that we still suffer from its consequences nowadays (3). The subject of sex was relegated to a domestic sphere, guarded by the traditional heterosexual couple, with reproduction as its only aim. As Foucault writes: “On the subject of sex, silence became the rule” (3). During this period, morality was heavily regulated through repression via silence, denial, and shame:

These are the characteristic features attributed to repression, which serve to distinguish it from the prohibitions maintained by penal law: repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know. (4)

Instead of prohibiting sexual speech in the public sphere, repression intended to erase it. If sexuality is not successfully kept in secrecy by an individual, they will be socially erased. One must “renounce [one]self or suffer the penalty of being suppressed” (84). However, Foucault argues that, since “illegitimate sexualities” (4) could not be recognised in a domestic conjugal sphere, society had to find a place where they could hide them, “if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit” (4). As a result, subjects to illegitimate sexualities, such as prostitution or homosexuality, were banished to brothels and mental institutions because they were not allowed to have ‘normal’ jobs on account of their ‘perversion’. This is why Foucault highlights the hypocrisy of the society of the time for only tolerating these sexualities if

they can be contained and exploited for a bigger benefit. Furthermore, he reveals that the repression of sexuality was a means to control a work-driven society (6). Sexuality needed to be regulated to ensure that workers were focused on work in an era marked by its industrialization.

Nonetheless, Foucault discusses that repression cannot be easily escaped, as “[it] has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age” (5). Therefore, it is necessary a radical change that redefines politics, economy, discourse, and ideology to overcome the consequences of repression. If an individual talks about sex in a repressed environment, they disrupt the law while also coming closer to undo the repression (6). In order to achieve a future where sex is finally free from silenced speech the repression must be defied several times (9). However, due to its centuries-long oppression, the route towards sexual freedom “is bound to make little headway for a long time before succeeding in its mission” (10).

Furthermore, Foucault acknowledges that limiting freedom instead of completely repressing it benefits power structures, since it is “the general form of its acceptability” (86). Therefore, secrecy is given to individuals as a form of freedom because the identity that has to remain hidden can still exist in the realm of silence. Nevertheless, it is owing to that little freedom that individuals unconsciously tolerate the power that dominates them. Despite the illusion of freedom that authority wants to create, the tools used for oppression by power structures can also be the ones that free individuals from their dominion. Foucault reveals this in the following paragraph:

[D]iscourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it

fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance. (101)

Discourse is used by power to oppress and control, but it can also be used by individuals to resist and question its authority. Likewise, the secrecy that is imposed and forced into individuals is also the domain where resistance hides before rebellion. In the end, Foucault's account on the repression of sexuality is closely linked to Butler's statements on censorship. They are methods through which power is exerted and through which everything that is found beyond the boundaries of the speakable domain according to the established law is imposed to silence.

2.4.- Silence and Queer Identity

We have established that silence has a function and that it is motivated by mechanisms of oppression and censorship. Nevertheless, in order to understand silence, we must see beyond its phenomenon and find the meaning hidden in it. Considering that what triggers silences in an individual is the repression of their identity; I will focus now on the first identity I will be analysing in this dissertation.

Guy Hocquenghem (2009) wrote in *El deseo homosexual* about the public situation of homosexuality during the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, homosexuality was mostly dealt with as a crime or a psychological issue. Homosexuality was thought to be closely related to criminality, in the sense that they were believed to commit more crimes than a non-homosexual person. Besides, they were considered criminals and were often included in the same category as other groups of criminals, such as

procurers, drug dealers or gangsters. As an example, Hocquenghem cites the following Spanish law from the 1970s about social danger:

Título 1, capítulo 1: Se declaran peligros sociales a las categorías de personas siguientes: 1. los vagabundos. 2. los proxenetas. 3. los homosexuales... 7. los enfermos mentales que por falta de cuidados, constituyen un peligro para la sociedad... 9. los traficantes de drogas... 11. los que se juntan en pandillas y cuyo objeto es manifiestamente delictivo... (41)

Not only was homosexuality believed to be related to criminality, but it also thought to showcase an underlying pathology. Therefore, homosexual desire was treated as a problem that needed to be solved, as Hocquenghem mentions: “Se nos explica que es posible, con la ayuda de tratamientos psicológicos, curar a un tercio de los homosexuales” (63). Once a person reveals to feel homosexual desire, they will be subject to legal and medical prejudices. Moreover, whether they refuse to be ‘cured’ or are unable to get rid of their homosexuality through these ‘treatments’, they will always be rejected by society (63). Hocquenghem summarises this view of homosexuality as: “Culpable potencial frente a la ley, el homosexual es un enfermo potencial frente a la psiquiatría” (64). As a result, the society of the time decided that although they had to admit the existence of the homosexual desire, they would not tolerate its affirmation (44).

Hocquenghem believed the reason behind this extreme hatred towards homosexuality was due to what he called the anti-homosexual paranoia. There is a paranoid society who sees a homosexual conspiracy that will disrupt the perfect performance of the heterosexual machine (27). If a person discovers that someone close to them, like a coworker or a friend, is homosexual they believe that that person will immediately feel attracted to every person from the same sex, including oneself. In

other words, this paranoia emerges from the possibility of seeing oneself as object to homosexual desire. As Hocquenghem says: “Hay sexualización espontánea de toda relación con un homosexual” (27). Similarly, homosexuals live with a constant sensation of being chased, which is related to the oppressive view of their sexuality. He explains that anti-homosexual oppression is a reflection of homosexual desire (27), because “el miedo a su propia homosexualidad lleva al hombre social al temor paranoico de verla aparecer a su alrededor” (28). Therefore, this hatred is born out of a fear of discovering one’s own possible homosexuality. Furthermore, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler (2010) writes about Monique Wittig and Michel Foucault’s theory that heterosexual norm preserves the binary sexual identity and that this “category of sex would itself disappear and, indeed, dissipate through the disruption and displacement of heterosexual hegemony” (25). Therefore, maintaining a heterosexual hegemony avoids a revolution towards queer freedom, not only in the sense of sexual orientation but also of gender identities. Paradoxically, Butler explains how establishing gender norms is what also produces out-of-the-norm genders and sexualities:

“Intelligible” genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the “expression” or “effect” of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (23)

Societies create laws that define what is coherent and continuous, such as the commonly accepted sexual orientations and gender identities in a specific culture.

However, that law is also defining what identities are outside of it, what Butler calls discontinuity and incoherence due to its opposition to what is understood as continuity and coherence. The same way anti-homosexuality emerges from a fear of discovering one's own homosexual desire, gender norms legitimise the existence of non-heterosexual and non-binary expressions.

Moreover, Hocquenghem talks about how anti-homosexuality campaigns from 1960 were justified under the connection that society created between homosexuality and venereal diseases (42). What is more, Hocquenghem describes how people of that period believed homosexuality to be one of the main causes for the spreading of venereal diseases. This association between the two was also derived from paranoia, as people considered that “el homosexual transmite la sífilis como transmite la homosexualidad” (43). While in the 1960s homosexual desire was to blame for the spreading of syphilis, Preciado explains in the epilogue to *El deseo homosexual* and titled “Terror anal”, how between 1980 and 1990 anti-homosexual discourse used the appearance of AIDS and its expansion to justify hatred (163). In relation to this, Frederick S. Roden (2019) wrote in “Queer Jewish memory: André Aciman’s *Call Me By Your Name*” that the quote “Is it better to speak or to die?”, was not only related to the confession of the love, but also a reference to a slogan by the activist group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) (203). This slogan was “Silence = Death” and Roden says that in the quote from the novel “silence was not only failure to address the epidemic; it was also the closet of the ‘gay disease’” (203).

Furthermore, around the time of the emergence of psychoanalysis in the 19th century, psychoanalysts like Freud distinguished between two types of homosexuals:

La homosexualidad latente, estimada por los psicoanalistas, corresponde a la opresión de la homosexualidad patente; y encontraremos la carga más grande de homosexualidad latente

en las maquinarias sociales especialmente anti-homosexuales: el ejército, la escuela, la Iglesia, el deporte, etcétera. En el nivel colectivo, la sublimación en cuestión constituye el medio de transformar el deseo en deseo de represión. (Hocquenghem 46)

Essentially, Freud differentiated between exteriorised and visible homosexuality (patent), and repressed and non-visible homosexual desire (latent). The latter type of homosexual is motivated to hide their desire because of the environment that surrounds them, which is normally constituted by oppressive institutions. These establishments are also the ones typically presided over by men, which just uncovers the relevant relationship between oppressive masculinity and anti-homosexuality.

Furthermore, the oppression of homosexuality hides deep in its roots the hate towards women. As Hocquenghem explains, in heterosexual societies women's only apparent function is to be the object of desire for men (54). However, in a homosexual relationship between men women are not the object of desire. They have failed to fulfil that function. As a result, under this misogynistic perspective they are to blame for the existence of homosexual desire. This idea is developed by Hocquenghem in his book, as we can see in the following quotation: "Así, «la mujer», que por otro lado no tiene como tal ningún lugar en la sociedad, designada como el *único* objeto sexual social, es también *la falta* atribuida a la relación homosexual" (54). Nevertheless, this interpretation of homosexual desire as the lack of the feminine object of sexual desire does not take into account the existence of other sexualities, such as bisexuality or homosexuality among women. This is what Judith Butler meant when she argued in *Gender Trouble* that the female body is constantly defined in a "pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language" (14). In her analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's study in *The Second Sex*, Butler explains how female bodies are "marked within a masculinist discourse" (17), since they are described using a language that accepts

the masculine as the norm, while the feminine is the 'other' or is described by its differences with the masculine. In the words of Luce Irigaray, "instead of a self-limiting linguistic gesture that grants alterity or difference to women, phallogocentrism offers a name to eclipse the feminine and take its place" (Butler, 2010: 18). In other words, instead of allowing the feminine to define itself without the intervention of phallogocentrism, this masculinist discourse erases this opportunity by defining it on its own male-centred terms.

The ultimate purpose of hatred and oppression of the homosexual desire is none other than to cure homosexuality through guilt and embarrassment, since "vergüenza y homosexualidad están estrechamente ligadas" (64). Through the means previously mentioned, homosexual identity was deeply affected by negative emotions and defined by its hatred. Hocquenghem clarifies that the reason behind forcing the feeling of guilt into homosexuals is to make homosexual desire disappear:

La psiquiatrización de la homosexualidad no ha sustituido la represión penal: más bien la ha acompañado. Encarcelar a los homosexuales bastaba en una época en la que el sodomita era un degenerado, al mismo nivel que el tonto o el loco. La represión moderna necesita un juego justificativo, un vaivén entre la culpabilidad por las leyes y la psicología de la culpabilidad. La comprensión del psicólogo acompaña a la acción del juez: este representa la institución positiva del juicio que realiza la normalidad, aquel arraiga la culpabilidad dentro del individuo mismo. Para que la represión sea eficaz, conviene que el culpable la reconozca como necesaria. (49)

The rejection of one's own homosexuality is what Butler calls in *Gender Trouble* melancholic denial/preservation of homosexuality. Through the theories of Freud, Butler explains how in homosexual desire "both the desire and the object require renunciation and so become subject to the internalizing strategies of melancholia" (75).

In other words, a homosexual must reject their own desire in the context of an anti-homosexual society, which creates a sense of loss or melancholia within themselves. Moreover, the loss of the desired object causes them to undergo a process of identification through which the lover starts to become part of the self as a new “part of the ego through the permanent internalization of the other’s attributes” (74). As a result, although the homosexual desire is suppressed, it is preserved through the new form of identity.

Hocquenghem describes that homosexuals were prone to feel confused about their sexual identity or to go through a loss of identity, as the only sexuality accepted and recognized at the time could be heterosexuality (77). Ultimately, homosexuality was a taboo identity that needed to be hidden or expressed privately so as to make it disappear. As he writes in his conclusion, “tratar con menosprecio y olvido estas formas del placer es un buen medio de hacerlas desaparecer” (129). As a result, homosexual desire had to be expressed in silence or not be expressed at all.

2.5.- Silence and Jewish Memory

The second identity I will be analysing in this dissertation is the religious one; more specifically, the Jewish identity. Antisemitism had existed for centuries before the events of World War II; however, it was the genocide caused by the rising Nazi ideology of the 20th century what strongly defined the identity of European Jews in the years that followed. The connection between Jew and Judaism changed forever as an aftermath of trauma and the history of Jews in Europe, specifically, was bounded to the violence they had suffered during the Holocaust. This means that the events of World War II did not only affect the survivors of violence, since the next generations

'inherited' the memory of their antecedents. As Richard Terdiman says: "memory is the past made present" (Rothberg, 2009: 3).

The scholar Marianne Hirsch called this phenomenon postmemory. In 2008 she published an article titled "The Generation of Postmemory", in which she defined the term as follows:

Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. (106-107)

Hirsch challenges the common meaning that we tend to give to the concept of memory. Memory is generally understood as the ability to remember in the present the experiences of the past, hence the noun 'memories' being used to refer to the recollections that are kept in our minds as evidence of those past experiences. Therefore, it can be paradoxical to use that same word to imply the remembrance that one person has of the traumatic experiences lived by a previous generation. Nevertheless, in Hirsch's own words: "memory can be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event" (106). This entails that postmemory does not suggest a correlation between postmemory subject and experience, but rather that it drives that subject to create memory from an external experience through a process of projection (107). Thus, she clarifies that "[p]ostmemory is not identical to memory: it is "post," but at the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force" (109). This is, although the memory is inherited from one generation to another, both

memories are essentially different. Moreover, she recognised that inheriting memories and trauma from past generations threatened the identity of the postmemory subject, as it “[risks] having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation” (107). She explains that “children of those directly affected by collective trauma inherit a horrific, unknown, and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive” (112). An individual that is a subject of postmemory must carry their predecessor’s trauma while also developing their own identity, which will eventually be affected by the heavy weight of someone else’s memory. Postmemory suggests a link between past and its consequences in the present, hence the term chosen by Hirsch.

In reality, the idea of an inherited memory has been studied for different authors before and after Hirsch, but all of them name it differently. Some of the examples that Hirsch includes in her article are Ellen Fine’s ‘absent memory’, Celia Lury and Alison Landsberg’s ‘prosthetic memory’, Nadine Fresco’s *mémoire des cendres*, and James Young’s ‘received history’ (105). Notwithstanding, Hirsch considered that the prefix post- was the most adequate because it invokes “a particular end-of-century/turn-of-century moment of looking backward rather than ahead and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past rather than initiating new paradigms” (106). Inspired by terms such as postcolonialism and postmodernism, Hirsch coined postmemory not only to express what follows a certain period of time but also the effects that prevail after its end and the connection that remains between both (106). She first introduced this term in 1992 when, while examining some photographs from Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus*, she realised that it was necessary to find a name that could encompass the idea of inherited memory that she saw in his work (107). She clarifies that, because the narrators of *Maus* are first and second generation, father and son, it demonstrates

“how familial postmemory works through the transformations and mediations from the father’s memory to the son’s postmemory” (119).

Marianne Hirsch introduces in her article the studies of Jan and Aleida Assmann about the transmission of memories among generations. Jan Assmann suggests two types of collective memories, based on the notion of collective memory by Maurice Halbwachs: communicative memory and cultural memory. On the one hand, communicative memory takes place between adult contemporaries who have experienced an event and “who can pass on their bodily and affective connection to that event to their descendants” (110). This memory, Hirsch clarifies, is inherited through three to four generations. Communicative memory is fundamentally similar to Hirsch’s definition of postmemory, but rather than focusing on the inheritance of memory, Assmann’s term concentrates on the transmission from the first generation’s point of view. On the other hand, cultural memory emerges from the desire of the following generations to preserve their ancestors’ memory in an “institutionalized archive” (110). Hirsch explain how, years later, Aleida Assmann adapted this categorization to four memory formats in accordance with Jan Assmann’s two main types (110). Firstly, the communicative memory is subdivided into individual memory and family/group memory. Secondly, Jan Assmann’s cultural memory corresponds to Aleida Assmann’s national/political memory and cultural/archival memory. The reasoning behind her typology is that memories are, first of all, individual and they are transferred from one individual to another. It is then that individual memory starts to transform into family/group memory, when remembrance is shared between members of the same community. Hirsch highlights here Assmann’s specification of family as a “privileged site of memorial transmission” (110), as the family is the immediate group closer to an individual with whom beliefs and experiences are shared, resulting in intergenerational memory transfer. In the case of national/political memory and

cultural/archival memory, she explains that the transmission is instead transgenerational, because “they are no longer mediated through embodied practice but solely through symbolic systems” (110).

Nonetheless, Hirsch argues that “Jan and Aleida Assmann’s typological distinctions do not specifically account for the ruptures introduced by collective historical trauma” (111), since violent events disrupt the connection between generations and their transmission of memory is affected as a result of trauma. In order to reunify that connection, she believes that postmemorial work is essential:

Postmemorial work, I want to suggest—and this is the central point of my argument in this essay—strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less-directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory, which can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone. (111)

In other words, the artistic work created by descendant generations transfers family memory to collective remembrance. Even when the direct victims from violent events have already passed away, their memory survives in time and history thanks to collective memory. Postmemorial work ensures that the historical trauma that emerges from violence does not fade into oblivion. For instance, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* as a postmemorial work is an example of family memory, since he was inspired by the story of his father as a survivor of the Holocaust (112). By creating *Maus*, the family memory has been transferred to cultural memory and will not be forgotten. Finally, Hirsch mentions in her article that although she chose the Holocaust as reference for her investigation of postmemory, she believes that the term can be applied to other fields of study related to traumatic transfer (108).

In *Multidirectional Memory*, Michael Rothberg (2009) also concerned himself with the study of collective memory, and the link between a traumatic past and its consequences in the present. More specifically, Rothberg argues whether the existence of different groups of victims of histories of violence causes a competition between them in the domain of collective memory. Whether the memory of one group displaces the remembrance of another. He criticises opinions like that of Walter Benn Michaels who believed that collective memory is somewhat limited in the sense that all the different histories of victimization cannot coexist in it, so those groups must compete to determine which ones should be remembered despite the erasure of others (2-3). Nevertheless, Rothberg challenges the existence of a competitive collective memory and regards “memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (3). In his opinion, when there is an ongoing discussion about group A being more rightful to occupy a commemorative space occupied by another group B, people unconsciously use the platform offered by the widespread memory of B to divulge the memory of A. Memory, as multidirectional, proposes a space in which different histories of victimization cohabit, interact, and complement each other within collective memory. Multidirectional memory is not exclusive to a specific group of victims, since it “acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites” (11).

In the same way as Marianne Hirsch, Rothberg chose the memory of the Holocaust to illustrate his concept of multidirectional memory, because the worldwide reach of Holocaust memory has functioned as a platform for other histories to be articulated (6). As an example, Rothberg mentions how the practice of torture during the Algerian War of Independence triggered in France Holocaust memory, because witnesses found a connection between extrajudicial violence in the Algerian War with

the genocide during the Nazi regime (17). As a result, future debates on torture not only triggered Holocaust memory but also the memory of the Algerian War due to the link that had been established between the two previous years. This phenomenon is a clear example of Rothberg's multidirectional memory "that convoluted, sometimes historically unjustified, back-and-forth movement of seemingly distant collective memories in and out of public consciousness" (17). Moreover, when we consider a specific history of violence within collective memory unique and isolated from the others, we create a hierarchy of suffering that incites competition between different histories of victimization (9). The isolation of a history of violence removes that event from historical agency, erasing its possible discussion and analysis in political, ideological, cultural or social fields, since the discourse of uniqueness portrays it as an isolated case unrelated to historical processes (9). Besides, Rothberg explains how "Deborah Lipstadt [...] suggests links between those who relativize the Holocaust through comparison and analogy and those who deny its very existence" (9). Both relativisation and denial of a history of victimisation threaten with their complete erasure from history.

Michael Rothberg clarifies that memory encompasses at the same time "the individual, embodied, and lived side and the collective, social, and constructed side of our relationships to the past" (4). Therefore, he establishes that there is a strong connection between memory and identity. Notwithstanding, he believes that this link is not a simple straight line since memory does not directly determine the development of an identity but rather influences it. The connection between memory and identity, just like Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory, does not entail the substitution or exclusion of other memories and identities on account of just one (4). Rothberg resolves that "our relationship to the past does partially determine who we are in the

present, but never straightforwardly and directly, and never without unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider other” (5).

Another scholar that examined Holocaust-related theory was Bindeman (2017) in *Silence in Philosophy, Literature and Art*. He addressed the problem of speaking about such a traumatic event like the Holocaust as unspeakable. He shares the view on the topic from the author Elie Wiesel, who explored how silence could be born as a reaction to “institutionalised torture and killing” (129) in his novel *The Testament*. In his work, he creates a link between silence and freedom and how it is silence rather than words that kills, transforming people into subjects to silence. Bindeman writes that “in response to the Holocaust—or to all forms of inhumanity for that matter— neither speech nor silence is acceptable” (129). When it comes to the Holocaust it is difficult to determine whether speaking or remaining silent is more adequate, because silence is accusatory in the sense that it reveals our incapability to respond to violence and the consequent self-judgement we experience because of it (130).

Nonetheless, the Jewish identity outside of the Holocaust context in Europe could have been affected by other histories of antisemitism. Laura Marcus (2021) writes in her article “‘In the Key of Loss’ Aciman, Guadagnino and *Call Me By Your Name*” about André Aciman’s own experience of exile. The Arab-Israeli War that started in 1948 caused the expulsion of Arabs in the territory under Jewish occupation and, as a consequence, the expulsion of Jewish in predominantly Arab countries, such as Egypt in Aciman’s case. For this same reason, being Sephardic Jews, he and his family left Alexandria, their hometown, in 1965 and moved to Italy, France and, eventually, the United States (366). Aciman is known for his essays and memoirs, in which he deals with the themes of exile, memory and nostalgia. Moreover, Marcus adds that specifically the city of Alexandria has a deep connection with the trope of nostalgia, because of the still very present memory of the burning of its library (366).

So much so that a press attaché called Lawrence Durrell named it “the capital of memory” (qtd. in Marcus 367); an expression that Aciman would use later on to title the first essay of his collection *False Papers* in 2000. Marcus refers to him as “an anatomist of nostalgia” (370), because he explores and investigates the characteristics of nostalgia. Aciman defines nostalgia with the term itself: “[t]he site of nostalgia is writing and speculating and thinking about nostalgia” (qtd. in Marcus 370).

Marcus applies Svetlana Boym’s nostalgia typology to Aciman’s work. Boym distinguishes between a “reflective nostalgia” and a “restorative nostalgia” (qtd. in Marcus 370). The former considers that nostalgia does not look for the restoration of a past and, instead, reflects on the remaining memory; whilst the latter longs for a recovery in the present of a past that is regarded as timeless. However, Marcus argues that Boym’s categorization does not coincide with the paradoxical understanding that Aciman has about nostalgia (370). On the one hand, Aciman’s definition of nostalgia as nostalgia itself fits the category of reflective nostalgia. On the other hand, this quote taken from Aciman’s *Alibis* challenges Boym’s view: “The Egypt I craved to return to was not the one I knew, or couldn’t wait to flee, but the one where I learned to invent being *somewhere else, someone else*” (qtd. in Marcus 370). Here, he confesses that the Egypt he longed for was not a real lived memory, but an unreal invented past, hence his interpretation cannot fit in Boym’s typology, because he believes that false memories can function as the object of nostalgia. Thus, his approach to nostalgia is through contrafactuality since he has “hope of restoring a remembered past in an imagined future” (qtd. in Marcus 371). He revealed in an interview with writer Colm Tóibín that he needs to have something lost in order to write, as “his motivation is not to capture present experiences of places for their own sake, in their immediacy, but to log them for a future time in which they will have become the past” (Marcus 371).

Laura Marcus introduces the work of the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips in relevant connection to Aciman's nostalgia of the unreal invented past. Phillips calls this the un-lived life:

[T]he un-lived life became a haunting presence in a life legitimated by nothing more than the desire to live it. [...] We become obsessed, in a new way, by what is missing in our lives; and by what sabotages the pleasure that we seek... So we may need to think of ourselves as always living a double life, the one that we wish for and the one that we practise; the one that never happens and the one that keeps happening. (qtd. in Marcus 372)

Aciman's story of exile invites him to imagine a life that is not his own, but the one he wished for. The displacement from his homeland is the something lost that inspires his writings, specifically his memoirs. Marcus adds that a memoir "may be "truer" to the un-lived life than to the lived one, and the novel may be more committed to "what really happened" than the "memoir"" (373).

In his essay "Queer Jewish memory: André Aciman's *Call Me By Your Name*" Roden also deals with the importance of memory. He says that "[t]he ambiguity between knowing and remembering is the stuff of Jewish memory" (195), because Jewish memory is linked both with historical knowledge and collective memory. Nonetheless, Roden believes that Aciman's novel contributes to the creation of a new Jewish memory. Similarly to Hirsch's analysis of art as a channel through which memory is transmitted, Roden believes that transferring memory through artistic forms is a way of challenging a patriarchal heteronormative generation:

If we accept that memory is, or can be, a queer thing, producing art rather than fathering children, the Jewish imperative to patriarchal generation and continuity of identity is queer in a homogeneous culture that prefers to forget or negate Jewish difference. (196)

Roden says that memory transmission through art, instead of the traditional method of reproduction, conforms an alternative way of preserving Jewish memory. This method parallels the incapability of transferring queer memory to offspring and instead doing it through artistic manifestations. In this sense, Jewish memory acts in the same way queer memory does, challenging a homogenous culture that discriminates all that is non-normative in a patriarchal heteronormative context. Finally, Roden finishes his essay with a reminder that the only thing that is left from the past is memory, and that this must be preserved through art when reproduction is not possible: “The past is gone, long live the past; its survival is in memory, but also in the postmemory not simply based on generation, but its evocation in art that creates even as it fails to procreate. Futurity is found in poetry from the ashes” (208).

2.6.- Cultural Identity

After carefully exploring themes of queer and Jewish identities, I will close this theoretical framework with a section dedicated to cultural identity. By cultural identity, I refer to characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, and language. In order to explain how cultural identity is formed we must understand what identity means in this context. In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall (1996) writes in the introduction that the theme of identity always arises when dealing with the relationship between subjects and discursive practices; this is, ways of behaving, speaking, and thinking (2). However, Hall believes that when it comes to subjectification and discursive practices, the most appropriate term is identification instead of identity. He describes identification as “a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal” (2). This identification is a process in

constant construction that, like many other terms, is defined across difference; by what it is not. Identity, however, is what Hall calls to the result of the identification process. He defines identities as “increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (4). According to Hall, identities are not the answer to “‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (4). We form identities through different identification processes. They are “produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices” (4). In other words, identities are constructed through difference, because they are defined by their relation to the excluded, to what it is not. Moreover, identity is fragmented, as it is not a united single identity, but a combination of diverse identifications that are in continuous transformation. Furthermore, identity is “the meeting point” (5) between social definition of an individual and the response of the individual to that definition. Hall ultimately defines identities as follows:

Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate - identical - to the subject processes which are invested in them. (6)

For Hall, identity is a combination of social and individual discourse, defined through difference and absence, and constituted by other multiple identities whilst remaining in constant negotiation. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* from 1997, Stuart Hall introduces another central aspect of culture:

representation. He explains that “culture is about ‘shared meanings’” (1), and that language is the tool through which meaning is shared. Language allows two interlocutors to share the same worldview, “because it operates as a *representational system*” (1). This is, we use symbols such as written words or sounds to represent our messages to our interlocutors, this is how we communicate, or share meaning, within a culture. Therefore, when Hall says in *Questions of Cultural Identity* that identities are representations (6), he means that identities are shaped by the interpretation that society gives them.

In the introduction to *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall defines culture firstly as “whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group” (2). Nonetheless, he clarifies that his approach on culture is more specialized:

Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ — between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. (2)

Culture is the share of worldview between the members of a group. However, he argues that “each of us probably does understand and interpret the world in a unique and individual way” (18), but because our worldview is more similar than not, we can still communicate within a cultural group. Notwithstanding, it is also necessary to be able to exchange messages between the members, “and we can only do that when we also have access to a shared language” (18). Furthermore, Hall adds that this communication between the members does not necessarily happen through a

linguistic medium, but that meaning can also be shared through non-verbal communication, such as gestures and facial expressions (2). Even “[m]usic is ‘like a language’ in so far as it uses musical notes to communicate feelings and ideas, even if these are very abstract” (5). According to Hall, “meaning is what gives us a sense of our identity” (3) since it differentiates us from other cultures while demonstrating our bond with our own. Therefore, when a culture meets an alien one, to communicate or share meaning with each other they must “be able to use the same linguistic codes” (4). This does not mean that they need to be fluent in the alien language, only that a certain degree of knowledge is necessary for an effective communication.

Regarding the study of language, Hall mentions two different approaches. The semiotic approach studied by Saussure and Barthes that explores “how language produces meaning” (6), whereas the discursive approach taken by Foucault studies “the effects and consequences of representation” (6). Therefore, semiotics creates meanings, while the function of discourse is to “produce knowledge” (62). The actual relationship that individuals have with meanings, he adds, is ambivalent. Meanings are powerful, because they determine what is normal and what is not, they reveal strong positive and negative emotions, they are involved in relations of power, and “[t]hey sometimes call our very identities into question. We struggle over them because they matter — and these are contests from which serious consequences can flow” (10).

This theoretical framework has brought to light that our own identities are subject to external factors. As Hall argues, our identities are formed through social and individual discourse. Therefore, how others view our identities will undoubtedly impact on how we show ourselves to the world. If our identities have been subject to a long history of hate crime and oppression, said identities will unquestionably start to exist in the realm of the unspeakable. Everything that exists outside of language is jeopardized, because meanings are what shape us as individuals. If identities are

banished to the realm of the unspeakable, where they cannot exist freely within discourse, then their erasure should be easy. Nonetheless, the power of language allows those unspeakable identities to survive through indirect speech, through the implications of everything that is not said. What we have revised in this theoretical framework will be helpful to do character analysis, focusing on the characters' queer, religious, and cultural identities. By analysing their silences and their instances of indirect speech, we will be able to discover the aspects of their identities that have originally motivated those silences, regardless of whether it has been consciously or unconsciously done.

3.- ANALYSIS: SILENCES THAT SPEAK

As a coming-of-age novel, *Call Me By Your Name* relies heavily on the discovery of the protagonist's identity, Elio Perlman. This becomes clear when we pay attention to the narrator, since we find a protagonist narrator that constantly shares with the reader his struggles to find his own place in the world. Through the analysis of excerpts taken from the book in which silence is very present, I intend to reveal some of the different identities that we find in the characters, especially Elio and Oliver, his beloved. In order to explore the characters' identities, I want to discover the motivations behind the use of silence as indirect speech. Whether the same silence that is created through oppression to erase identities is also the one that unintentionally gives room for those identities to continue existing in discourse. I want to prove if it is possible that the silence that hides identities can simultaneously reveal them.

In order to carry out this study, I will divide the analysis into four sections. Firstly, I will dedicate a small part to the study of the phenomenon of silence as quietness. In this segment, I will focus on moments that do not necessarily involve discourse but that connect the characters with each other through the silence that surrounds them. Secondly, I will explore the characters' queer identity, and the indirect speech that is used to conceal it. I intend to examine what the interactions between Elio and Oliver can tell us about their identities and the context of the novel. Nevertheless, much information will be taken from Elio's introspective narration, as a big part of the novel relies heavily on its first-person narrator than on its dialogues. Then, I will analyse how the characters display their Jewish identity, especially how Elio and Oliver's portrayal of Judaism differs from one another and what that says about their own Jewish memory. Finally, I will look at the possible cultural differences that contrast both characters, more specifically the way in which Elio constructs his own image of Oliver's

character through his behaviour and use of language and whether his assumptions coincide with Oliver's true character.

3.1.- The Phenomenon of Silence

At the end of the novel, Elio introduces the concept of "ghost spots" (Aciman, 209). Ghost spots are those places where the essence of someone remains even long after they are gone. It is a specific spot that has become part of the memory that remains of someone when they have left or passed away, a place where they used to stand. For example, when Elio's father dies years after the main events of the novel and he has to scatter his ashes, one of the places he chooses is the spot in which his chair in the garden used to be: "We walked down the back stairwell into the garden where the old breakfast table used to be 'This was my father's spot. I call it his ghost spot'" (Aciman 247). I believe that Elio's idea of ghost spots aligns in some way with the notion of silence that I am analysing. They are phenomena that are very present around us, but that cannot be simply seen in front of us. Ghost spots require us to retrieve memories of one person existing in a space although they are not there anymore, whereas indirect speech requires us to pay attention to hidden implications beyond what is being directly said. According to my own reading, in indirect speech there are two dimensions in one message: the one that is said and the one that remains unspoken. In order to fully grasp the meaning of a message we must see beyond its form. What truly matters in discourse is the meaning that is being conveyed through words. Although the type of silences that are most relevant for our case of study are those involving these indirect messages, we also find some moments of quietness that are worth highlighting. We will comment some in this segment and analyse the indirect speech in the following sections.

Following the typology created by Dauenhauer (qtd. in Bindeman, 2017), there are many cases in which we find deep silence between intimates, as we can see in the following quote: “Silence was always light and unobtrusive on those afternoons” (Aciman 28). In this line, Elio was describing how many afternoons him and Oliver would just sit around the pool and spend time talking or just in absolute silence. However, he does not consider this silence to be uncomfortable or oppressive like we would feel talking with a stranger if conversation just stopped flowing. As Bindeman (2017) says, the deep silence between intimates is one in which silence speaks more than words do, proving how powerful non-verbal communication can be.

Another moment in which this type of silence proves to be very relevant in the development of their relationship is when Oliver confesses to Elio the moment in which he realised that Elio was attracted to him. Elio narrates that the very first week he spent at their house they were having a conversation about translating poetry and the talk suddenly came to a pause. During this long moment of silence Elio caught Oliver staring at him without looking away, but every time he tried to look right back at him, he could not bring himself to hold his gaze. He confesses that he blushed because of “the thrilling possibility, unbelievable as [he] wanted it to remain, that [Oliver] might actually like [him], and that [Oliver] liked [him] in just the way [he] liked [Oliver]” (Aciman 159). In this case, silence involves non-verbal interaction through looks between both characters. However, it still conveys a strong message that even Elio himself was not aware of until much later in the novel when Oliver tells him.

Moreover, the novel offers examples of what Bindeman called healing silence. We discover that Oliver enjoys spending many nights by himself sitting on a rock contemplating the sea. When Elio finds him for the first time, he describes him in the following way: “But down below the rocky shore, in the moonlight, I caught sight of him. He was sitting on one of the higher rocks [...]. He was doing nothing, just hugging his

knees, listening to the ripples lap against the rocks below him” (Aciman 153-154). When asked about what he does there, he replies that he just thinks. This is healing silence, one that does not need language and just exists to connect an individual to the world around them.

3.2.- Silence and Queer Identity

Call Me By Your Name is, above all, a love story between the protagonist and his beloved. However, being two men in Northern Italy during the 1980s will completely determine the way they interact and show themselves to each other and the world. It is important to clarify beforehand that, although I will be talking several times about homosexual desire, both Elio and Oliver are bisexual. This is clearly stated multiple times during the novel. For instance, Elio confesses that he has felt attraction to both women and men before: “I had wanted other men my age before and had slept with women” (Aciman 25). He even reveals further into the novel that the first time he realised he felt homosexual desire had happened three years before meeting Oliver when an errand boy in Rome flirted with him and he rejected his advances (Aciman 176). Since we never get an explanation for his rejection, we can only guess that it was due to a conflictive relationship with his own sexual identity or even lack of interest for that particular boy. Besides, Elio maintains a relationship with a town girl named Marzia during the events of the novel because he feels attracted to her: “I wanted to look at her, [...] tell her how long I’d wanted to kiss her” (Aciman 116). In Oliver’s case, from what Elio narrates, we know that he had a relationship with another town girl named Chiara: “The romance with Chiara started on the beach. Then [Oliver] neglected tennis and took up bike rides with her and her friends in the afternoons [...]” (Aciman 46). Furthermore, when Oliver comes back to visit them for Christmas that same year,

Oliver confesses to Elio that he is going to get married next spring to a woman with whom he had had an on-and-off relationship for years (Aciman 226). Towards the end of the book Elio also mentions that Oliver had two children and lived a happy married life with his wife and kids (Aciman 231).

Despite having had other relationships with other people both during and after Oliver's stay in the Perlman house, their relationship stands out because of its soulmate-like particularity. Elio thinks that the deep connection and attraction that he feels towards Oliver can only be explained through the creation myth of Aristophanes, found in Plato's *Symposium*, where it was claimed that humans had been split into two as punishment and that they would have to spend the rest of their lives searching for their lost half (Marcus 374). The similarities that Elio finds between him and Oliver incite him to wonder if he is the other half he is meant to find:

Did I want to be like him? Did I want to be him? Or did I just want to have him? Or are 'being' and 'having' thoroughly inaccurate verbs in the twisted skein of desire, where having someone's body to touch and being that someone we're longing to touch are one and the same [...]. When had they separated us, you and me, Oliver? And why did I know it, and why didn't you? Is it your body that I want when I think of lying next to it every night or do I want to slip into it and own it as if it were my own [...]? (Aciman 67-68)

Roden explains this as "[t]he Platonic desire in pursuit of the whole [being] inflected by their tribal sameness" (200). Eventually, when they have sexual intercourse for the first time, Oliver says the title quote "Call me by your name and I'll call you by mine" (Aciman 134), signifying the union of the two split halves into one whole again (Roden 204). This quote highlights the uniqueness of their connection in contrast to the other relationships that they have with other people since calling each other by the others' name conveys accepting one another as the soulmate, the long-

lost half. Nonetheless, the weight of a heteronormative society causes in Elio a sense of revulsion after their first sexual encounter, a feeling of shame for his unborn children in the context of that heterosexual norm (Roden 204). Furthermore, Elio believes these negative emotions to be proof of how he is not bisexual, as the disgust he feels must mean that he is not attracted to men:

[A]ll my doubts about myself, which had started three years before when an anonymous young man riding a bike had stopped, gotten off, put a hand around my shoulder, and with that gesture either stirred or hastened something that might have taken much, much longer to work itself to consciousness—all these could now finally be washed away as well, dispelled as an evil rumor about me, or a false belief, released like a genie who'd served his sentence [...]
(Aciman 138)

Elio hopes that the sea water will wash away everything that they have done, implying that being together in that way is something dirty: “It was not him I hated — but the thing we’d done” (Aciman 136). Elio’s rejection of his own homosexual desire is a reflection on how the weight of a heteronormative society pressures all the non-normative to feel guilt when the limits of the speakable are crossed. Elio’s feelings for Oliver until then were no more than a fantasy or an infatuation because they only existed inside of his mind, in the realm of the speakable. Nonetheless, when they sleep together, the unspeakable fantasy becomes a reality and the censorship promoted by the heterosexual norm causes the rejection of his non-normative identity. When an individual has lived all their life inside of the limits of the speakable and they cross them for the first time, they get scared of the consequences of breaking those limits. Therefore, rejection is a necessary consequence to the eventual acceptance or denial of one’s identity. Moreover, Elio does not understand why this identity is constantly linked to such negative emotions when his desire for Oliver feels so simple and natural:

“[Oliver] had shown me that what I wanted could be given and taken so naturally that one wonders why it needed such hand-wringing torment and shame, seeing it was no more complicated a gesture than, say, buying a pack of cigarettes [...]” (Aciman 92). This exemplifies how the heterosexual norm uses negative emotions of guilt and shame as a mechanism to keep individuals from accepting their non-normative identities and eventually make those identities disappear. If heteronormative discourse connects those identities to negative emotions, it prevents individuals from accepting their non-heterosexuality as they would not want to feel shame, guilt or disgust about their identity. However, Elio seems to grow out of his own feelings of shame and disgust when he sees Oliver wearing his bathing suit and again sees himself reflected in him:

No one had ever worn my clothes. Perhaps the physical and the metaphorical meanings are clumsy ways of understanding what happens when two beings need, not just to be close together, but to become so totally ductile that each becomes the other. To be who I am because of you. To be who he was because of me. To be in his mouth while he was in mine and no longer know whose it was, his cock or mine, that was in my mouth. He was my secret conduit to myself—like a catalyst that allows us to become who we are, [...], the other man's heart that makes us more us than we were before the transplant. (Aciman 142-143)

Seeing Oliver wearing his clothes is for Elio just another piece of evidence of that Platonic sameness that they share. This worked as a reminder of the uniqueness of their relationship, the very realisation of this and the fear of losing it motivate him to ignore his previous shame and continue his relationship with Oliver. Moreover, Elio uses Emily Brontë's famous quote from *Wuthering Heights* to describe his connection with Oliver: “because ‘he is more myself than I am’” (Aciman 223). Elio's contradictory feelings are a perfect example of what Judith Butler (2010) called melancholic

denial/preservation of homosexuality. Although Elio being bisexual allows him to not fully reject all desire and, therefore, his sense of loss might not be as big as that of a fully homosexual person, Elio's rejection of his own homosexual desire causes him to feel this loss of Oliver. When Elio sees Oliver wearing his bathing suit, he begins to go through the process of identification that follows the loss, a process that internalises the beloved's attributes within oneself. Notwithstanding, instead of accepting this loss, Elio decides to stop rejecting his homosexual desire and finally welcome Oliver as his soulmate. His melancholic denial/preservation of homosexuality does not follow Butler's model as she had originally described it since he eventually decides to stop rejecting his sexuality. Especially since he has expressed many times how he believes Oliver to be his other half. However, the idea of a process of identification with the lover aligns perfectly with Elio and Oliver's relationship as Elio is constantly trying to adapt himself to Oliver, as we can see in the following example: "The summer I learned to love fishing. Because he did. To love jogging. Because he did. To love octopus, Heraclitus, *Tristan*" (Aciman 18).

Moreover, Elio's bisexuality torments and confuses him, since he is divided between the heteronormative desire represented in Marzia, and the homosexual desire and "the Platonic soul's pursuit of its carnal whole" (Roden 204) seen in Oliver. Even when Elio admits that he has felt attraction to men before Oliver, he explains his bisexuality within heteronormative discourse since for him being bisexual means "[wanting] to be both man and woman—with men and women" (Aciman 25). This proves that admitting one's own queer identity does not keep an individual from being subject to the heteronormative norm. Elio accepts his bisexuality through heteronormative terms since he believes that liking women is man-like and liking men is woman-like. This is why he feels ashamed for "desiring [Oliver] as Chiara did" (Aciman 45) as he desires a man like women are supposed to do. Therefore,

bisexuality is understood by Elio as feeling both the masculine desire for women and the feminine desire for men.

Furthermore, Elio's behaviour the mornings after sleeping with Oliver changes unconsciously depending on the sexual role that he plays that night. His relation to his queer identity is determined by whether he has been the giver or the receiver during sexual intercourse. In order to explain this more clearly, we must compare Elio's attitude after the first time they have sexual intercourse to his attitude after the second time. As I have mentioned before, after their first time together Elio feels revulsed by what they had done the night before and even wonders what his unborn children would think about it. He admits "[wanting] to be leagues away and a lifetime away from [Oliver]" (Aciman 137). Notwithstanding, the second time they have sexual intercourse, Elio felt very protective towards Oliver the morning after and he wanted to be close to him: "I wanted to protect him from everything this morning, from the rocks, from the jellyfish, now that jellyfish season was upon us" (Aciman 156). Elio's reactions after each time are very different and could easily be explained by how, in the first occasion, he was the receiver whilst, in the second, he was the giver. The idea that I intend to highlight here is that when Elio fulfils his 'male role' during sexual intercourse in terms of heteronormative discourse he feels very content and protective towards his partner. Nonetheless, when his role differs from the heteronormative, all the emotions of shame and guilt that have been systematically forced into people feeling homosexual desire suddenly start to invade his thoughts. Therefore, not only is his description of the non-heteronormative influenced by the norm but also his feelings in relation to his own queer identity.

This is similar to Butler's (2010) critique of the feminine being constantly defined through phallogentrism. In this case non-heterosexual concepts are explained through the lens of the heteronormative. Everything that is not the norm is described through

difference to that norm. As Stuart Hall (1996) explained, every identity is defined by what it is not, but that difference will, more often than not, be decided by the most powerful identity. In patriarchal societies, everything that is non-male is described through phallogentrism and, in heteronormative societies, all the non-heteronormative is defined by difference to heteronormativity. Besides, it could be argued that the character of Chiara has been used to establish a connection between Oliver's desire and Elio's desire within heteronormative discourse. In the following quotation, we see how Elio tries to get closer to Oliver by linking the two of them through Chiara as an object of desire: "I'd turn Chiara into the object of man-to-man gossip. It would allow us to warm up to one another through her, to bridge the gap between us by admitting we were drawn to the same woman" (Aciman 45). Elio uses the realm of the speakable in the heteronormative society to connect with Oliver's desire in a way that does not require to break the set norm, so as not to directly reveal his own desire towards him.

The weight of this heteronormative society also influences how Elio talks about homosexuality in others. At some point during the novel, two scholars from Chicago that are a gay couple come to have dinner at the Perlman house. Nonetheless, Elio describes them using disrespectful names: "They looked, as my father must have realized, like a flowery, gussied-up version of Tintin's Thomson and Thompson twins. [...] I looked at them, wondering who was top and who was bottom, Tweedle-Dee or Tweedle-Dum" (Aciman 125). Elio not only fetishises their relationship by immediately wondering how their sexual interactions must be like, but he also constantly caricaturises and ridicules this couple through absurd nicknames. Another instance of his disrespect towards them is how he plays into the stereotypes usually related to homosexuality. When he is told that they will come for dinner, he says that he "would wear the purple shirt given to [him] by a distant cousin from Uruguay" (Aciman 124-125) because purple is a colour that has often been associated with homosexuality.

Elio's remarks and behaviour are proof that even people who feel homosexual desire are subject to internalised homophobia, as homosexuality can only exist in the realm of the speakable when it is ridiculed or hated. Furthermore, we can also find homophobic remarks made to Elio and Oliver when they go on a trip to Rome and a woman calls Oliver 'dissoluto' or 'debauched': "I couldn't tell whether he was being called dissolute because of the two babes he had wandered in with or because of me. Or both" (Aciman 180). When this woman realises that there is possibly more than a friendship between Elio and Oliver, he calls him debauched because of his possible sexual orientation. Later that same word is directed towards Elio by the same woman, and he interprets it as "an accusation of a deep and ugly fault in [his] character" (Aciman 184). This comment highlights an identity that Elio has tried for a long time to maintain hidden but that is perceived externally as a flaw.

Elio and Oliver's complicated relationship with their queer identity is reflected in the moments where they want to talk about it but realise they cannot, because they might not be accepted. For instance, when Elio weighs his options of who he could do about it, he believes almost everyone in his life to not be safe confidants:

There was no one to speak to. Whom could I tell? Mafalda? She'd leave the house. My aunt? She'd probably tell everyone. Marzia, Chiara, my friends? They'd desert me in a second. My cousins when they came? Never. My father held the most liberal views—but on this? Who else? Write to one of my teachers? See a doctor? Say I needed a shrink? Tell Oliver? Tell Oliver. There is no one else to tell, Oliver, so I'm afraid it's going to have to be you... (Aciman 61)

Elio concludes that there is no one he can talk to freely about his identity other than Oliver, although at this point in the novel he was not sure of Oliver's feelings towards him or whether his own feelings could ever be reciprocated. Notwithstanding,

even when he did not know about Oliver's queer identity, Elio considers him his only option as he is the object of his homosexual desire. In spite of the possibility of Oliver rejecting him, Elio trusts him with his secret solely based on their connection and friendship: "Perhaps the very list I wanted was for him to tell me that there was nothing wrong with me, that I was not less human than any other young man my age" (Aciman 30). This quotation highlights how, in the context of the novel, homosexual desire is seen as something that is wrong as it makes Elio feel self-conscious. Therefore, Elio battling with his identity and how he believes that it would be badly received by the people around him force him to conceal it. Hiding his identity might entail that he does not like who he is, as "[p]eople who hide don't always like who they are" (Aciman 115). However, this self-hate is something that emerges unconsciously in the protagonist due to the stigma about homosexual desire. It is another example of the censorship mechanism that induces the rejection of one's identity. Although concealing who he is from everyone causes in Elio a feeling of safety, he does not want to live hiding his identity forever: "[...] if I were no longer transparent and could disguise so much of my life, then I was finally safe from [my parents], and from [Oliver]—but at what price, and did I want to be safe from everyone?" (Aciman 60). Elio believes that keeping his identity silenced is safe because it avoids judgement and possible rejection from the people around him, but he also thinks that having to maintain that identity hidden forever is too big of a price to pay for that safety. He wonders if it is really worth it to spend the rest of his life inside the boundaries of the established norm when his identity is clearly outside of it. In fact, when he imagines himself speaking the truth to Oliver he feels joy because he is able to free himself from the weight of the heterosexual norm: "But what I'd spoken into his pillow revealed to me that, at least for a moment, I'd rehearsed the truth, gotten it out into the open, that I had in fact enjoyed speaking it" (Aciman 63). At the end of the book, when Elio discovers that his father had known all

along about the two of them, he tells Elio that “to feel nothing so as not to feel anything” (Aciman 224) is a waste. In this case, they were talking about heartbreak and having to let go of someone that is so special as Oliver was to Elio. Nonetheless, it can also be applied to Elio’s doubt about the cost of hiding one’s identity. If he hides the part of himself that feels homosexual desire, every emotion and experience that derives from that particular identity are also concealed. In order to live a fulfilling life, he must be able to feel all of what his identities have to offer and accept who he is because “our hearts and our bodies are given to us only once” (Aciman 225).

However, in this same conversation with his father, Elio seems aware that his identity can exist in indirect speech, since they can speak about his relationship with Oliver using ambiguous terms, such as calling their relationship a beautiful friendship: “Speaking abstractly was the only way to speak the truth to [my father]” (Aciman 224). As Foucault (1978) declares, the same discourse that censors a certain speech can be used to escape said censorship. It is within the domain of the imposed silence on homosexuality that Elio and Oliver can accept their censored identities. We can also see this when Elio gifts Oliver a copy of Stendhal’s *Armance* and writes the following dedication: “*Zwischen Immer und Nie, for you in silence, somewhere in Italy in the mid-eighties*” (Aciman 105, emphasis in original). The intention of Elio with this dedication is not only to remind Oliver of this summer even when many years have passed, but also to make the people who may come across this book in Oliver’s library wonder who was in silence. Elio wants other people to know that he loved Oliver, even if their relationship could only exist in secrecy. Therefore, Elio seems to know that through indirect speech he can speak about his silenced identity although he admits that he does not really know how to do it: “Perhaps, in this, as with everything else, because I didn’t know how to speak in code, I didn’t know how to speak at all” (Aciman 17). Nonetheless, he acknowledges that staying silent tempts him to confess his feelings

to Oliver, so he resolves that the best way to maintain his identity hidden is by avoiding the moments of silence:

I stammered all manner of things so as not to speak my mind. [...] Otherwise, the silence between us would probably give me away—which was why anything, even the most spluttered nonsense, was preferable to silence. Silence would expose me. But what was certain to expose me even more was my struggle to overcome it in front of others (Aciman 17)

Elio believes that, from an outside perspective, seeing him struggle to avoid the moments of silence between them can hint to his original motivation for doing so: not confessing his feelings to Oliver. Another example of his conflict between silence and speaking is seen when Oliver massages his shoulder in front of all of their friends. Oliver's touch arouses Elio and makes him unconsciously lean into his touch, but he is scared that everyone will be able to see in his reaction how he feels about Oliver. He gets away from Oliver but then is worried that he will think that the massage had hurt him, and he will be discouraged to touch him ever again, so he says that it did not hurt. Nonetheless, Elio feels self-conscious about how others might interpret him separating himself from Oliver if it was not because of pain: "But I sensed that if it wasn't pain that had prompted such a reaction, what other explanation could account for my shrugging him off so brusquely in front of my friends?" (Aciman 16). He is afraid that their friends will realise that what originally made him free himself from Oliver's touch was actually the arousal that it provoked, "[s]o [he] mimicked the face of someone trying very hard, but failing, to smother a grimace of pain" (Aciman 16).

Furthermore, he narrates later in the novel that he can shamelessly admit that Oliver is attractive because everyone else thinks the same: "I was like men who openly declare other men irresistibly handsome the better to conceal that they're aching to

embrace them. To withhold universal approval would simply alert others that I had concealed motives for needing to resist him” (Aciman 38). Elio takes advantage of the implications of indirect speech to remain hidden. He knows that silence is motivated by a desire for concealment, a desire to hide one’s identity. Therefore, by admitting openly that Oliver is handsome, he keeps hidden his homosexual desire as wanting to disagree with public opinion will make him stand out more as well as reveal his motivation for hiding.

Before Elio confesses his love to Oliver, he finds a story about a knight that is deeply in love with a princess, who loves him back. However, none of them have revealed how they feel, and the mere idea of confessing intimidates the knight. Since the princess is very sincere and honest, the knight is afraid of being rejected. Then one day he asks her: “is it better to speak or die?” (Aciman 63). Elio thinks that a big amount of courage is necessary to ask such a question because it is one of those messages that hides a heavy implication. ‘Is it better to speak or die?’ is an unspoken confession, as it puts at the same level the choices of speaking or dying. The truth that will be spoken is so big and important to the knight that he compares it to death, for him speaking and possibly being rejected is equal to dying. Thus, when Elio imagines confessing his feelings to Oliver and being rejected, he admits that he would also prefer death to his rejection: “That steely look of yours, Oliver, I’d rather die than face it once I’ve told you” (Aciman 63). However, Oliver himself encourages Elio to act on his emotions when Elio tells him that he did not have the courage to sleep with Marzia and Oliver replies: “Try again later” (Aciman 51) and “If not later, when?” (Aciman 51). Oliver’s answer was initially given as advice about Marzia, but Elio interprets it as encouragement to reveal his feelings for Oliver, as Oliver’s words reflect on his own fear to confess to him: “*If not later, when?* What if he had found me out and uncovered each and every one of my secrets with those four cutting words?” (Aciman 52,

emphasis in original). Elio believes that Oliver's advice reveals that he might know more about Elio's feelings for him than he lets on. Oliver knows Elio does not have the courage to confess to him and keeps delaying the moment he will tell him: "*Try again later* meant, I haven't the courage now. Things weren't ready *just* yet. Where I'd find the will and the courage to *try again later* I didn't know" (Aciman 51-52, emphasis in original).

The love confession is also spoken through numerous silent implications. They are in a public space, in the town's 'piazze'. Elio has already come to the conclusion that the only person he can talk to about his identity is Oliver, but it is in this instant that he feels compelled to finally reveal himself before him:

'If you only knew how little I know about the things that really matter.'

I was treading with water, trying neither to drown nor to swim to safety, just staying in place, because here was the truth—even if I couldn't speak the truth, or even hint at it, yet I could swear it lay around us, the way we say of a necklace we've just lost while swimming: I know it's down there somewhere. [...]

'What things that matter?'

[...]

'You know what things. By now *you* of all people should know.'

Silence.

'Why are you telling me all this?'

'Because I thought you should know.'

'Because you thought I should know.' He repeated my words slowly, trying to take in their full meaning [...]

'Because I want *you* to know,' I blurted out. 'Because there is no one else I can say it to but you.' (Aciman 72, emphasis in original)

Elio starts his love confession by simply revealing that there are things that really matter but that he does not know anything about. Just like the knight, Elio reveals an important hidden truth that he does not know how to speak. In this passage, there is nothing being directly said that cannot exist within the realm of the speakable. Notwithstanding, silences must be consciously analysed to understand their full hidden meaning, just like Oliver does in this quote as he considers Elio's message beyond the words that have been spoken. If Oliver did not feel homosexual desire, he might not have been able to grasp the full meaning in Elio's confession. Therefore, this confession works between them because they share an identity. When Elio says that Oliver is the only person to whom he could possibly say these things, he hides in between the unspoken words that he may be the only one around him who can feel homosexual desire. Besides, Oliver understanding Elio's hidden confession is further proof that he feels the same way.

Despite Oliver reciprocating his love, when Elio reveals his feelings to Oliver, he answers that "[they] can't talk about such thing" (Aciman 75), hinting to the taboo that this relationship represents in the context of the novel. Oliver's response demonstrates how Elio and Oliver deal with their queer identities differently. Elio is blunter and more active in his pursuit of Oliver, while Oliver is more avoidant and self-conscious about crossing the line of the speakable. Furthermore, Oliver's mixed signals of avoidance and interest towards Elio angers the latter: "But I had never been visited by such powerful contradictions before. This was agony, for something like rage was brimming over inside me" (Aciman 91). For Elio, having to return to live in silence after managing the courage to reveal his unspeakable identity is very difficult. So much so that he "can't stand the silence" (Aciman 117) anymore, since he wants to keep pursuing a relationship with Oliver. He finally sees possible revealing his queer identity and feeling free from the heterosexual norm, even if it is just with Oliver: "All I knew was that I had

nothing left to hide from him. I never felt freer or safer in my life” (Aciman 172). This difference in the handling of their queer identities could be easily explained with one quote from the novel spoken by Mafalda, the housekeeper: “youth has no shame, shame comes with age” (Aciman 35). In contrast to Oliver, who is an adult and has possibly slept with other men before, Elio is experiencing for the first time a homosexual relationship and he may not be as fully aware as Oliver of the stigma around homosexuality. This is why when they kiss for the first time Oliver is the one to eventually end the contact by saying: “So far we’ve behaved. We’ve been good. Neither of us has done anything to feel ashamed of. Let’s keep it that way. I want to be good” (Aciman 82). Oliver’s words in this example also have secret meanings in relation to how homosexuality was viewed in the context of the novel. Oliver implies that acting on one’s homosexual desire is something to be ashamed of and is considered inappropriate behaviour. As we have seen in Hocquenghem’s (2009) *El deseo homosexual*, shame was the ultimate oppressive mechanism used to erase homosexual identities in a heteronormative society. Notwithstanding, there are two physical spaces in the novel where Elio and Oliver can feel freer from this oppressive heteronormativity. They have a similar function to that of the forest in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* because they are spaces that allow them to live outside the rules imposed by their society as long as they are there.

On the one hand, we find Rome as the city where their identities can exist unnoticed: “We were alone together for three days, we knew no one in the city, I could be anyone, say anything, do anything” (Aciman 172). What Elio feels being in such a big city is the freedom and safety of being anonymous. They do not care if they are seen together holding hands or kissing because big cities allow identities to exist on crowded spaces. The more people around an individual the easier for their identities to go unnoticed. On the other hand, Monet’s berm, where they kissed for the first time,

represents a natural and intimate space in which only they exist. Notwithstanding, this place is still within the limits of the small Italian town of B., where the Perlman house is. This explains why Oliver puts a stop to Elio's kiss, as they remain under the strict heterosexual norm of the town. However, this place becomes a symbol of Elio and Oliver's relationship because Oliver takes a postcard of Monet's *berm* that belonged to Elio as a souvenir when he leaves. Elio discovers years later that he wrote "*cor cordium*" (Aciman 71) on the back of the post card, as a reminder of their soulmate connection. This inscription symbolises how even after they live apart since they said goodbye in Rome, no other relationship can compare to the one they shared that summer. This is why Oliver says that he has "never said anything truer in [his] life to anyone" (Aciman 242) than when referring to Elio as his *cor cordium*. Therefore, both Rome and Monet's *berm* become symbolic and safe spaces where unspeakable identities can exist freely. It is the most solitary places and the most crowded cities that hide one's identities the best.

3.3.- Silence and Jewish Memory

It is often recommended to avoid relying too much on an author's biography when we analyse their work. Nonetheless, *Call Me By Your Name* needs to be understood through André Aciman's own experience with exile. In an interview with Irish author Colm Tóibín, Aciman confesses that the story was motivated by the shared Jewish identity that he gave to his main characters, more specifically, the differences in the way they display their Jewish identity (Marcus 373). Elio's family is described as being 'Jews of discretion': "We wore our Judaism as people do almost everywhere in the world: under the shirt, not hidden, but tucked away. 'Jews of discretion,' to use my mother's words" (Aciman 19). The portrayal of Judaism of Elio's family was inspired by

André Aciman's own experience of having to hide his Jewish identity in Egypt (Marcus 374). Notwithstanding, the concealment of the Jewish identity in the Perlman family is most likely not due to exile. The only hint that we can find about their nationality is that Elio is "a child of expats¹" (Aciman 32), being his mother Italian and his father American, and that they are settled in Italy. Therefore, their concealed Jewish lifestyle is most probably influenced by the history of antisemitism in Europe, especially during World War II. We can only guess that Elio probably belongs to a third generation of Holocaust survivors. Both him and his parents interact with Judaism through the familial memory that remains from survivor ancestors. Their relationship with Judaism being influenced by the memories of previous generations is what Hirsch (2008) called 'postmemory'. Their religious identity is affected by the weight of someone else's memory and trauma. This is why we can talk either of Jewish identity or Jewish memory since the latter is what ultimately creates the former.

Moreover, they live in a very Catholic country, which might have had an effect on how they portray their religious identity out of doors since they are surrounded by Catholic tradition, history and people. Nonetheless, their discreet Jewish lifestyle does not make them less Jew than open Jews. Although they may pass as non-Jews to other people, they do not tolerate antisemitism, as Elio's mother says when they are deciding on the next summer house guest: "We may be Jews of discretion, she'd said, but this Pavel is an anti-Semite and I won't have another anti-Semite in my house" (Aciman 229).

In contrast to the Perlmans, Oliver, who comes from the United States, proclaims his Judaism openly: "To see someone proclaim his Judaism as Oliver did

¹ Although this word was originally related to people who were banished from their countries, in modern usage it refers to people who *choose* to leave their homeland. However, Elio's choice of words here stands out if we take into consideration his family's Jewish identity, since the Jewish community has been historically associated with exile and displacement.

when he grabbed one of our bikes and headed into town with his shirt wide open shocked us as much as it taught us we could do the same and get away with it” (Aciman 19). Elio speaking of getting away with showing his Star of David hides a message of a past where proclaiming the Jewish identity would have consequences. These consequences forced them to live this religious identity in private. However, years later and thanks to Oliver, Elio’s family realises that they do not need to maintain their Judaism in secrecy anymore. The open exhibition of Oliver’s Jewish identity is also based on Aciman’s life and the envy he once felt at another Jew that did not carry his Star of David in secrecy (Marcus 374). Nonetheless, Elio admits that he tries to do the same, but that he ultimately feels “like someone trying to feel natural while walking about naked in a locker room only to end up aroused by his own nakedness” (Aciman 19). Elio’s comparison of showing his Judaism openly with being naked demonstrates how such a small action as showing his Star of David means to him more than just letting others see his necklace. The Star of David necklace is a symbol of his Jewish identity; thus, showing it is like revealing this identity that he has been taught by his family to keep hidden. When Elio speaks with Oliver about how he portrays his Judaism he responds that he is used to being “the odd Jew out” (Aciman 20) since he has lived in many small towns in New England. Oliver’s relationship to Judaism is not tainted by a history of victimisation as his family has probably lived for generations in the United States, “he never thought about being Jewish or about the life of Jews in a Catholic country” (Aciman 20). The root of their different relationship with religion is found on their ancestors’ Jewish experiences. Therefore, the interest of Elio about Oliver originates in their different connections with Jewish identity, because “Elio envies Oliver’s lack of self-consciousness, his ease with his body– Jewish and otherwise” (Roden 201).

Elio seems to believe that historical events are forgotten once all the participants of those events pass away. He thinks about this while looking at a “war memorial dedicated to the youth of the town who’d perished in the Battle of the Piave during the First World War” (Aciman 73). He looks around and thinks how many of the older villagers recalled those deceased young men and whether they had known them. If there were still people who knew them, they would have to be one hundred years old. He believes that at such an advanced age everyone eventually forgets: “At one hundred, siblings forget, sons forget, loved ones forget, no one remembers anything, even the most devastated forget to remember. Mothers and fathers have long since died. Does anyone remember?” (Aciman 74). Nonetheless, Elio himself is proof that memory survives through generations and that it does not simply disappear, since his Jewish identity is influenced by his predecessors’ experience with antisemitism. Moreover, the war memorial that makes him recollect these young men demonstrates that the memory of victims can survive in collective remembrance. The memorial preserves and keeps alive the memories of the deceased and the traumatic events of the battle not only in the collective memory but also in a historical and cultural record. As we have seen with Hirsch, postmemorial artistic work is a way of ensuring that historical trauma does not fade into oblivion. The war memorial functions as a commemoration to the lives lost but also as a way to preserve their memory through history. Besides, as we have seen in Roden, artistic work is another effective way of preserving memory when transmission to offspring is not possible. Since the deceased in the Battle of the Piave were mostly young, it is possible that their memory could have not been transferred through reproduction to following generations.

Nevertheless, the weight of previous generations also threatens Elio’s own discovery of identity. For instance, right before meeting Oliver for their first sexual encounter he hears his dead grandfather’s voice warning him not to do it:

Turn back. Who know what you'll find once you're in that room. Not the tonic of discovery but the pall of despair when disenchantment has all but shamed every ill-stretched nerve in your body. The years are watching you now, every star you see tonight already knows your torment, your ancestors are gathered here and have nothing to give or say, Non c'andà, don't go there.

(Aciman 127, emphasis in original)

This voice appears before Elio when he is about to cross to the boundaries of the speakable. However, the warning is given by his ancestor, signifying how the acceptance of homosexual desire threatens his bloodline. We have mentioned previously that one of Elio's biggest worries about sleeping with Oliver is what his offspring would think of him: "It was not these I had offended, but those who were yet unborn or unmet and whom I'd never be able to love without remembering this mass of shame and revulsion rising between my life and theirs" (Aciman 135). This conflict that Elio faces with his ancestors and descendants could be derived from the shame that his homosexual desire could bring to the familial memory but also from the possibility of ending his entire bloodline. By crossing the limit to the unspeakable, Elio tarnishes his connection with the generations that came before him and the ones that could come after him. As we have seen with Roden (2019), queer memory cannot be always transmitted to offspring through the conventional means of reproduction. Although Elio is bisexual, he believes that accepting homosexual desire puts in danger the future existence of his children. Besides, all the memories in a bloodline are transferred among generations, i.e. familial memory, and Elio's memory is no exception. Thus, if he crosses the boundaries of the speakable, it will taint forever his memory and that of the following generations.

Furthermore, at one point in the novel Chiara comments how Elio has “[n]othing to rebel against” (Aciman 48) as he has such permissive parents. Chiara implies that rebellion takes place when an individual goes against the rules imposed to them. Therefore, Elio, who lives in a permissive household, would not have any rules to break free from. Notwithstanding, Elio answers that “[w]e all have our ways of rebelling” (Aciman 48). If we analyse this line from the understanding that Elio is very confused about his non-heterosexual identity, we can interpret his rebellion as him experiencing homosexual desire and pursuing an actual homosexual relationship with Oliver. If Elio understands this as a rebellion it means that he doubts his parents would accept this part of himself and that he is going against their values and rules. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, when we discover that his father knew about their relationship, he is very supportive and welcoming of his son’s non-heteronormative identity: “In my place, most parents would hope the whole thing goes away, or pray that their sons land on their feet soon enough” (Aciman 224). Taking into account the context of the novel, Mr. Perlman’s support takes Elio by surprise but also helps him feel validated, especially when his ancestors had tormented and warned him about his identity before. Even Oliver recognises how lucky Elio is to have such an understanding father since “[his] father would have carted [him] off to a correctional facility” (Aciman 227).

Although the experiences of Elio with Judaism are not related to exile, Aciman writes *Call Me By Your Name* about his own experience of exile from Egypt. The soulmate connection that Elio and Oliver have is a metaphor about being taken away from their homeland, seeing each other as the home they were displaced from:

[W]e were in a half ghetto, half oasis, in an otherwise cruel and unflinching world where fuddling around strangers suddenly stops, where we misread no one and no one misjudges us, where one person simply knows the other and knows him so thoroughly that to be taken

away from such intimacy is *galut*, the Hebrew word for exile and dispersal. Was he my home, then, my homecoming? You are my homecoming. (Aciman 49)

Not only is Elio and Oliver's love story written through the Platonic conception of soulmate relationship but also through the idea of returning home after exile. Elio believes Oliver to be his soulmate and his homecoming because their intimacy makes him feel welcomed. The connection between them derives from how similar they are identity-wise. They understand each other and feel safe sharing who they are.

By the way in which Elio's queer and Jewish identities battle with each other, it would seem that memory is more competitive than it is multidirectional, since Elio's Judaism rejects his queerness through the voice of his ancestors. It is true that the idea of a competitive or multidirectional memory is often applied to the collective remembrance of histories of victimization. However, as we have seen through Aleida Assmann's typology of memory (qtd. in Hirsch, 2008), all memory starts as individual and is then shared among communities and families, reaching at some point the collective quality. In this sense, Elio's battling identities open a discussion about whether two different identities, which have been historically oppressed can cohabit within an individual. As I have said before, the opposition by Elio's ancestors would prove that the sharing of space is not possible. Nevertheless, Elio's discovery of his queer identity represented in his desire for Oliver make him reconnect with his Jewish identity. We see this in how he tries to copy Oliver's portrayal of Judaism by wearing his Star of David openly, which could just be another example of the melancholic denial/preservation of homosexuality explained by Butler (2010). Furthermore, Elio explains his connection to Oliver in Jewish terms, as we have seen when he compares being separated from Oliver as *galut* or exile. Another example of this would be when he uses their identities as Jewish men to describe a moment that is caused by their

queer identities: “My Star of David, his Star of David, our two necks like one, two cut Jewish men joined together for time immemorial” (Aciman 87). This interaction between his Judaism and his queerness would demonstrate Michael Rothberg’s (2009) idea of a multidirectional memory that has space for different memories, here understood as identities, to interact with each other. Therefore, by the end of the novel Elio is able to accept both identities as part of himself without the need to reject one of them, especially after his father approves his relationship with Oliver, contrary to the warnings of his ancestors.

3.4.- Silence and Cultural Identity

It is important to take into account that Elio can be a very unreliable narrator, especially when it comes to Oliver and the image he depicts of him. For instance, there are several occasions in the book in which Elio’s desire incites fantasies about Oliver that he narrates as real events until eventually acknowledging that they never truly happened: “The door was shut—was someone in my room? I could make out the scent of his Roger & Gallet shampoo, so near me that if I so much as lifted my arm I knew I’d touch his face. [...] It was only a draft. A draft had pushed [the door] shut” (Aciman 96-97).

Furthermore, the opinion that he creates around him is formed through his expressions and behaviour. Mrs. Perlman calls these expressions so typical of Oliver ‘Americanisms’. These are words that Oliver uses and that makes him stand out among the Italian community as a foreign American, even within an English-speaking household like the Perlmans’. For example, Oliver’s word of choice to bid farewell is “*Later!*” (Aciman 3, emphasis in original). Elio says that he had never heard the word *Later!* used to say goodbye before, which means that it is an expression more

commonly used in the United States. It is through this word that Elio draws the first image of Oliver since it “was a chilling, slam-dunk salutation that shoved aside all [their] honeyed European niceties” (Aciman 33). This quote demonstrates how Elio compares Oliver’s culture to his own. He forms an opinion through difference to the culture and linguistic environment he is used to. *Later!* is one of the first words that Elio hears Oliver say. This is why the first impression he had of Oliver was a careless and unattached person as *Later!* “sounded harsh, curt, and dismissive, spoken with the veiled indifference of people who may not care to see or hear from you again” (Aciman 3). Elio feels very intimidated by him due to the image he draws of Oliver through his use of that word. Moreover, Oliver transfers the meaning of his English *Later!* to the Italian “*Esco*” (Aciman 41, emphasis in original): “His *Esco*, I realized soon enough, was just another version of *Later!* A summary and unconditional goodbye, spoken not as you were leaving, but after you were out the door” (Aciman 41, emphasis in original). This is an example of how Oliver is able to keep his cultural identity despite speaking another language. He conveys the original meaning of his ‘Americanism’ using an Italian word. It is also due to these ‘Americanisms’ that Mrs. Perlman calls him “*Il cauboi*—the cowboy” (Aciman 33, emphasis in original) and “*la muvi star*” (Aciman 33, emphasis in original). Although they start as a critique to Oliver’s expressions, they end up becoming endearments, which proves that the initial cultural shock disappears once they get used to those differences.

Another word that exemplifies the depiction of an identity through a linguistic analysis is “*Yours*” (Aciman 35, emphasis in original). Oliver used this word to warn Elio that he was throwing him an apricot and to make sure that he could catch it. By this point in the novel, Elio has already admitted to himself that he desires Oliver, so when he hears the word from Oliver’s mouth he secretly interprets it as Oliver offering his body to him: “*Yours*, like *Later!*, had an off-the-cuff, unceremonious, *here catch*

quality that reminded me how twisted and secretive my desires were compared to the expansive spontaneity of everything around him” (Aciman 35, emphasis in original). Elio demonstrates here that words can be interpreted in many different ways beyond their original meaning. Besides, he is able to compare himself to Oliver by analysing the interpretation and use that each of them has given to the same word. *Yours* for Oliver is just a way of warning Elio, whereas Elio uses that *Yours* to feed his secret fantasies about Oliver. This is why he concludes in that passage that the word *Yours* only proves Oliver’s natural personality as opposed to Elio’s twisted mind. Nonetheless, since the book is narrated from Elio’s perspective, we can only speculate about Oliver’s true intentions behind the use of the word *Yours*. Whether Oliver meant more by saying *Yours* than just a warning remains unclear, but it is a possibility because we know that Oliver also knows how to convey meaning through the unspoken.

Notwithstanding, the biggest misconception that Elio had about Oliver was that every time he returned home late at night he had been sleeping with different people around town: “It seemed clear that after Chiara there had been a succession of *cotte*, crushes, mini-crushes, one-night crushes, flings, who knows. To me all of it boiled down to one thing only: his cock had been everywhere in B.” (Aciman 67, emphasis in original). This image that Elio has created of Oliver originates from all the nights he spends outside of the Perlman house without giving any explanations about nightly activities. Nevertheless, later in the book Elio discovers that those nights Oliver would be near the shore contemplating the sea:

[...] ‘I come here every night and just sit here. Sometimes I spend hours.’

‘All by yourself?’

He nodded.

'I never knew. I thought—'

'I know what you thought.'

The news couldn't have made me happier. It had obviously been shadowing everything between us. (Aciman 154)

Elio's assumptions about Oliver are not resolved until they finally show their full identities to one another. The image that Elio had constructed was through his own interpretation of Oliver's speech and action, even if it was ultimately mistaken. This is only further proof of how unreliable and untrustworthy Elio is as a narrator. His misconception of Oliver is a perfect example of how one's identity is defined through social discourse and through the labels that others give them. Oliver's character and identities have been defined to us as readers through Elio's assumptions. We do not truly know Oliver until he shows Elio his identities and we can resolve which parts of Elio's depiction of him are accurate and which ones are incorrect.

Oliver's technique for analysing someone seems more accurate than Elio's since he admits that he saw through Elio from the very start. Oliver is better at reading people than Elio, as he pays attention to everything the other person may be trying to hide: "[Oliver] saw through [everybody] precisely because the first thing he looked for in people was the very thing he had seen in himself and may not have wished others to see" (Aciman 21). In other words, Oliver looks for the hidden parts of the other person, the parts of themselves that they want to conceal. It is when Elio realises this quality of Oliver's that he admits that he had misjudged him based on the first impressions he had of him.

Elio and Oliver are proof that people are not just one single identity. As Stuart Hall (1996) states, identities are not a monolith, but a fragmented combination of different identities that are in constant negotiation. Everybody interacts with their

identities differently depending on their own personal experiences. For example, both Elio and Oliver have a Jewish identity but their relationship with that identity differs from one another. In *Call Me By Your Name*, André Aciman introduces the concept of the 'San Clemente Syndrome' to explain a very similar idea to that of the fragmented identities. This idea is based on the architectonic history of the Basilica de San Clemente in Rome. This Basilica has been constructed over many layers of subsequent ruins. Aciman uses this layering as a metaphor to describe people as multifaceted:

Like the subconscious, like love, like memory, like time itself, like every single one of us, the church is built on the ruins of subsequent restorations, there is no rock bottom, there is no first anything, no last anything, just layers and secret passageways and interlocking chambers
(Aciman 192)

Just like the Basilica is a combination of its architectonic history, people are a mixture of all their different identities. People have 'San Clemente Syndrome' because they are the sum of all their facets and experiences in life, both the ones they share and the ones they conceal. The layers of ruins of the Basilica are like all the different fragments of identity in a person. Therefore, to really unveil a person's identity, we must look under the surface and analyse everything that is covered by the top layers of their identity. Silences are motivated by the desire to conceal those parts of themselves that they do not want anyone to see. However, if we pay close attention, it is through that same silence that we will be able to find what was originally intended to keep hidden.

4.- CONCLUSION

I started this dissertation with the initial hypothesis that silences not only hide who we are but also reveal it. This is why I have interpreted silence not as quietness, but as unspoken implications in messages. In order to prove my hypothesis, I chose André Aciman's work *Call Me By Your Name*, because the discovery of identity of the protagonist is one of the major focal points of the story as it is categorised as a coming-of-age novel. Furthermore, some of the identities that can be found in this novel have historically suffered oppression, which would cause in the characters a desire for their concealment. This is why the setting of the novel has a very important role in shaping the story and the behaviour of the characters. Many of the dialogues between Elio and Oliver hide many of those unspoken implications that I wanted to analyse.

Notwithstanding, before examining the quotations of the novel, I needed to establish a theoretical framework that would allow me to connect the separate concepts of silence and identity. Moreover, I had to decide which specific identities I would focus on among all those that can be found in the novel. Eventually, I decided to study about Elio and Oliver's portrayal of their queer, Jewish and cultural identities. Firstly, I chose queer identity because *Call Me By Your Name* is a love story between two men within a close-minded context: a town in northern Italy in the 1980s. Thus, their relationship is very much shaped by the context of the novel, which determines how they portray and talk about their homosexual relationship. Secondly, I decided to explore their Jewish identities, since although they are both Jews, their portrayal of the religion is very different from one another. I wanted to investigate how their different backgrounds and familial memories could have affected these differences. Lastly, I wanted to cover their cultural identities and the way in which their linguistic choices and behaviours were strictly related to the cultures they grew up with. Therefore, the

theoretical framework had to link silence with these three different identities, while also providing some sort of explanation as to why would these identities have to exist in silence. Since I wanted to prove that silence hides one's identity, I needed to find identities that caused in the characters a desire for their concealment. Then, I would have to prove how that same silence that conceals identities could, at the same time, reveal it.

As I said before, I started by searching for a connection between silence and identity. Reading Steven L. Bindeman's (2018) study, we saw that silence can connect past and present, since silence is the result of the present and the weight of memory. This means that silence can be motivated by personal experience. Therefore, it can be seen as more than simple muteness, because silence holds message and can be interpreted. In connection to this, Judith Butler (1997) explains in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* that silence may be born as an involuntary reaction to a traumatic experience. Thus, silence becomes the living proof of a violent event, which unavoidably turns silence into a phenomenon that can say more than words do. Furthermore, I explored two typologies of silence included in Bindeman, one by himself and another by philosopher Dauenhauer. Since these typologies deal mostly with the idea of silence as quietness, some categories have proved to be more significant than others in the analysis of the novel. This is why, we should pay special attention to Bindeman's healing silence, which sees silence as a relevant part in contemplating nature. For example, this is illustrated when Elio describes Oliver spending time watching the sea while thinking. From Dauenhauer's typology, we should focus on his description of a deep silence between intimates. This type is normally accompanied by other types of utterances, such as speech, and can communicate more than words do. We have seen that, in the analysis of the novel, this type of silence is very present in Elio and Oliver's relationship and is deeply connected to non-verbal communication.

In connection to the concepts of silence and identity, we have seen that repression plays an important role in the concealment of identity. As we have seen in Butler (1997), repressive tools such as censorship are used to define the limits of the speakable and unspeakable in discourse. These methods are what create norms. Therefore, since individuals are subject to language and depend on discourse to form identities, everything that is outside of the realm of the speakable will become non-normative. This proves Butler's (2010) idea about the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence since, by creating a norm, all the non-normative is also being defined through difference to that norm. All those identities crossing to the realm of the unspeakable are at risk of being ostracised. Thus, the ultimate objective of censoring a certain discourse or speech is to erase it. Nonetheless, the same discourse that is used for repression can work as a resistance tool when we use it to reshape and challenge the boundaries of the speakable. Discourse shapes society, but society shapes discourse. We have seen in Foucault's (1978) study about the taboo around sexuality in the Victorian era that although censored identities are silenced, they can still exist in secrecy, which means that repressed identities can survive through implicitness and indirect speech. It is true that this secrecy is no more than an illusion of freedom allowed by power, so as to give individuals a sense of agency and make them unconsciously tolerate the power that oppresses them. Nevertheless, while identities can continue to exist, even if they can only do it in secrecy, they will keep on reshaping the limits of the speakable.

After defining the connection between silence and identity, I explored the first identity that I wanted to analyse: queer identity. Through Hocquenghem's (2009) account on the public opinion on homosexuals around the 1960s and 1970s we discover that queer identity was one of those repressed identities that censorship intended to erase. Around the time, public opinion would claim that homosexual desire

was strictly related to mental instability, criminality, and the spread of venereal diseases. In the analysis of the novel, we have seen how this opinion around homosexuality affects Elio's own self-image, since he sometimes refers to his homosexual desire as a flaw in his character or as something that is wrong with him. Besides, I have also highlighted how both Elio and Oliver were called debauched by a woman in Rome when she discovered their queer identities. Moreover, Hocquenghem explains how shame was one of the most relevant tools against homosexual desire, since its ultimate intention was to make homosexuals feel guilty or ashamed of their actions. Thus, turning homosexual desire into something that should be avoided at all costs. We have seen this on the way Oliver is more self-conscious about acting on his homosexual desire than Elio is, as he is older and is probably more aware of the stigma around homosexuality. Notwithstanding, Elio is not exempt from this prejudice around homosexuality, as we have seen in his own mocking of a gay couple that visits his family's home for dinner. These opinions on homosexual desire derive from the anti-homosexual paranoia born from the fear of homosexuality disrupting the heteronormative society. In this sense, the anti-homosexual paranoia proves that this queer identity was consigned to the realm of the unspeakable, as it was outside of the norm. This is why, when Elio wonders with whom he could talk about his homosexual desire, he discards almost all his inner circle, since he claims that all of them would be opposed to this identity. Therefore, the only person he believes he can talk to is Oliver, who may or may not share the same identity.

Furthermore, Elio is aware that he can accept his queer identity as long as it remains hidden and he knows that he can hide within the boundaries of the speakable in discourse. For instance, in order to remain within the heterosexual norm Elio tries to connect with Oliver's desire through their desire for the same woman, Chiara. He uses ambiguous language to his advantage in order to conceal implicit meanings. For

example, it is because he understands how language works that he can admit shamelessly that Oliver is handsome, since going against public opinion would make him stand out more. Nevertheless, Elio realises that although it makes him feel safe to be able to conceal his identity, he does not want to shut it down forever. This is why he resolves confessing his feelings to Oliver. Although he theoretically crosses the boundaries of the speakable when he confesses, the ambiguous language that hides unspoken messages allows him to conceal his queer identity. In this sense, we analysed many moments between Elio and Oliver that show how it is possible for them to maintain their unspeakable identities within the limits of the speakable, as long as they exist in secrecy through silence. Notwithstanding, we also find physical spaces in which the norm is apparently not as strict as it is in the small town of B.: Monet's berm and Rome. Just in the same way Nathaniel Hawthorne uses the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* as a space where characters can live outside of societal rules, Monet's berm and Rome allow them to conceal their queer identities in solitary and crowded spaces, since those are places in which they can go unnoticed.

The same way Butler (2010) explains that in a patriarchal society phallocentrism is the norm, since all the feminine is defined through difference with the masculine, Elio uses heterosexual norm to define his non-heteronormative identities. We can see this in how he describes being bisexual as wanting to be both man and woman, as the heteronormative object of desire for men are women, and vice versa. Thus, Elio implies that desiring men turns him metaphorically into a woman. However, this only feeds into the narrative of being homosexual as not being masculine enough. This conflict of defining a non-heteronormative identity through the heterosexual norm causes in Elio a deep sense of rejection to his own homosexual desire. This can be seen when he feels ashamed and revulsed with himself after sleeping with Oliver for the first time due to his role as receiver in the sexual relationship; whereas after the second time they sleep

together Elio felt very protective towards Oliver because of his sexual role as giver. These contradictory feelings are strictly linked to the traditional role of women as receivers and men as givers in heterosexual relationships. Therefore, Elio's rejection to his own homosexual desire is caused by the heavy weight of the heterosexual norm by crossing for the first time the boundaries of the speakable.

Butler (2010) called this rejection of one's own homosexuality the melancholic denial/preservation of homosexuality. Under the weight of a heteronormative society, homosexuals must renounce to their object of desire and to the feeling of desire in itself, as their identity is censored. In this sense, they face a feeling of loss that will make them undergo unconsciously a process of identification with the beloved, in which the lover becomes a part of the self. In *Call Me By Your Name* this idea goes further, since Elio and Oliver's relationship is constantly described in terms of Plato's *Symposium* and the creation myth of Aristophanes. Therefore, their process of identification is already based on the idea that they are the two halves of a whole. This is why, when Elio sees Oliver wearing his clothes, he is reminded of their soulmate-like connection. This makes Elio realise that he does not want to renounce to his relationship with Oliver and decides to continue defying the heterosexual norm.

After exploring the desire for concealment of their queer identities, I analysed their different portrayals of Judaism taking into account their familial memories. Since Elio's mother's side of the family is Italian and they reside in Italy, their ancestors have had to face the persecution of Jews during World War II. This would mean that Elio possibly belongs to a third generation of Holocaust survivors. According to Hirsch (2008), the traumatic experiences lived by one generation can be transferred to the following ones. She calls this 'postmemory', a concept that establishes that post-generations of survivors can create memories from external experiences. Thus, taking experiences lived by ancestors threatens the identity of the postmemory subject, since

they have to form their own individual identities while being affected by the weight of someone else's memory. This is the reason why Elio's family live their Jewish lives in discretion, wearing their Star of David under the shirt. The weight of the events of World War II lived by their ancestors unconsciously makes them conceal who they are. In contrast to Elio, Oliver is an American Jew and does not have any problem wearing his Judaism openly, as he demonstrates by not hiding his Star of David. Oliver does not live under the weight of someone else's memory like Elio does. Elio admits that Oliver does not feel any type of self-consciousness when wearing his Judaism openly in Italy because he has never had to experience what European Jews have or how their lives in a Catholic country as Jews were like. Moreover, when Elio tries to do the same and wear his Star of David openly, he compares it to being naked, because he is exposing an identity that he has been taught to keep hidden due to the consequences that showing his Judaism in the past would have had. He says that Oliver demonstrates that he could be as open as him with his Judaism and get away with it, which entails the unspoken implication of a past in which showing his Judaism was something bad.

Furthermore, Rothberg's (2009) 'multidirectional memory' also plays an important role in the novel. This idea explains that different histories of victimization can coexist and interact in collective memory and public spaces. However, I have applied this theory to the realm of individual memory and how two identities that have been historically subject to violence can in fact coexist and interact within one person. At first it seems that Aciman sees memory as competitive, because Elio's ancestors try to warn him and stop him from crossing to the realm of the unspeakable by sleeping with Oliver. Furthermore, Elio feels guilt towards his unborn children, hinting at the dilemma of reproduction in homosexual relationships highlighted by Frederick S. Roden (2019). This rejection by his Jewish memory is due to the possibility of Elio's

unspeakable queer identity to taint his memory and the familial memory to following generations. Nevertheless, we see in many instances throughout the novel how his queer identity makes him reconnect with his Jewish identity, thanks to the similarities between him and Oliver, like when Elio tries to copy Oliver in his portrayal of Judaism. There are other examples in which we can see how Elio uses Jewish terms to explain his connection to Oliver. For instance, based on André Aciman's own experience with exile from Egypt, he uses metaphors related to exile to explain Elio and Oliver's relationship. Therefore, not only is Oliver Elio's soulmate but also his homecoming, being separated from him is *galut*, exile.

The last identity I explored was the cultural identity, specifically Elio's Italian identity and Oliver's American identity. In order to analyse them, I read Stuart Hall (1996) in search for a definition for identity in this context. He explains that the question of identity is related to discursive practices: ways of behaving, speaking, and thinking. Hall clarifies that identities are the result of many identification processes, in which individuals find shared characteristics with other groups or ideals. Thus, identities are fragmented and in constant negotiation. This idea is supported by Aciman's concept of the San Clemente Syndrome, a theory that he includes in the novel to explain how individuals are the sum of all their experiences, just like the Basilica de San Clemente is the result of all its architectural history. Moreover, Hall states that all identities are defined through difference. This can also be seen in the novel when Elio judges Oliver's behaviour and way of speaking from his European standpoint. Therefore, he defines Oliver's identity across difference with his own.

Furthermore, the different cultural identities of Elio and Oliver seem to generate conflict in the way they interact from a linguistic standpoint. Hall (1997) explains that language is the tool through which meaning is shared within a same culture. In this sense, sharing a language means sharing the same culture. Although he admits that

every individual has their own personal worldview, two members of a same culture will share a more similar worldview than two members of different cultures. Therefore, when two alien cultures meet each other, they will need to have a certain degree of knowledge about the other's linguistic code to be able to communicate meaning. Otherwise, they will not be able to understand one another. This linguistic conflict is actually seen in *Call Me By Your Name* in a very specific way, since both Elio and Oliver speak English. Nevertheless, the cultures in which they use their English is not the same. They are able to communicate meaning, but their ways of behaving and speaking are still strictly connected to their Italian/American cultures. This is why Oliver's 'Americanisms' are a focal point for Elio when he draws his own personal image of Oliver. His expressions are the essence of his cultural identity, which in contact with the mostly Italian identity of the Perlman's stands out in the family. This is also why Mrs. Perlman gives Oliver nicknames related to typically American things, such as the film industry and the cowboys. As Hall (1996) claims, identities are formed through discourse by how others define us and how we respond to that definition.

In conclusion, silences allow individuals to conceal who they are and to maintain their identities in secrecy, especially when those identities have been subject to oppression, persecution, and censorship. Besides, this silence is not always done by choice by subjects of unspeakable identities. Instead, they have been imposed to them by the oppressive powers through the means previously stated. This has proved to be true in the queer and Jewish identities, since they both have suffered persecution. Nonetheless, since the unspoken messages found in those silences have a motivation, they reveal the originally concealed identity. As I have demonstrated in my analysis, when we pay attention to the implicit meanings hidden in speech, we can discover their initial motivation and why they cannot be explicitly said. In this sense, discourse has two dimensions: the words that are said and their hidden connotation. This is why, I

would consider that exploring instances of silence in characters' speech is especially helpful for character analysis. My final degree dissertation deals with a specific type of literary analysis dedicated to unveiling deeper and rounder characters beyond the initial image they present. Although my hypothesis has proved to be true in connection to queer and Jewish identities, it is true that when it comes to cultural identities, unless the culture has been subject to historical violence, silences are not used to conceal them. The analysis of Elio and Oliver's cultural identities has demonstrated, however, that people's behaviour is easily misunderstood and misinterpreted when we judge them through difference with our own culture.

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