

Remembering Identity: Ghostly Pictures and Objects in the Work by Ruth Behar

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Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to examine the use of photographs in two works by Ruth Behar (*An Island Called Home* (2007) and *Travelling Heavy* (2013)) with regards to the representation of the trauma of the Holocaust and the search of identity that Behar herself enacts in her multiple travels to Cuba. Behar uses photography (specifically family pictures) in order to insert herself in the Cuban nation and as a means to explore her different identities as a Cuban-American, as a Jewish Cuban in the United States and in the world. Behar's family pictures (mostly by unknown photographers) illustrate her desire to establish roots and find a home. Her autobiography/memoir is a way to explore her multiple identities and insert herself in the different histories to which she belongs: Cuban history, Jewish immigrant history, Sephardic history. I will focus additionally in how Behar uses objects and the mechanism of a picture within a picture to enact an act of postmemory (Marianne Hirsch) and to uncover the ghostly presence of those who died in Auschwitz or other concentration camps in Germany or Poland. Objects and documents brought by Jewish immigrants to their new home in Cuba become sites of memory and identity for the next generations. For Behar, her inability to remember her Cuban past propels her to bring other people's memories alive and to embrace the ghosts that populate the lives of the survivors and descendants of the Holocaust.