

«*In-between spaces:*
le scritture migranti e la scrittura come migrazione»

2

Identity navigation: rethinking languages, literatures and cultures between challenges and misinterpretations

edited by

Nino Arrigo, Annalisa Bonomo e Karl Chircop

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Prefazione

“Poiché nulla di sé e del mondo sa la generalità degli uomini, se la letteratura non glielo apprende” come ammoniva Leonardo Sciascia, anche sui temi dell’immigrazione la verità del fenomeno emerge a volte con più chiarezza e forza nella testimonianza o nell’invenzione letteraria che nelle statistiche demografiche ed economiche, per quanto esse, da sole, dovrebbero bastare a smentire la percezione prevalente sulla natura tossica e cospiratoria di un processo, che accompagna l’umanità da millenni e costituisce un motivo archetipico dell’esperienza umana e della creazione artistica. Dovrebbero bastare – dicevo – le statistiche: ma non bastano. Come tutte le paure più profonde, anche quella dello straniero è una paura culturale e culturali devono esserne, in buona misura, anche i contravveneni politici. Ogni giorno saggiamo duramente il fondo oscuro del pregiudizio e la sua sostanziale impermeabilità alle confutazioni “oggettive”. Quasi tutto ciò che si scrive e si diffonde con più successo sul fenomeno migratorio è falso e volgarmente propagandistico. La retorica dell’invasione come metafora del rapporto tra immigrati e nativi ha prepotentemente conquistato il discorso pubblico. Gli schemi cognitivi e i riflessi emotivi innescati da questa retorica sono tanto alienanti, quanto potenti e possiamo dire, con rammarico, che chiunque oggi voglia contrastare questo dominio è costretto a giocare come ai margini estremi del campo di gioco: quelli del fanatismo, della discriminazione o della violenza. Contro le “verità” ufficiali – gli stranieri sono troppi, causano la disoccupazione e consumano il welfare degli italiani, fanno crescere i tassi di criminalità... – non si può a quanto pare neppure provare a giocare: non c’è proprio partita.

Una sfida civile, che stiamo tutti perdendo sul piano della rappresentazione sociale, può essere combattuta sul piano della rappresentazione letteraria e della critica culturale, cioè di un “sapere” che non aspira a farsi immediatamente “potere”, ma piuttosto a demistificarne i presupposti ideologici, a partire da quell’idolo immondo, come lo chiamava Luigi Einaudi, dello Stato sovrano (con tutti i suoi corollari intrinsecamente razzisti e imperialisti)? Io penso che sia possibile e in ogni caso che sia anche questo il piano che ci può consentire di destrutturare le verità coatte del discorso nazionalista. L’approccio multidisciplinare alla comprensione del fenomeno migratorio, come di qualunque fenomeno umano di questa misura, si impone per ragioni di onestà, oltre che di efficienza. Non possiamo sperare di capire nulla di una realtà complessa e non riducibile a un ordine di cause ed effetti predeterminato, senza indagarne tutte le dimensioni, a partire da quelle più radicalmente antropologiche, che proprio nella letteratura trovano piena espressione.

In questo, come anche nel precedente volume, i curatori e gli autori si sono impegnati a indagare il duplice verso di questa esperienza: quella della migrazione come tema o, per usare un termine improprio, come “oggetto” e quello della migrazione come forma di ricerca interiore, come distanza che aiuta a leggere e a ricostruire, pienamente umanizzandoli, i meccanismi dell’appartenenza. È quanto ciascuno di noi sperimenta ormai quotidianamente, anche in campi lontanissimi dalla letteratura, dove le frontiere e le appartenenze etnico-nazionali sono sempre più convenzionali e irrilevanti, rispetto all’insieme delle nostre frequentazioni, dei nostri consumi, del contenuto spirituale e materiale della nostra vita quotidiana. Tutto quello che siamo, vediamo, sentiamo, mangiamo, indossiamo, per non parlare di tutto quello che “facciamo” e dei relativi mezzi, rimanda a una geografia ormai totalmente post-nazionale e se ciascuno fosse in grado di elaborare la differenza tra il volto e la maschera dell’identità diventerebbe immune dalla seduzione nazionalista e dai suoi feticci simbolici.

Il titolo di questa collana suggerisce di muoversi “in-between spaces”, a cavallo di confini linguistici e culturali che diventano, da barriere, congiunzioni e da trincee, sentieri di comprensione della

diversità come cifra caratteristica non solo dell’umanità nel suo complesso, ma di ogni uomo nella sua identità personale. Non ho dubbi che il potere oggi vincente in Italia, e non solo in Italia, liquiderebbe questa indicazione come un puro vezzo intellettuale e snobistico. Ho ancora meno dubbi che oggi, però, la sfida è esattamente questa e ogni tentativo che va in questa direzione non è solo benvenuto, ma prezioso.

Emma Bonino

Preface*

Leonardo Sciascia warned that “*nulla di sé e del mondo sa la generalità degli uomini, se la letteratura non glielo apprende*”. This means that the truth about immigration and all its pertaining issues sometimes emerges more strongly in literary representation and creation rather than in demographic and economic statistics, even though the former and the latter should suffice to undermine the predominant perception of the toxic and conspirational nature of a process which has always been associated with human experience and artistic creation. As I said, statistics “should” be sufficient, but they are not.

As with all deepest fears, even that of the foreigner is a cultural concern and, to a large extent, its political antidotes have to be cultural ones. Everyday we experience the obscure face of prejudice and its substantial resistance to “objective” confutations. What is usually written and successfully spread about the phenomenon is most of the time false or commonly propagandistic. The rhetoric of invasion as a metaphor for the relationship between immigrants and natives has arrogantly won over public opinion. The cognitive methods and the emotional effects of such a rhetoric are both alienating and powerful, and we may say – regrettably – that today anyone who wants to contrast this control is forced to play at the extreme borders of the playing field, and these are fanaticism, discrimination or violence. Apparently you can’t even try to play against the official “truths” – there are too many foreigners, they cause unemployment, they squander the welfare of Italian people, they increase criminality rates. There is no level playing field.

Can the civil challenge, which we are socially losing, be faced thanks to the literary representation of it, and thanks to cultural criti-

* English translation provided by the editors.

cism? Can “knowledge”, which does not want to become immediately “power”, demistify all those ideological assumptions, starting from that obscene idol – as Luigi Einaudi used to call it – which is the sovereign State (with all its intrinsically racist and imperialistic results)? I think it is possible and, in any case, this is also the perspective which may deconstruct the imposed truths of the nationalistic discourse. The multidisciplinary approach to migration, as in the case of other many other human phenomena, is fundamental in order to understand it honestly and efficiently. We should investigate all its dynamics if we want to understand a complex situation which can't be reduced to a predetermined order of causes and effects. And we should start from its anthropological realms which find in literature their full expression.

In the present issue, as in the previous one, the editors and authors investigate the dualistic aspect of this experience: on the one hand, they deal with migration as a topic, or, to call it improperly, as a “subject”; on the other hand, they muse on migration as a soul-searching condition, as a distance useful to read and reconstruct the sense of belonging by humanising it. It is what we daily experience by now, also in areas other than literature, where boundaries and ethnic/national memberships are increasingly more conventional and irrelevant if compared to our acquaintances and customs, and to the spiritual and material contents of our daily life. All that we are, see, feel, eat, wear, and even more everything we do and how we do it, refers to a post-national geography; and if we were able to elaborate the difference between the face and the mask of identity, we would be immune to nationalistic seduction and its symbolic imagery.

The title of this series suggests to move within “in-between spaces”, whilst rising above linguistic and cultural borders which become connections instead of barriers, new paths instead of trenches. So, thanks to that, we will be able to understand diversity as a typical feature not only of humanity but also of each individual identity. I am sure that the current ruling power in Italy would think such an indication as a mere intellectual and snobistic exercise. However, I am evermore convinced that nowadays here lies the crux of the challenge, and all the attempts which try to face it are not only welcome, but also really precious.

Emma Bonino

Introduzione

a cura di Nino Arrigo, Annalisa Bonomo e Karl Chircop

L'identità si crea costantemente e altrettanto costantemente si rappresenta. In questo modo, al di là dell'idealizzazione di una sua presunta unicità, essa contiene molteplicità, incroci e "spazi-tra", elementi di un'esistenza più "autentica" che si colloca al di fuori di ogni restrittiva categorizzazione di lingua, cultura, etnicità, genere, classe e religione. Tale eterogeneità interroga le mutevoli condizioni di una società plurilingue e multietnica attraverso la lingua e la letteratura intese come potenti veicoli trans-culturali. D'altra parte, la lingua è componente primaria dell'identità, sia essa sociale o etnica e tutti gli individui compongono, raccontano e ricordano la propria identità usando la lingua in maniera strategica. Suggestiva rimane, a tal proposito, l'attribuzione del valore verbale ai termini "language – to language" e "ethnicity – to ethnify" proposta da Ofelia García nel 2010. Un agire sulla propria identità con la lingua, da parte di individui e gruppi "who use discursive and ethnic practices to signify what it is they want to be. The ability 'to language' and 'to ethnify' is precisely then the most important signifying role of human beings – that which gives life meaning. It is through languaging and ethnifying that people perform their identifying" (García 2010: 519).

Tanto nei contesti delle vecchie diáspore quanto nelle loro controparti moderne, alla lingua è concesso un nuovo potere contro la repressione, l'oppressione, i fraintendimenti e gli stereotipi; inoltre, tutti gli aspetti dell'esperienza umana sono mediati, trasmessi e tradotti da categorie predeterminate e da opinioni che necessitano di essere conosciute e gestite correttamente.

Allo stesso modo, tanto le politiche linguistiche quanto le rappresentazioni letterarie e sociologiche riconciliano la memoria storica con la realtà empirica e distinguono diversi tipi di formazione dell'identità

così come differenti modi di trasmissione e rappresentazione della stessa. Di conseguenza, le identità nazionali, sociali, religiose, di genere e linguistiche contengono una serie di costrutti culturali che navigano la complessità dell'era globale, fornendo un nuovo senso di "appartenenza" e sperimentando percezioni multiple di cosa il concetto di identità significhi tanto negli studi linguistici quanto nella critica letteraria e nella riflessione sociologica.

Alla luce di tali premesse, il secondo volume della collana di studi *In-between spaces* propone ai suoi lettori il concetto di migrazione, non solo come uno spostamento fisico del soggetto migrante, ma anche come un'altra mobilità "identitaria", prettamente svolta nella mente. Spesso la letteratura della migrazione propone un soggetto migrante che attraverso diverse circostanze fortuite subisce uno smarrimento identitario, un sentirsi mentalmente *in-between spaces* trovandosi in balia di un'asse centrifuga composta di tre spazi fisici concatenati: i. lo spazio asfissiante della terra d'origine, il che comporta la partenza estenuante da quei punti-soglia che depersonalizzano la realtà migrante, come i porti, le stazioni e gli aeroporti; ii. lo spazio in bilico tra il punto di partenza e la meta, cioè l'*in-between space* transitorio del viaggio sui treni, sugli aerei ma in particolar modo sui transatlantici, vere città galleggianti e labirintiche che aumentano il senso di smarrimento; iii. lo spazio della meta d'approdo, quella destinazione finale avvolta dalla pretesa di immedesimazione identitaria del soggetto migrante nella cultura che lo ospita.

Si tratta dunque di concepire la mobilità dell'identità in termini di navigazione, di flusso e di sviluppo. Spesso e malvolentieri la realtà della migrazione ci spinge a scoprire una sofferta e malsana negoziazione di compromessi psicologici, culturali, pseudocoloniali e linguistici talvolta avvillenti per il soggetto migrante, nella fattispecie quelli imposti prepotentemente dal contesto ospitante. È, poi, interessante inquadrare lo spazio ospitante anche in termini della natura del mondo animale, perché non molti autori lo fanno. Noto a tutti è il caso esemplare di Karen Blixen¹ (1885-1962), la quale dopo anni trascorsi in Kenia (1913-31) ritornò in patria e cominciò a scrivere il suo libro di

¹ Nota anche con il *nom de plume* Isak Dinesen.

ricordi *La mia Africa* (pubblicato originariamente in inglese nel 1937) in cui attua una poetica trasfigurazione della sua esperienza identitaria immersa nella natura e nel popolo africano. Blixen infatti scriveva che, “Gli uomini civilizzati non sanno più cos’è la vera calma, e devono prendere lezioni di silenzio dal mondo selvaggio, prima che quel mondo li accetti” (Blixen 2005: 20). L’autrice delinea anche i suoi rapporti amichevoli con gli indigeni, ben consapevole però “che non avrei mai potuto conoscerli o capirli completamente, mentre loro mi conoscevano fino in fondo e riuscivano addirittura a prevedere i miei atti e le mie decisioni” (ivi, 23). Nel suo libro di ricordi, Blixen arriva addirittura a distinguere sociologicamente tra la predisposizione degli europei nordici e quella dei meridionali. Narra che i nordici arrivano a vivere in Africa con “una pazienza infinita con i paesi e le razze dei tropici. (...) Intuivano che nel contatto con una razza completamente diversa c’era una possibilità di comunione assoluta, quasi di identità: e il loro individualismo spariva” (ivi, 21). D’altro canto, “I popoli dell’Europa meridionale e quelli di sangue misto non capiscono questa possibilità: la criticano o ne ridono (...)” (*ibid.*).

Se vogliamo metabolizzare la realtà identitaria della migrazione non possiamo, poi, esulare da una delle grandi lezioni modernistiche della letteratura mitteleuropea, cioè quella impartita dalla poetica pi-randelliana sull’identità che è costantemente creata e rappresentata. Sfatando dunque l’immagine dell’identità coesa e rosea del migrante nordeuropeo di Blixen che persegue il suo utopico sogno nord-occidentale in Africa, si potrebbe arrivare a percepire le sfasature, la molteplicità e le intersezioni identitarie del trovarsi *in-between spaces*, in fattispecie quando il soggetto migrante pensa illusoriamente di dimenticare le categorie e i problemi claustrofobici della sua terra d’origine. Questo, infatti, è quanto accade al personaggio di Karl Rossmann nel romanzo *America* di Franz Kafka. Karl fugge dalla realtà claustrofobica praghese e da una gravidanza non voluta, e prima ancora di approdare ad un’estraniante New York, si è già smarrito tra i corridoi di un transatlantico, autentico labirinto e catalizzatore di angoscia e confusione:

Sotto, con suo rincrescimento, trovò sbarrato per la prima volta un passaggio che gli avrebbe di molto abbreviato la strada, probabilmente

a causa dello sbarco dei passeggeri, e dovette cercare a fatica la via per scale che non finivano mai, lungo corridoi pieni di curve, attraverso una cabina vuota con una scrivania abbandonata, sinché infine, dato che aveva percorso quel tragitto soltanto una o due volte e sempre in compagnia di qualcuno, si accorse di essersi smarrito del tutto. Disorientato, poiché non aveva incontrato anima viva e udìva sempre soltanto lo scalpiccio di migliaia di piedi sopra di sé e da lontano, come un anelito, gli arrivava l'ultima eco delle macchine ormai ferme (...). (Kafka 1997: 21)

Kafka sceglie un'accumulazione di termini negativi per narrare questa prima esperienza americana del personaggio: “rincrescimento”, “sbarrato”, “fatica”, “non finivano mai”, “vuota”, “abbandonata”, “smarrito”, “disorientato”. E durante l’entrata in porto, New York, in una *mise en abyme* decisamente kafkiana, gli si profila agli occhi tramite una statua della Libertà che non impugna la consueta torcia che tutti conosciamo, bensì una sconcertante spada.

Il nostro volume prende, dunque, in esame diverse tipologie di migrazione che affrontano molteplici aspetti di questa triplice spazialità del soggetto migrante. I personaggi e i contesti analizzati testimoniano attraverso la scrittura svariati generi, transizioni e metamorfosi che evidenziano il concetto di una *identity navigation* che è sempre in flusso e in movimento. Vale la pena di considerare il caso singolare del migrante e missionario gesuita del romanzo *Silence* (1969) di Shusaku Endo (1923-1996). Endo, a pieno titolo personale, si converte al cattolicesimo in una scelta fondamentale vissuta drammaticamente. Nel romanzo, ambientato nella seconda metà del Cinquecento, quando il cristianesimo cominciò a diffondersi in Giappone seppure osteggiato dal governo Tokugawa, Endo narra la storia identitaria del missionario gesuita Sebastião Rodrigues, la cui fede viene costantemente insidiata. Durante il viaggio via mare per approdare in Giappone, Rodrigues, in balia del terrore e dello smarrimento, si aggrappa alle icone identitarie della sua formazione gesuitica:

There arose in my heart the thought of St Francis Xavier. He also, in the calm which followed such a storm, must have looked up at the milky sky. And then for the next eighty years how many missionaries

and seminarians had sailed around the coast of Africa, passed by India, and had crossed over this very sea to preach the gospel in Japan. (Endo 1988: 50)

Pochi personaggi migranti dispongono di tali certezze cui ancorare la propria navigazione dell'identità durante gli *in-between spaces* del viaggio via mare. Ben diversa, per esempio, è la chiave di lettura di scrittori migranti che ritornano in patria anni dopo aver vissuto l'esperienza migratoria, come accade con i testi di Marguerite Duras (1914-1996). Duras rientrò in Francia dal Vietnam nel 1932, e con *L'Amante* (1984), ambientato sempre in Vietnam, sceglie la chiave identitaria autobiografica parlando di sé in termini di *anagnorisis* epifanici ed estraneità:

Quella notte, perduta tra tante e tante notti, la ragazza, di questo era certa, l'aveva trascorsa su quella nave e c'era quando ciò era successo, quando era esplosa la musica di Chopin sotto il cielo luminescente. Non c'era un alito di vento e la musica si era propagata per tutto il piroscalo buio, come un'ingiunzione del cielo, chi sa per che cosa, come un ordine divino dall'ignoto significato. E la ragazza si era alzata come per andare a uccidersi a sua volta, a buttarsi a sua volta in mare e poi aveva pianto, perché aveva pensato all'uomo di Cholen e tutto a un tratto non era più sicura di non averlo amato, solo che quell'amore non l'aveva visto perché si era perso nella storia come acqua nella sabbia e lei lo ritrovava soltanto ora, nell'istante della musica sul mare. (Duras 2006: 120)

Per sondare adeguatamente i molteplici aspetti del fenomeno identitario della migrazione, il volume si presta anche ad un'erme-neutica eterogenea e volutamente transdisciplinare. La lingua in questo caso si assume responsabilità onerose e gravose di strumento di analisi interculturale imparziale e sensibilissimo. Troviamo molto perspicace un'analisi storico-linguistica e post-coloniale della scrittrice siciliana Irene Chias, la quale nel romanzo *Non cercare l'uomo capra* illustra questa chiave di lettura linguistica per capire meglio il fenomeno identitario:

Uno dei miei migliori amici dopo il mio arrivo in Italia era gambiano, si chiamava Tidiane. Parlavamo la stessa lingua, il wolof, ma io lo facevo inserendo parole francesi, lui inglesi. È davvero strano quello

che succede con i gambiani. C'è uno stesso popolo, con la stessa religione e la stessa lingua, spesso sono membri di una stessa famiglia che nell'Ottocento è stata separata da una linea dritta e irreale tracciata da un francese e da un inglese. Diresti che è una linea immaginaria disegnata su una carta e che quindi non ha alcun effetto sulle persone che invece stanno sulla terra. E però non è così. Io posso testimoniare la differenza fra i gambiani e i senegalesi. Certo è minore e trasversale rispetto alla differenza fra la gente di campagna e la gente di città, ep pure c'è. A Banjul, ad esempio, sono molto più pragmatici che a Dakar. E parliamo di due capitali. Ci sono differenze rispetto a noi che io collego alla presenza anglosassone. Ma parlo di persone che hanno fatto le scuole, che sono le scuole dei colonizzatori. Per me il rapporto con i gambiani è la dimostrazione di come la colonizzazione ha plasmato la nostra identità, anche se ci si illude di aver recuperato qualcosa di "precoloniale" che ovviamente non esiste più e si può solo inventare. (Chias 2016: 166)

Il personaggio migrante e cingalese di Assane, tramite la scrittura di Chias, prende atto dell'impatto esercitato dalle politiche e delle culture linguistiche del suo paese e di quello confinante (Senegal e Gambia), tentando di riconciliare la memoria storica e coloniale alla realtà empirica e identitaria. Il volume che presentiamo cerca in maniera parallela di distinguere svariate tipologie di formazione e di comunicazione dell'identità scoprendo così un'eterogeneità e una transitorietà con cui deve sopravvivere il soggetto migrante in una società sempre più multilinguistica e multietnica.

D'altra parte, durante il corso della storia delle tante diasporre vecchie e nuove, collettive e individuali, la lingua e la letteratura si sono sempre assunte la responsabilità di testimoniare contro la repressione minoritaria, e contro la mancanza di integrazione sociale e l'intolleranza alla diversità. Pensiamo per un attimo alla lezione magistrale impartita da Edward Morgan Forster (1879-1970) nel suo *A Passage to India* (1924), dove l'autore, dopo anni vissuti in India, si fa carico di analizzare e descrivere i rapporti tra indiani e inglesi residenti in India non solo dal punto di vista sociale e linguistico, ma anche come simbolo di problemi assai più vasti ed enigmatici, connessi ai rapporti dell'uomo con i suoi simili, con la cultura e con i propri istinti. Forster narra del deterioramento dei rapporti umani tra Mrs. Moore e suo figlio Ronny Hea-

slop, il magistrato della città fittizia di Chandrapoore, nella fattispecie quando questi rivela atteggiamenti razzisti nei confronti degli indigeni indiani: “You never used to judge people like this at home’. / ‘India isn’t home’, he retorted, rather rudely (...)(Forster 1982: 54). Tuttavia, Forster va anche oltre, e indaga il campo gravitazionale esercitato dall’India sui colonizzatori inglesi che vi abitano. Questo spiega, infatti, la presenza di Adela Quested in India: “Although Miss Quested had known Ronny well in England, she felt well advised to visit him before deciding to be his wife. India had developed sides of his character that she had never admired” (ivi, 96). Forster illustra le abitudini dei coloni inglesi come Ronny, sempre tesi verso le convenzioni e le forme, ma rivelando nel frattempo i profondi pregiudizi e la derisione nei confronti degli indiani indigeni: “Aziz was exquisitely dressed, from tie-pin to spats, but he had forgotten his back collar-stud, and there you have the Indian all over: inattention to detail; the fundamental slackness that reveals the race. Similarly, to ‘meet’ in the caves as if they were the clock at Charing Cross (...)" (ivi, 97).

L’incontro di mare e di terra, per dirla con Franco Cassano, di *Mithos* e *Logos*, sul far del Novecento, scandisce, invece, un’altra famosa odissea, quella del Pascal pirandelliano, una vera e proprio odissea dell’identità la cui parabola si conclude tra le braccia della zia Scolastica. E come ci rivela l’onomastica: se Pascal è il filosofo dell’*esprit de finesse*, delle intuizioni del cuore e, dunque, del *Mithos*, la zia Scolastica rappresenta la filosofia dell’oggettività del reale, il *Logos* aristotelico. Il filo rosso del romanzo pirandelliano è, infatti, rappresentato dall’identità in navigazione del suo protagonista, un antieroe novecentesco, epigono dello spirito di Ulisse. Un’odissea che racconta lo spaesamento, la crisi scaturita da quella perdita della centralità nel cosmo che Pirandello addebita, nella seconda premessa del romanzo (quella filosofica, a mo’ di scusa), a Copernico, ovvero a colui che per primo toglie, alla terra e ai suoi abitanti, la centralità nel cosmo².

² Si pensi anche al *Copernico* di Leopardi che, molto prima di Pirandello, in una delle *Operette Morali*, affronta il concetto della nullità del genere umano e attacca la filosofia che mette l’uomo al centro dell’universo.

La condizione dell'uomo del ventesimo secolo non potrà allora che essere quella dell'esule, migrante sperduto in un cosmo labirintico, alle prese con l'enigma della sua stessa natura e della sua identità. Alle prese con la vertigine dell'incertezza. Pirandello sembra comporre una sorta di cruciverba a chiave dove il lettore, ricomponendo i pezzi (Pascal, Scolastica, Copernico) trova la soluzione, scoprendo la parola mancante: "nessuno". Nessuno, come Ulisse. Oppure niente. Il nulla, la "vanità delle vanità" contenuta nel più enigmatico dei libri della Bibbia, l'*Ecclesiaste*. Oppure il paradosso di autoreferenzialità, espresso dal Dio veterotestamentario che si manifesta a Mosè in forma di roveto ardente, "ego sum qui sum". Io sono colui che sono: nessuno, come Ulisse, o tutti gli uomini della storia, come il Nietzsche posseduto dal demone della follia. La parabola del Pascal pirandelliano, smessi i panni di Adriano Meis, si concluderà tra le braccia sicure della zia Scolastica, delle certezze del *cogito*. Tra Aristotele e Cartesio, per cercare di dare un senso, fornire un ordine a "quell'immenso panorama di futilità che è la storia contemporanea", alla maniera di T.S. Eliot alle prese con l'odissea dell'Ulisse di Joyce³. "Io sono il fu Mattia Pascal", l'epilogo del romanzo pirandelliano, scandisce drammaticamente l'impossibilità dell'uomo contemporaneo di conoscere se stesso, se non come moltitudine di identità. Siamo tutti "uno, nessuno e centomila", oscilliamo tra il tutto e il niente, incapaci di trovare un porto che ci salvi, costretti a navigare all'infinito con l'unica certezza dell'assenza di certezze, del "sapere di non sapere", socraticamente.

Ora, questa sapienza letteraria, sembra trovare un'epitome illuminante nella nozione di soggetto elaborata dal sociologo Edgar Morin:

Contrariamente ai due dogmi che si oppongono, l'uno per il quale il soggetto non è niente, l'altro per il quale il soggetto è tutto, il soggetto

³ Si veda, T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth", in *The Dial*, LXXV (Nov. 1923), pp. 480-83; altrettanto significativi sono, poi, i seguenti studi: M. Shorer, J. Miles & G. McKenzie (eds.), *Criticism: The Foundation of Modern Literary Judgment*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948; S. Givens (ed), *James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism* (1948), New York, The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1963, pp. 198-202; R. Deming (ed), *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970 [Vol. 1], pp. 268-71.

oscilla tra il tutto e il niente. Io sono tutto per me, io non sono niente nell'Universo. Il principio di egocentrismo è il principio per il quale io sono tutto, ma poiché tutto il mio mondo si disinteggerà, alla mia morte, per questa mortalità, appunto, io non sono niente. L'"io" è un privilegio inaudito e nello stesso tempo la cosa più banale, perché tutti possono dire "io". Nello stesso modo c'è oscillazione del soggetto tra egoismo e altruismo. Nell'egoismo io sono tutto e gli altri sono niente, ma nell'altruismo io mi sacrifico sono del tutto secondario rispetto a coloro ai quali mi do. L'individuo soggetto rifiuta la morte che lo inghiotte, ma è tuttavia capace di offrire la vita per le sue idee, per la patria e l'umanità. Ecco la complessità della nozione di soggetto. (Morin 2000: 137).

Il nostro mondo contemporaneo ha, dunque, bisogno, oggi più che mai, di riscoprire un pensiero "meridiano" come via verso la complessità, ovvero quel pensiero filosofico nato sulle coste della Grecia che Husserl ci invitava, con passione teoretica, a rivitalizzare in chiave europea⁴. Un pensiero che alla passione identitaria e ai fondamentalismi della ragione, preferisca una riflessione sul lato oscuro di ogni identità. Un pensiero libero e aperto che non abbia paura di scoprire l'altro, il diverso. Anche in ognuno di noi.

Prendendo spunto da tali riflessioni, questo volume intende, dunque, affrontare la dinamica conflittuale del concetto di identità espresso nelle sue varie sfaccettature nazionali, ideologiche, religiose, sessuali e linguistiche, contribuendo alla creazione di paradigmi culturali che navighino la complessità dell'epoca globalizzata. Fondamentale in questa sede è la lezione sulla complessità identitaria tramandataci da Forster: "But nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else" (Forster 1982: 101). Il volume si apre a questo nuovo senso di consapevolezza sociologica, letteraria e linguistica nella diversità di significati dell'identità negli studi sulla migrazione, proponendo l'idea di un'identità "fluida" e "in movimento" secondo una prospettiva volutamente

⁴ Cfr. E. Husserl, *La crisi delle scienze europee e la fenomenologia trascendentale*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2015.

pluricentrica e plurilinguistica che consenta, sin dalla conformazione del volume stesso, l'abbraccio di più discipline e la combinazione di diverse prospettive che posizionino di volta in volta il significato/significati più intimi dell'identità l'uno in relazione con l'altro; un approccio, quest'ultimo, che mira a delineare più i contorni e il controluce del diverso, dell'altro, e dell'identità individuale e sociale come entità intrisecamente plurali.

Nello specifico, la prima sezione, in lingua italiana, muove dall'idea di "frontiera", che, specie in ottica plurilingue, rivela porosità inaspettate e valenze plurali sino al dilemma stesso legato all'accoglienza, indagato al di là dei più comuni conformismi legati alla migrazione; dall'identità come "ponte" sino all'azzeramento della stessa come suprema barbarie. La seconda parte, in lingua francese, si propone di raccontare il sottile legame, da sempre esistente, tra la scrittura, l'esilio e la ricerca dell'identità (muovendo da una prospettiva "intima" e "locale"). Spetta, infine, alla terza e ultima sezione, in lingua inglese, il compito di delineare, grazie ad una cornice più ampia, un'"identità fluida" a cavallo tra nuovi e vecchi immaginari, percezioni globali e individuali e sempre maggiori dilemmi che attraversano le prospettive più comuni della rappresentazione/i della migrazione; il "migrare" come paradigma, quindi, in grado di rileggere generi letterari, protagonisti della cultura e della letteratura, dinamiche di genere e atteggiamenti sociolinguistici in ottica volutamente interculturale, prestandosi ad un appassionante esercizio ermeneutico eterogeneo e transdisciplinare.

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Introduction

by Nino Arrigo, Annalisa Bonomo and Karl Chircop

Identity is constantly (re)created and portrayed. It goes without saying that apart from its assumed idealisation as a compact entity it also contains multifaceted traits, intersections and *in-between spaces* which all point towards a more “authentic” existence which eludes any classification of language, culture, ethnicity, gender, class or religion. Such a heterogeneous perspective challenges the ever-changing traits of a multilingualistic and a multiethnic society through the powerful cross-cultural instruments of analysis that are languages and literatures. On the other hand, language is a primary component of identity, both at a social as well as at an ethnic level. However, all individuals construct, narrate and refer to their own identity by strategically using language. One even might recall the suggestive attribution of verbal traits to the terms “language – to language” and “ethnicity – to ethnify” as proposed by Ofelia García in 2010. This means operating on one’s own identity through language, either through groups or individuals “who use discursive and ethnic practices to signify what it is they want to be. The ability ‘to language’ and ‘to ethnify’ is precisely then the most important signifying role of human beings – that which gives life meaning. It is through languaging and ethnifying that people perform their identifying” (García 2010: 519). In both old and new diasporas, language thus acquires new means by which to contrast repression, oppression, misunderstanding and stereotypes. In fact, all human experience is mediated, transmitted and translated by predetermined categories or opinions that ask to be known and managed correctly.

Similarly, linguistic policies as well as literary and sociological portrayals reconcile historical memory with empirical reality; they also distinguish between different typologies of identity formation and its varied modes of transmission and portrayal. Consequently, identities

pertaining to the national, social, gender and linguistic realms contain a series of cultural constructs that navigate through the complexity of the global era, thus allowing a new sense of “belonging” and experimentation with the multiple meanings of identity in the fields of linguistics, as well as literary and sociological criticism.

Amidst such premises, the second volume of the series *In-between spaces* investigates the concept of migration not only as the physical displacement of the migrant, but also as another form of mobility, namely the displacement of identity which is carried out in the mind.

The literature of migration frequently presents a migrant who undergoes a crisis of identity through a series of circumstances; this involves that mental perception of feeling trapped *in-between spaces*, in the rotation of a centrifugal axis conditioned by three physical spaces: a. the stifling place of departure, which underscores the exhausting experience of ports, train stations and airports that depersonalise the migrant; b. the travelling space between the departure and arrival points, which is basically that transitional space on trains and aircraft but also those of transatlantic steamers which reveal themselves as floating cities and labyrinths that augment the sense of displacement; c. the space of the final destination and its effect on the migrant’s pretense of a holistic identity integration within the hosting culture. Hence, this means conceiving the continuous flux of identity in terms of navigation, mobility and transformation.

Unfortunately, the reality of migration unveils a series of demeaning and lame compromises at a psychological, cultural, (pseudo)colonial and linguistic level which the migrant has to put up with in his hosting culture. It is also worthwhile pondering on the hosting culture of migration in terms of the animal world, because very few authors ponder upon it. Many will be aware of the case of Karen Blixen¹ (1885-1962) who, after having spent years living in Kenya (1913-31), decides to return to her homeland to write her book of memoirs *Out of Africa* (first published in English in 1937), in which she enacts a poetical transfiguration of her experience of identity amongst African wildlife and its tribes. Blixen writes that “The civilized people have lost the aptitude

¹ She was also known by her pen-name Isak Dinesen.

of stillness, and must take lessons in silence from the wild before they are accepted by it" (Blixen in Dinesen 1992: 14). She also outlines her relationship with the native tribes whilst being quite well aware of the fact that "while I should never quite know or understand them, they knew me through and through, and were conscious of the decisions that I was going to take, before I was certain about them myself" (ivi, 17). In her memoirs, Blixen also manages to create a sociological distinction between the European northerners' and southerners' predisposition when they arrive to settle down as migrants in Africa. She narrates that the northerners live in Africa "with humility and resignation. Their sense of individuality itself was lost in the sense of the possibilities that lie in interaction between those who can be made one by reason of their incongruity" (ivi, 15). On the other hand, "The people of Southern Europe and the people of mixed blood have not got this quality; they blame it, or scorn it" (*ibid.*).

If we really desire to contend with the plethora of issues of identity in migration we cannot escape one of the great lessons of European Modernist literature, namely that of Pirandello's poetics of identity that is constantly (re)created and portrayed. Pirandello's poetics deconstructs that idyllic image of Blixen's European northerner who pursues his utopic north western dream in Africa, and brings us to perceive the ruptures and multiple intersections in the identity realm of being *in-between spaces*, particularly in the case of migrants who live under the illusion of becoming emancipated from their stifling native culture. This is also what happens to the character of Karl Rossmann in Franz Kafka's novel *America*. Karl thinks he has evaded the claustrophobic atmosphere of Prague and an undesired pregnancy from a seducing girl, but before arriving in an estranging New York he is already lost amidst the endless labyrinth of corridors of the transatlantic steamer which catalyses his anguish and sense of confusion:

Below decks he found to his disappointment that a gangway which made a handy short-cut had been barred for the first time in his experience, probably in connection to the disembarkation of so many passengers, and he had painfully to find his way down endless recurring stairs, through corridors with countless turnings, through an empty

room with a deserted writing-table, until in the end, since he had taken this route no more than once or twice and always among a crowd of people, he lost himself completely. In his bewilderment, meeting no one and hearing nothing but the ceaseless shuffling of thousands of feet above him, and in the distance, like faint breathing, the last throbings of the engines that had already been shut off [...]. (Kafka 1976: 133)

Kafka chooses an accumulation of negative terms to narrate Karl's first American experience: "disappointment", "barred", "painfully", "endless", "empty", "deserted", "lost", "bewilderment". And during the entrance into the harbour, in a typically kafkesque *mise en abyme*, New York is perceived through a Statue of Liberty that does not clutch the usual torch we are all familiar with, but a disconcerting sword.

This volume analyses various typologies of migration that tackle this tripartite sense of spatiality of the migrating subject. The characters and contexts examined all testify through writing the diverse nature of genres, transitions and metamorphoses that underscore the concept of identity navigation that is always in continuous flux and development. It is quite fitting to consider here the peculiar case of the Jesuit missionary and migrant of Shusaku Endo's (1923-1996) *Silence* (1969). Endo had undergone a very personal and emotionally charged conversion to Christianity in his lifetime. In his novel, which is set in the second half of the Sixteenth Century when Christianity began to spread in Japan but was barred by the Tokugawa government, Endo narrates the identity saga of the Jesuit and missionary Sebastião Rodrigues, whose faith undergoes a series of tribulations. During the sea voyage before landing in Japan, Rodrigues, completely gripped by fear and bewilderment, clings to his identity icons pertaining to the years of his Jesuit formation:

There arose in my heart the thought of St Francis Xavier. He also, in the calm which followed such a storm, must have looked up at the milky sky. And then for the next eighty years how many missionaries and seminarians had sailed around the coast of Africa, passed by India, and had crossed over this very sea to preach the gospel in Japan. (Endo 1988: 50)

Dismally few characters possess such certainties on which to cling to during the overseas and *in between spaces* migration process. A totally contrasting case can be found in those migration writers who returned to their homeland years after their first migrating departure, as happened in the texts of Marguerite Duras (1914-1996). Duras returned to France from Vietnam in 1932, and with *L'Amante* (1984), again set in Vietnam, she chose to narrate identity autobiographically, and through the techniques of epiphanic *anagnorisis* and estrangement:

Among all the other nights upon nights, the girl had spent that one on the boat, of that she was sure, and she'd been there when it happened, the burst of Chopin under a sky lit up with brilliancies. There wasn't a breath of wind and the music spread all over the dark boat, like a heavenly injunction whose import was unknown, like an order from God whose meaning was inscrutable. And the girl started up as if to go and kill herself in her turn, throw herself in her turn into the sea, and afterwards she wept because she thought of the man from Cholon and suddenly she wasn't sure she hadn't loved him with a love she hadn't seen because it had lost itself in the affair like water in sand and she rediscovered it only now, through this moment of music flung across the sea. (Duras 1997: 114)

In order to achieve a profound understanding of the phenomenon of migration, this volume opens up to a heterogeneous and transdisciplinary hermeneutics. Language in this case assumes the grave and onerous responsibility of a sensitive instrument of impartial intercultural analysis. We find as particularly eloquent the historical, linguistic and postcolonial analysis carried out by the contemporary Sicilian writer Irene Chias in her novel *Non cercare l'uomo capra* whereby she illustrates this linguistic hermeneutics to understand further the phenomenon of identity:

After my arrival in Italy one of the best friends I had was Tidiane who hailed from Gambia. We spoke the same wolof language with the difference that I borrowed French terms whilst he inserted English ones. There are some very peculiar circumstances concerning people from Gambia. They are one people with the same religion and language; frequently they are even related to the same family that in the Nineteenth Century had been split up by a dividing imaginary

line drawn by a Frenchman and an Englishman. You might think that it is an imaginary line drawn on a map which has no real bearing on the people living in the territory. Alas, this is not the case. I can bear witness to the difference between Gambians and Senegalese. Obviously this is a difference of a lesser degree than that between country and town folk, but it's there to be noticed. In Banjul, for instance, the people are more pragmatic than those in Dakar. Keep in mind that these are two capital cities. There are differences with respect to us that are retraceable to the Anglo-Saxon presence. Here I am referring to people who attended schools administered by the colonisers. To me, the relationship with Gambians is the living proof of how colonisation has conditioned our identity, even though there might be the illusion that some form of "precolonial identity" has been recovered, even though it is nonexistent and only contrived. (Chi-as 2016: 166)².

The Senegalese and migrant character of Assane, through Chias' writing, acknowledges the force of impact of cultural and linguistic colonial policies in his own native Senegal, as well as in the confining country of Gambia, whilst attempting to reconcile historical and colonial memory with the empirical reality of identity. The volume we are prefacing shall attempt in an analogous manner to distinguish diverse typologies of identity formation and communication, and hence uncover a heterogeneous, albeit transitional, reality that the migrant has to contend with in an evergrowing multilingual and multiethnic society.

The history of ancient and modern diasporas has always witnessed the prominent voices of language and literature, both at an individual level and a communitarian one, which have testified against the repression of minorities, the lack of integration, and the intolerance towards diversity. Let us consider for instance the intuitions brought about by Edward Morgan Forster (1879-1970) in his novel *A Passage to India* (1924) whereby he has taken the onus to analyse and describe the relationships between the native Indians and the British colonial migrants after a long period spent living in India; this has been done not

² English translation provided by the editors.

only from a sociological and linguistic viewpoint, but also by casting a glance into the enigmatic problems of man and his relationship with his own brethren, culture and basic instincts. Forster narrates of the deterioration of the human rapport between Mrs. Moore and her son Ronny Heaslop, the magistrate of the fictitious city of Chandrapoore, especially when the latter reveals to possess racist attitudes towards Indian natives: "You never used to judge people like this at home". / 'India isn't home', he retorted, rather rudely [...] " (Forster 1982: 54). However, Forster delves further, and also investigates the gravitational field exercised by India on the British colonisers that dwell in it. This explains the presence of Adela Quested in India: "Although Miss Quested had known Ronny well in England, she felt well advised to visit him before deciding to be his wife. India had developed sides of his character that she had never admired" (ivi, 96). Forster illustrates the habits of the British imperialists like Ronny, always protracted towards conventions and forms, whilst also revealing simultaneously the deep prejudice and derision they fostered towards the native community: "Aziz was exquisitely dressed, from tie-pin to spats, but he had forgotten his back collar-stud, and there you have the Indian all over: inattention to detail; the fundamental slackness that reveals the race. Similarly, to 'meet' in the caves as if they were the clock at Charing Cross [...]" (ivi, 97).

At the dawn of the 20th Century, the interaction between sea and land, as Franco Cassano would put it, between *mythos* and *logos*, highlights another similar (in)famous odyssey of the Pirandellian character of Mattia Pascal, this being an odyssey of identity whose parable is concluded by the embracing of Aunt Scolastica. An analysis of onomastics would clearly reveal to us that if Pascal was the philosopher of the *esprit de finesse*, of heart intuitions, and hence of *mythos*, Aunt Scolastica represents the objective philosophy of reality, the Aristotelian *logos*. The thin red line of the Pirandellian novel is thus portrayed by an identity in navigation whose protagonist is a Twentieth Century antihero, the epitome of the spirit of Ulysses. This is an odyssey that narrates displacement, and the crisis that was borne out of that Ptolemaic loss of centrality that Pirandello had blamed on Copernicus (in the second premise of the novel, "quella filosofica a mo' di scusa"); all blame lies with that scientist

who had evicted the concept of centrality from planet Earth and its inhabitants³.

The condition of mankind in the Twentieth Century can inexorably only be that of an exile, a displaced migrant lost in a labyrinthical cosmos trying to come to terms with the enigmas of his own nature and identity from which ensues the vertigo of uncertainty. Pirandello seems to be composing a crossword puzzle whereby the reader places together various components (Pascal, Scolastica, Copernicus) and finds a solution in the missing word “nobody”. By nobody, the allusion is clearly towards Ulysses, the hero with a sense of nothingness, and a “vanity of vanities” as expressed by *Ecclesiastes*, one of the most enigmatic books of the Scriptures. We could also consider the paradox of self-referentiality, as expressed by God in *Old Testament* when he manifests himself to Moses in the semblance of a burning bush: “ego sum qui sum”, I am who I am: namely nobody, just like Ulysses, or like any other man in history such as Nietzsche when he was possessed by the demon of folly. The parable of the Pirandellian Pascal, once he is freed from the shackles of Adriano Meis, shall be concluded with the secure embrace of Aunt Scolastica who represents the certainties of cognisance. This places us between Aristotle and Descartes whilst we try to achieve meaning and try to create order in “the immense panorama of futility which is contemporary history”, just as T. S Eliot has embarked on the odyssey of Joyce’s *Ulysses*⁴. “I am the late Mattia Pascal” marks the epilogue of the Pirandellian novel that narrates man’s impossible quest to understand himself other than through a multitude of entities. We are “one, no one and one hundred thousand”, oscillating between everything and

³ The problematic scenario of the human race in a post-Copernican world had been previously tackled by the late Nineteenth Century poet Giacomo Leopardi in one of his *Operette Morali* entitled *Copernico*.

⁴ Cfr. T.S. Eliot, “Ulysses, Order and Myth”, in *The Dial*, LXXV (Nov. 1923), pp. 480-83; M. Shorer, J. Miles & G. McKenzie (eds.), *Criticism: The Foundation of Modern Literary Judgment*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948; S. Givens (ed.), *James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism* (1948), New York, The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1963, pp. 198-202; R. Deming (ed.), *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970 [Vol. 1], pp. 268-71.

nothing; we are incapable of finding a harbour that nurtures us, and hence we find ourselves forced to navigate to infinity with the only certainty being that such a port of call is nonexistent; hence we are embroiled in a gnosis of “knowing that we know nothing” in a Socratic sense.

This literary wisdom, seems to find its illuminating epitome in the subject notion elaborated by the sociologist Edgar Morin:

In contrast to the two opposed dogmas, the one for which the subject is nothing and the other for which the subject is everything, the subject oscillates between everything and nothing. I am all for me, I am nothing in the Universe. Egocentrism is the principle for which I am everything, but since all my world will disintegrate with my death, precisely for this death, I am nothing. The “ego” is an incredible privilege and, at the same time, it is the most ordinary thing, as everyone can say “I”. Similarly, there is a balance of the subject between egotism and altruism. In egotism I am everything and the others are nothing, but in altruism I sacrifice myself, I am completely secondary compared to the ones I give myself. The subject refuses the death which swallows him; however, he can offer his life for his ideas, for his country and for humanity. This is the complexity of the notion of subject. (Morin 2000: 137)⁵

Our contemporary world needs now more than ever to rediscover a “meridian” thought, a right way towards complexity, namely that philosophical thought conceived on the Greek coast that Husserl had invited us to revitalise in the European context⁶. It is a mode of thinking that prefers to reflect on the dark sides of identity instead of a passionate search for it or for the fundamentals of reason. This emancipates our mode of thinking so that it does not wane in the face of encountering diversity in each and every one of us.

Whilst contemplating such reflections, this volume intends to tackle the conflictual dynamics of identity as expressed in its multi-faceted national, ideological, religious, sexual and linguistic connotations; the

⁵ English translation provided by the editors.

⁶ Cfr. E. Husserl, *La crisi delle scienze europee e la fenomenologia trascendentale*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2015.

volume also strives to contribute to the creation of cultural paradigms that navigate the complexity of the globalized era. Here one has to recall the fundamental reflection on the complexity of identity which Forster has left us: “But nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else”(Forster 1982: 101). This volume attempts to uncover a new sense of sociological, literary, and linguistic awareness amidst the diverse nuances of identity in migration studies. It also simultaneously proposes the idea of a “fluid” and “mobile” identity according to a perspective intentionally meant as pluricentral and plurilingual which allows the book to embrace various disciplines and combine different perspectives of the different meanings of identity; this approach is intended to highlight the diversity of the other, whose individual and social identity are intrinsically plural entities.

The first section of the volume contains essays in Italian that focus on the concept of “frontier”. In a plurilingual perspective this reveals unexpected faults and affinities right up to the dilemma of welcoming. This is deeply analysed in the context of migration both from the perspective of identity as a “bridge”, right up to its complete barbaric removal.

The second section of essays in French proposes to explain the subtle connection that has always existed between writing, exile and the quest for identity (starting off from an “intimate” and “local” perspective).

The third and last section in English shall outline the wider context of a “fluid identity” between new and ancient imaginary realms, including global and individual perceptions. Reference will also be made to other dilemmas that cross the most common forms of the portrayal of migration. Hence whilst lending itself to a heterogeneously hermeneutical and transdisciplinary exercise, the volume looks into “migrating” as a paradigm capable of (re)reading literary genres, cultural and literary protagonists, gender dynamics and sociolinguistic attitudes across cultures.

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Part I

CONFINE, FRONTIERA, IDENTITÀ

La poesia del *Villaggio di cartone* di Ermanno Olmi, o il dilemma dell'identità e dell'accoglienza, contro i conformismi sulla migrazione nella mediterraneità europea

Angelo Fàvaro

Abstract: Per la prima volta, dall'uscita del film nelle sale cinematografiche – regia di Ermanno Olmi – e dalla pubblicazione di alcune scene-quadri tratti dalla sceneggiatura, *Il villaggio di cartone. Diabasis*, scritta dal regista con la collaborazione di Claudio Magris e Gianfranco Ravasi, il presente saggio indaga e ricostruisce, criticamente e rispetto al tema-problema della mediterraneità europea, il complesso rapporto fra la poesia dell'opera filmica, il valore della fede nella relazione con il Mistero, il ruolo della Chiesa cattolica e dei cristiani nell'accoglienza dei migranti provenienti dal Mediterraneo. Attraverso un approccio metodologico coerente con le più recenti indicazioni transdisciplinari, chiamando a supporto dell'analisi filmica e letteraria dell'opera di Olmi la storia, gli studi interculturali, la scienza politica e i documenti normativi dell'Unione europea, con l'intenzione di offrire uno studio che varchi la dimensione informativa, ma giunga ad una prospettiva formativa e di coscienza della civiltà, l'obiettivo del saggio è di esaminare l'attuale concetto di Europa unita nella sua necessaria relazione umana, culturale, sociale con il Mediterraneo. Ricorda Morandini, e alla fine cita Olmi: «Non i riti e le ceremonie fanno la chiesa, ma le opere di bene per i miseri, i derelitti, gli sfortunati. Cambiare il mondo, d'accordo, ma prima di tutto noi stessi. Ristabilire, attraverso la carità, la giustizia e l'onestà. "Stiamo vivendo in un mondo di cartone, e di cartone è fatto il potere, e gli uomini di potere... E il cartone si scioglie come si sta sciogliendo in questi ultimi tempi tutto ciò che sembrava indistruttibile: la finta giustizia, la ricchezza, l'economia"».

Abstract: For the first time, since the direction of the movie by Ermanno Olmi and the publication of some scenes from the script *Il villaggio di cartone. Diabasis*, written by director Claudio Magris and by Gianfranco Ravasi, this essay investigates the complex link between the poetics of the film and the role of faith in its relationships with the My-

stery, and the role of the Catholic Church in the reception of migrants coming from the Mediterranean Sea. Thanks to a methodological approach which intends to be consistent with the latest transdisciplinary guidelines, and taking into account the historical background as well as intercultural studies, political sciences and the constitutive acts of the European Union, the essay aims at analysing the current concept of united Europe and its human, cultural and social relationship with the Mediterranean Sea, thus offering the reader a study which can rise above the mere informative writings by reaching a formative level concerned with the conscience of our civilisation. As pointed out by Morandini and quoted by Olmi, «Our Church is not made of rites and ceremonies, but of good deeds for the poor, the derelicts and the hapless. We need to change the world, that is true, but first of all we need to change ourselves, that is restore justice and honesty through mercy. “We are living in a cardboard world where power and powerful men are made of cardboard too. And cardboard melts as it is melting everything which once seemed indestructible: fake justice, wealth and economy”».

Keywords: Ermanno Olmi, Europe, Conformism, Migration.

«... ma devo andare all’essenza delle cose».

E. Olmi

Preludio

Ha poeticamente affermato Edmond Jabès: «La verità non si può condividere. / È già divisa fin dall’origine. / Resta da legittimare il modo in cui è stata divisa» (Jabès 1992: 25). Questa verità già condivisa, attraverso la poesia tragica, di cui è intriso il film di Ermanno Olmi *Il villaggio di cartone*¹, è l’oggetto dell’analisi di questo saggio, che af-

¹ *Il villaggio di cartone* è un film di genere drammatico, per la regia di Ermanno Olmi, uscito nelle sale cinematografiche nel 2011. Interpreti: Michel Lonsdale (il vecchio prete), Rutger Hauer (il sacrestano), Alessandro Haber (il graduato), Massimo De Francovich (il medico), Elhadji Ibrahima Faye (il soccorritore), Irina Pino Viney

fronta le difficoltà e le problematiche odierne, suscite nella civiltà europea dalle ondate di migrazioni mediterranee, e dalle modalità e dalle politiche dell'Unione Europea, specificatamente inerenti all'accoglienza dei migranti.

In tale direzione, il testo non può non partire da una riflessione storica sul concetto di Europa, giungendo poi a rilevare quali siano le azioni politiche e le ragioni etiche dell'Europa nella sua relazione con il Mediterraneo², e affrontare analiticamente le suggestioni che provengono dall'opera filmica di Olmi.

Una tale ricerca non si potrebbe nemmeno ipotizzare, dal punto di vista metodologico, senza il ricorso alla nozione di transdisciplinarietà³, con l'ausilio tanto delle indagini storiche e geopolitiche, quan-

(Magdaha), Fatima Ali (Fatima), Samuels Leon Delroy (il bardo), Fernando Chironda (il cherubino), Souleymane Sow (l'avverso), Linda Keny (madre), Blaise Aurelien Ngoungou Essoua (padre). Nazionalità: Italia. Distribuzione: 01 Distribution. Origine: Italia (2011). Soggetto e sceneggiatura: Ermanno Olmi, con la collaborazione del saggista e scrittore Claudio Magris e del Presidente del Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura monsignor Gianfranco Ravasi. Fotografia: Fabio Olmi. Musiche: Sofia Gubaidulina. Montaggio: Paolo Cottignola. Durata: 87'. Produzione: Luigi Musini per CinemaUndici in collaborazione con RAI Cinema. Necessario riferire che è stato realizzato con la collaborazione di Apulia Film Commission e Regione Puglia, in associazione con Intesa Sanpaolo S.p.A. e con il Patrocinio dell'Alto Commissariato delle Nazioni Unite per i Rifugiati (UNHCR) – Ufficio per il Sud Europa. Inoltre il film è stato riconosciuto di interesse culturale con sostegno dal Ministro per i Beni e le Attività Culturali Direzione Generale per il Cinema (MIBAC). Per volontà del regista non è stato presentato in concorso, ma fuori concorso alla 68° Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica di Venezia (2011).

² Da anni mi occupo di una peculiare condizione letteraria, artistica, geopolitica, latamente culturale, che ho avuto per primo l'onere di definire e l'onore, tutt'oggi, di constatare proficuamente valida e validamente funzionale, nella sua polisemia e complessità, mi riferisco al concetto di *Mediterraneità europea*, che è stato inoltre approfondito nel corso di convegni internazionali e ha avuto sessioni di lavoro presso i Congressi ADI. Si veda, online, nel sito delle Edizioni Sinestesie, la sezione: *Mediterraneità europea: Arti, Letterature, Civiltà del Mediterraneo. Per rifondare l'identità del cittadino europeo del XXI secolo*.

³ E. MORIN, *Il Metodo. Ordine, disordine, organizzazione*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1986. <http://disf.org/carta-transdisciplinarieta. La qualità plurale. Sguardi transdisciplinari sulla ricerca qualitativa>, a c. di F. DOVIGO, Franco Angeli, Roma 2005, in particolare pp. 11-39. *Memoria e saperi. Percorsi transdisciplinari*, a c. di E. AGAZZI, V. FORTUNA-

to della scienza politica e delle istituzioni europee, ed egualmente degli studi sociologici e storico-religiosi, o della filosofia e dell'antropologia. Il film di Olmi è un poema tragico, colmo di amore e di disperazione.

Primo movimento. Andante

Nella seconda lezione, svolta al Collège de France nel 1944-1945, e dedicata all'Europa, Lucien Febvre pone alcuni problemi preliminari che svilupperà per l'intero anno. Egli si presenta come storico, e conferma che il suo lavoro avviene "nel tempo", e "col tempo". Risalendo quello che chiama "il fiume del tempo", azzarda ad orientare una bussola alla spiegazione delle caratteristiche e delle specificità che storicamente consentono di delimitare questo concetto. Tanto labile ed egualmente persistente, dunque, l'interrogativo dal quale prende le mosse Febvre e dal quale anche questo lavoro di ricerca, di comprensione, di interpretazione di quello che non è semplicemente un film, ma un manifesto epocale, nel quale si fondono la letteratura e le arti, la politica e l'etica, la geografia, l'aspetto più controverso della società contemporanea, quello delle migrazioni, ma soprattutto si agita l'*humanum*, inteso nel rapporto di ciascuno con sé stesso, e con gli altri uomini, ed altresì con il sacro, deve *per necessità* avviarsi⁴. La questione è: di cosa ci occupiamo quando proviamo ad affrontare il significato e l'idea di Europa?

Iniziamo col distinguere che non c'è un concetto di Europa concesso "per natura", e i primi che ne parlarono, i greci antichi, non poterono farlo avendo esperienza o avendola osservata direttamente: «come sempre succede tutte le volte che si tenta di risalire all'origine di una di

TI, Meltemi, Roma 2007. B. NICOLESCU, *Manifesto della transdisciplinarità*, Armando Siciliano Editore, Messina 2014.

⁴ I. BERLIN, *Il legno storto dell'umanità. Capitoli di storia delle idee*, Adelphi, Milano 1994. I. BERLIN, C. TAYLOR, *Individuo. Pluralismo. Comunità*, a c. di S. Bignotti, Morcelliana, Brescia 2016. J. HABERMAS, *La condizione intersoggettiva*, Laterza, Roma Bari, 2007; Idem, *L'inclusione dell'altro. Studi di teoria politica*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2013.

quelle nozioni correnti su cui sonnecchia sicura una umanità che centellina le sue curiosità», chiarisce Febvre, «la nozione di Europa è nata anzitutto da un ragionamento astratto, [...] da considerazioni teoriche, senza rapporto con l'esperienza» (Febvre 2014: 19). Un concetto di Europa astratto ha preceduto l'Europa concepita come complesso geograficamente compatto, o più esattamente riconoscibile nella sua costruzione concettuale millenaria. È un bisogno dello spirito, secondo il nostro storico, e non consiste soltanto nel considerare questa condizione ideale e culturale, prima che concretamente geopolitica⁵; anche il mito dimostra inequivocabilmente l'indeterminazione dei confini di questa costruzione⁶. Nella terza lezione, lo storico analizza l'elemento complementare all'Europa: il Mediterraneo. Spiega: «noi diciamo che la nostra civiltà odierna, la civiltà dell'Occidente, la civiltà europea che è ricaduta su tutti i paesi europei, noi diciamo che questa civiltà è mediterranea fin dall'origine. Ma io voglio sapere: che cos'è la civiltà mediterranea?» (Febvre 2014: 33). L'impellenza di definire l'Europa e di congiungerla al concetto di civiltà mediterranea costringe in una condizione sempre più oscillante fra qualcosa di dato superficialmente per certo, ma completamente indefinito, e al contempo qualcosa di indecifrabilmente problematico. Si danno per noti il paesaggio e il clima,

⁵ Alcuni saggi consultati, per completare il discorso: G. ZIZOLA, *Geopolitica mediterranea. Il Mare Nostrum dall'egemonia al dialogo*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 1997. B. AMOROSO, *Europa e Mediterraneo. Le sfide del futuro*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari 2000. F. CANALE CAMA, D. CASANOVA, Q. ROSA M. DELLI, *Storia del Mediterraneo moderno e contemporaneo*, Alfredo Guida Editore, Napoli 2009. C. JEAN, *Geopolitica del mondo contemporaneo*, Laterza, Roma Bari, 2012. F. MINI, *Mediterraneo in guerra. Atlante politico di un mare strategico*, Einaudi, Torino 2012. F. CAFFIO, N. CARNIMEO, A. LEANDRO, *Elementi di diritto e geopolitica degli spazi marittimi*, Cacucci editore, Bari 2013, particolarmente utile lo studio per la legislazione dell'Unione sugli spazi e i movimenti nel Mediterraneo.

⁶ E. RIGO, *Europa di confine. Trasformazioni della cittadinanza nell'Unione allargata*, Meltemi, Roma 2007. N. FORMOSO, *Una terra di mezzo. Ai confini dell'Europa tra Est e Ovest. Saggio di geografia politica ed economica*, CUECM, Catania 2010. M. COGLITORE, *I confini dell'Europa. Globalizzazioni, conquiste, tecnologie tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Cafoscarina, Venezia 2012. D. DE KERCKHOVE, I. DIAMANTI, L. ZOJA, M. AGNOLETTI, G. COGOLI, J. DIAMOND, A. MORO, G. RIZZOLATTI, L. BOELLA, *Un mondo condiviso*, Laterza, Roma Bari 2016.

alcune caratteristiche, alcune pratiche tipiche della mediterraneità, ma c'è un dato incontrovertibile: notoriamente il paesaggio, il clima, le caratteristiche proprie e le pratiche peculiari del Nord dell'Europa e del Mediterraneo non hanno nulla di nemmeno approssimativamente affine. Tuttavia, osserva ancora Febvre, non sono realmente la natura o il clima a oggettivare l'astrazione categorica di civiltà mediterranea, connessa con l'idea di Europa; ma quando si tratta del continente e del mare Mediterraneo, è «l'uomo ad essere in gioco. Sono le società umane» (Febvre 2014: 40). La ricerca che lo storico intende effettuare, in quella spaventosa situazione esattamente a metà degli anni Quaranta del XX secolo, è volta verso «un'Europa umana, un'Europa fatta di gruppi umani capace di creare, condividere, propagare una civiltà europea, specificatamente europea» (Febvre 2014: 40).

Quel che si è trovato fin qui, con l'aiuto di uno storico, non è una nozione geografica, o politica, ma "umana" di Europa, ovvero di civiltà, ed è a questo punto che non si può non considerare l'importanza della presenza del Mediterraneo, non solo liquido, ma anche terrestre, sul quale si affacciano delle terre: «la storia del Mediterraneo non è un monologo, un canto solitario che scaturisce dall'acqua» riconosce Febvre, «ma un dialogo di spazi solidi e di spazi liquidi» (Febvre 2014: 44).

Tralasciando momentaneamente il Mediterraneo, il terzo principio che è conveniente, se non più propriamente indispensabile, convocare è quello di cristianità⁷. In tal modo riepilogando, ricorriamo ad una prima costruzione ideale, che nel corso dei secoli assume differenti concretizzazioni e forme di significato, attraverso l'esperienza e le vicende storiche della civiltà, ed è quella di Europa; c'è poi uno spazio mobile ma definito, che funge da strada, da via, da itinerario vario per uomini e per merci, ovvero il Mediterraneo; infine si offre all'attenzione degli osservatori un ulteriore elemento, fattore unificante: la

⁷ Sul tema dell'Europa cristiana e della cristianità, sono stati essenziali i volumi di: F. CARDINI, M. SALTARELLI, *Adveniat regnum. La regalità sacra nell'Europa cristiana*, Name, Genova 2000; J.H. WEILER, *Un'Europa cristiana. Un saggio esplorativo*, BUR, Milano 2003; P. BROWN, *La formazione dell'Europa cristiana. Universalismo e diversità*, Laterza, Roma Bari 2014; J.M. BERGOGLIO (Francesco), *Ripensare il futuro dalle relazioni. Discorsi sull'Europa*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2018.

cristianità. Dall'XI fino al XXI secolo, in Europa, «La cristianità è [...] una formazione unitaria. Possiede una fede comune, un ideale comune, un linguaggio comune» (Febvre 2014: 106). Con ogni evidenza si legittima il nerbo argomentativo per cui la cristianità non possegga un solo stato-nazione, ma si estende effettivamente su tutti gli stati-nazione, che scelgono e si riconoscono nei valori cristiani. Gli spazi nei quali generalmente si pratica la cristianità sono tutti i luoghi consacrati ritualmente al sacro cristiano, i centri monastici, le chiese, i vescovati, ma anche le piazze, le strade, le periferie urbane, dal IV secolo d.C. fino ai nostri giorni. Si riconsideri il fenomeno delle Crociate, che mettono in scena in Europa e nell'Asia mediterranea la salvezza della cristianità, e si ricordino i viaggi dei Pontefici: la cristianità interviene non solo religiosamente, ma politicamente e socialmente, accudendo, diffondendo e rinfocolando i suoi valori, sovente purtroppo anche tradendoli o deformandoli.

Il villaggio di cartone di Olmi è sostenuto da questi tre millenari atlanti statuari: l'Europa, il Mediterraneo, la cristianità, che non appaiono più tanto solidi e necessitano, per rimanere nella metafora della plastica e dell'arte, di un restauro non solo conservativo.

Invita, ancora, a riflettere interrogativamente Febvre: «Se l'Europa, nel senso che diamo alla parola quando facciamo politica storica, [...] è vicina, il Mediterraneo è lontano?» Risponde, non senza articolare nella sua varia complessità il discorso, nelle pagine successive: «Tutta questa storia in definitiva è una storia di rapporti, una storia di equilibri» (Febvre 2014: 109)⁸. Nell'immaginario collettivo odierno,

⁸ È d'uopo avvisare che le politiche mediterranee nella seconda metà del XX secolo si fanno sempre più rilevanti, non solo per l'Europa o per il bacino del Mediterraneo, ma anche e soprattutto in uno scacchiere internazionale extra-europeo: da quanto definito nei trattati di Roma (1957), fino agli "Accordi d'Associazione" e poi alla "Politica globale mediterranea" accertata dalla Conferenza di Parigi del 1972, e ripresa nel 1992, fino alla "Politica mediterranea rinnovata", si procede senza pause; poi c'è stata la Conferenza di Barcellona: la possiamo riconoscere come la svolta essenziale e la più avanzata, attraverso la formulazione del Partenariato Euro-mediterraneo; se è del tutto evidente che fin dalle origini della costruzione dell'idea di Europa il Mediterraneo ne ha configurato uno degli elementi costitutivi, tuttavia nel corso della storia occidentale si è, di volta in volta, posto come opportunità-problema geopolitico, economico, sociale, culturale dell'incontro-scontro fra civiltà. Oggi fra le opposte spinte della glo-

l'idea di Europa, di civiltà europea, di Unione europea non può quasi essere distinta, nonostante i leciti e sempre auspicabili richiami ad un sostanziale laicismo, dalla nozione di cristianità, come non si può né culturalmente, né geograficamente dislocare e dissociare dalla presenza costante del mare Mediterraneo.

Se è estremamente complesso definire l'Europa, ancor più arduo è arrischiare di delineare esattamente i caratteri dei cittadini europei: identifichiamo un nord e un sud, un est e un ovest e vi aggiungiamo il sostantivo Europa, così scopriamo le unità nazionali in relazione ai quattro punti cardinali, con innegabili affinità e con palesi differenze: le une e le altre partecipano di un equilibrio di forze e di culture, di lingue e di rivalità, egualmente commerciali e variamente identitarie, che dimostrano come il sogno, o l'auspicio, forse l'utopia di un'Europa unita non sia affatto realizzato, acuendo il paradosso della contemporaneità. Nel villaggio globale, il cittadino patisce spavento, disorientamento e incertezza, si rifugia nella fintamente rassicurante chiusura nazionale, con margini sempre più localistici e progetti di esclusione.

balizzazione e della chiusura localistica, fra la complessità dell'approccio cosmopolita e multidisciplinare ai problemi della contemporaneità e quello invece riduzionistico e della pervasiva visione populista e sovranista, fra le istanze economiche e produttiviste del capitalismo avanzato transnazionale, quello che sposta produzione, merci e persone con la medesima noncuranza, e le necessità dei governi nazionali di salvaguardare le persone e le culture identitarie, vincendo la pervasiva tendenza omologante, si rimane in una condizione di impotenza e di inerzia, mantenendo insostenibili disuguaglianze, non solo economiche, ma sociali, che sfociano in una irrisolta e insolubile conflittualità. Oggi, come mettono ben in evidenza nel volume a loro cura S. CRUCIANI, M. RIDOLFI, *L'Unione Europea e il Mediterraneo. Relazioni internazionali crisi politiche e regionali (1947-2016)*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2017, è difficile prevedere il futuro delle relazioni fra Unione Europea e Mediterraneo, a causa delle forti rivalità fra Stati Uniti, Giappone, Russia e Cina; inoltre bisogna considerare che, in particolare al presente, le strutture politiche sovranazionali stanno perdendo vigore e capacità decisionale, non consentono un pieno e consapevole rilancio dell'Unione e della sua presenza nel Mediterraneo. Sarebbe opportuno improntare nuovamente i rapporti internazionali ad un sostanziale multilateralismo, i cui frutti sarebbero da verificarsi nei prossimi decenni. È fin troppo semplicemente osservabile che l'Unione Europea in questo preciso momento non riesca a formulare politiche per il Mediterraneo, né di partenariato, né di sostegno ai paesi del Nord e del Centro Africa, ed egualmente non riesca a trovare una soluzione condivisa inerente ai flussi migratori.

Così, a fenomeni e fermenti di carattere planetario si alternano schizofrenicamente scenari che lasciano intravedere gli Stati d'Europa e quelli che si affacciano sul mare Mediterraneo ridursi e chiudersi incoerentemente, e barricarsi all'interno dei propri confini, individuando soluzioni semplificate e locali a problemi globali: la società civile non è né moralmente né politicamente preparata al fenomeno migratorio, con tutto quanto implica, come si vedrà qui di seguito, e al confronto aperto e sereno con i migranti; sovente contraddicendo apertamente i valori fondativi dell'Europa e le sollecitazioni che provengono dai documenti normativi del diritto primario e derivato dell'Unione, in particolare quanto contenuto nella *Carta dei diritti fondamentali dell'Unione europea*. La società civile, almeno stando alle scelte politiche di alcuni fra i ventisette Paesi, sta scegliendo di trincerarsi in un passato anti-storico e conservatore.

Le decisioni strategiche degli attori istituzionali ed economici dell'Unione non sono comprese e non sono adeguatamente comunicate agli stati membri, e successivamente da questi ai cittadini. Se facilmente si può constatare un'Europa delle Istituzioni, non si individua, né viene percepito il ruolo dell'Europa nelle politiche sociali, che giungono ad essere considerate inadeguate ad accogliere le istanze e riconoscere le esigenze dei cittadini. Quel che gli uomini e le donne dell'Unione non riescono ad interiorizzare e considerare patrimonio comune semrebbe la "funzionalità" di questo organismo sovranazionale, l'Unione Europea, perché non si stimano effettivamente coinvolti nei processi di trans-nazionalizzazione, dei quali non afferrano i vantaggi; al contrario, la principale opportunità risiede precisamente in una vera e sentita costruzione-condivisione di un'identità fluida e varia⁹, ma comunque europea, che può e deve dialogare con l'alterità. Il mare Mediterraneo è divenuto, in quasi tre millenni, lo spazio mobile della diversità e dell'alterità, spazio quasi naturalmente vocato allo scambio e alla migrazione.

⁹ Oltre i classici sul concetto di identità varia e fluida, di polidentità, più recentemente, B. FORTE, *La «patria» europea nell'era delle appartenenze fluide* <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/commenti-e-idee/2017-10-14/la-patria-europea-nell-era-appartenenze-fluide-223923.shtml?uuid=AEd0FbnC>. Z. BAUMAN, *Modernità liquida*, Laterza, Roma Bari, 2011. M. MARCHEGANI, *Antico mare e identità migranti. Un itinerario interdisciplinare*, Giappichelli, Torino 2018.

ne¹⁰. Ciò è difficile, oggi, da accettare come dato storico e condizione naturale. L'Europa, come dimostrano le indagini e i documenti storici, si genera, allora, nella condizione di continua edificazione di sé, dei suoi spazi, della sua civiltà; tuttavia, nell'odierno panorama sociale e politico, il processo costitutivo deve divenire intenzionalmente e solidamente condiviso dai suoi abitanti. Soltanto quando si intende esattamente e si riceve con tutta la sua complessità il significato dell'interdipendenza degli stati-nazione europei, del loro naturale sbocco mediterraneo a sud e della proficua reciprocità e collaborazione, non solo commerciale, con il *mare nostrum* e con i paesi che vi si affacciano, attraverso l'opportunità di ciascuno e di ognuno di concorrere, in primo luogo ad una mediterraneità europea; in secondo luogo, al dialogo con le istanze globalizzanti, senza ignorare le peculiarità e le specificità identitarie di ognuno degli attori coinvolti, soltanto a queste condizioni di esistenza e di insistenza si può affrontare e sperare di vincere la sfida all'unilateralismo e alla costruzione di muri. Attraverso una costante negoziazione, non di valori, fra i quali campeggiano quelli della cristianità e delle conquiste del pensiero illuminista, che si fondano sul rispetto reciproco e sulla fratellanza, ma dei progetti specifici, inerenti alla buona politica, all'economia, alla società, si traccia il varco e il percorso virtuoso di un multilateralismo europeo, che non può escludere il Mediterraneo ed è fondato sul dialogo e sul confronto, ove nessuno degli attori debba poter partire da una posizione di forza.

Così concludeva Lucien Febvre l'ultima lezione del suo corso:

L'Europa, l'abbiamo visto, è l'unione, la fusione del Nord e del Sud, del mondo mediterraneo e del mondo nordico. Ora in questi due ambiti, in queste due parti che costituiscono l'Europa, il problema è stato il me-

¹⁰ Si consulti il pregevole lavoro di E. PUGLIESE, *Migrazioni e Mediterraneo*, in *Conflitti, migrazioni e diritti dell'uomo. Il Mezzogiorno laboratorio di un'identità mediterranea*, a cura di M. AYMARD e F. BARCA, Rubbettino, Sovera Mannelli 2002, pp. 143 e sgg. Fondamentali rimangono gli studi di I. CHAMBERS, in particolare per questo lavoro: *Paesaggi migratori. Cultura e identità nell'epoca postcoloniale*, Costa & Nolan, Genova 1996; *Le molte voci del Mediterraneo*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2007; *Mediterraneo blues. Musiche, malinconia postcoloniale, pensieri marittimi*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2012. Anche l'intervista: <https://interartive.org/2010/07/polifonia-chambers>.

desimo: far fronte all'est, dalla parte dei nomadi della steppa, far fronte all'Asia; far fronte all'est, difendere le frontiere dell'est, munire la civiltà europea nascente, fragile e instabile, contro gli attacchi venuti dall'est; e d'altro canto, nello stesso tempo, introdurre in questa nascente civiltà europea il massimo grado possibile di elementi provenienti dall'est, dalle civiltà orientali, dal mondo orientale asiatico. [...] Il nostro universo politico europeo non è un universo a due dimensioni. È un universo a tre dimensioni. La sua superficie, certo, è in Europa. Ma [...] è inserito in tutta una complessità di interessi universali. Per esempio, come potrebbero ormai l'Europa e l'Asia disinteressarsi l'una dell'altra? [...] Dove comincia l'una e dove finisce l'altra? [...] Il problema dell'Europa oltrepassa l'Europa; il problema dell'Europa si situa su scala planetaria; il problema dell'Europa è il problema del mondo» (Febvre 2014: 274-284).

Anni ormai lontani, ma una visione lucida e una lettura esatta dei fenomeni storici sostengono le analisi e le considerazioni dello storico di Nancy: è proprio dalla sua constatazione conclusiva che inizia quella contemporaneità nella quale, giorno dopo giorno, abitiamo e dalla quale sosteniamo il nostro rapporto con il mondo. L'Europa cristianizzata ha continuato a parlare agli uomini con un linguaggio umano, e che ha prodotto una delle utopie più resistenti e potenti di tutti i tempi: nel precetto dell'amore permane la nostra condizione di uomini irrisolti, incompleti, incompiuti: «Ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso». Se riuscissimo a praticare questo “comandamento”, il diritto sarebbe esercitato con altre modalità, gli scambi economici sarebbero improntati ad un'etica molto differente da quella odierna, altro significato daremmo alle ricerche antropologiche, probabilmente non avremmo più nemmeno urgenza delle differenti religioni; della fede o della spiritualità, che sono attività connaturate all'*humanum*, continueremmo a percepire la necessità.

Secondo movimento. Presto

Non siamo giunti, come abitanti dell'Europa e navigatori sul Mediterraneo, in quasi due millenni, nemmeno a lambire la concreta possibilità di avvicinarci al dettato evangelico, che non è, nella sua essenza, escludente o esclusivo; non possiamo, allora, far altro che ricostituire

e interrogare la nostra multanime realtà e identità europea¹¹, nella certezza che molteplici aspetti legano e avvicinano popoli, culture, destini, in un continuo intrecciarsi passato e presente. Quel che dovremmo insieme tentare di fare, sarebbe di esorcizzare l'anarchia economica, delimitare il campo d'azione del potere finanziario, controllare l'economia delle politiche sovraniste ed egoiste, per individuare nel Mediterraneo la nostra alterità più vera e più viva, non da colonizzatori o predatori, né da castigatori dei flussi migratori, ma da uomini e donne in grado di ri-considerare il ruolo della civiltà europea nel Mediterraneo asiatico e africano, attenti a completarci nell'incontro, piuttosto che a mutilarci nella separazione. E probabilmente il mito greco della ninfa Europa, nell'allegoria propria di ogni mito, aveva già delineato, in un tempo lontanissimo e prima della storia, i caratteri della Mediterraneità europea¹².

¹¹ Mi piace ricordare, in questa sede, che l'espressione "multanime" è stata formulata autorevolmente dalla prof. ssa Bruna Consarelli, amica e *magistra* nelle questioni inerenti al pensiero moderno e alla riflessione sull'Europa unita, essenziale rimane il suo contributo nel volume miscellaneo: *L'Europa "una" e "multanime" un problema ancora aperto*, CEDAM, Padova 2012.

¹² Se il mito ha un valore realmente esplicativo delle nostre origini e può costituire un momento di condivisione e identitario, allora il mito della ninfa Europa è davvero un'allegoria della nostra condizione: la figlia di Agenore, Europa, non è mai giunta fino al centro del nostro continente, ma solo fino a Creta. Zeus, innamorato della Ninfà, la rapì, trasformatosi in toro bianco, e la portò fino a Creta, ove si giacque con lei: nacquero tre figli. Europa amata dal Dio della Luce e della Giustizia, trasformato in toro, simbolo della forza, da cui nacquero: Minosse, mitico sovrano che liberò il Mediterraneo dai pirati, avviando floridi commerci, ma ben famoso, nel IX libro dell'*Odissea*, è colui che amministra la giustizia tra i morti, per essere stato esempio di diritto e giustizia tra i vivi. Presente anche nell'*Inferno* dantesco; Radamanto, il legislatore per antonomasia, è il giudice ultraterreno; Saperdonte, il guerriero, giusto, coraggioso, è simbolo di forza e ragione in guerra. Si rileggia il mito sciogliendo il patrimonio allegorico in esso contenuto: la Luce della Ragione e della Giustizia, rappresentate da Zeus, unendosi alla bellezza della giovinezza, vagante, Europa, generano le tre grandi peculiarità identitarie e politiche dell'Occidente: il diritto e la giustizia, la prassi legislativa, e infine, tradizione non solo europea, la guerra. Così il mito esioideo di Europa, non regione, né continente, è la sintesi allegorica di alcune fra le più chiare ed evidenti attività dell'Occidente. Dal punto di vista linguistico-etimologico il lemma *europea* ha un'origine affatto europea: significa in sé "ponente", fu coniato in ambito semitico-fenicio dai marinai che viaggiavano verso Occidente. La ninfa Europa nac-

Necessario quanto fin qui siamo venuti tratteggiando e distillando, delle coordinate che si è voluto tracciare su una mappa complessa e di difficile decifrazione, per accedere ad una comprensione piena del film *Il villaggio di cartone* di Olmi¹³, che assume, in questo panorama concettuale, un significato paradigmatico, immergendoci in una condizione di bruciante verità sulla migrazione, sull’alterità, sull’accoglienza, sulla repressione, sul diritto del più forte contro ogni esperienza-coscienza di umanità.

C’è bisogno di molto coraggio – sono persuaso di ciò – per sostenere la visione di quest’opera filmica, così come per non far vacillare le nostre certezze, quando le mettiamo alla prova dei documenti del colonialismo, delle migrazioni, della soggettività migrante, che inevitabilmente inducono a considerare criticamente e consapevolmente le complesse relazioni fra identità nazionali e le contaminazioni culturali¹⁴. E forse, come ha, precisamente e con estrema sintesi, condensato ed esplicitato Baratta, il «coraggio oggi necessario è di saper mettere in discussione – senza perdersi, ma per ritrovarsi più ricchi in un mondo che certamente più ci avvicina, donne e uomini del pianeta – ogni “identità”»; e probabilmente è opportuno spiegare più diffusamente che «parliamo di “identità” con la consapevolezza che, dopo Adorno,

que in Fenicia, l’attuale Libano. Dunque il lessema Europa è di origine semitica, nella lingua greca andrà ad indicare dalla radice ὑερεβ l’Erebo appunto, ovvero l’Occidente, il luogo dell’occaso, ove tutto “muore sempre”, l’Occidente, il sempre morente. Interessante paradosso linguistico e certamente culturale! Cui segue la constatazione che il luogo ove tutto è sempre morente, ove tutto è sul punto di finire, è il luogo in cui tutto è nato e continua a nascerne, anche una grande idea: l’idea di un’Europa unita. Fra molti, almeno: K. KERÉNYI, *Gli dèi e gli eroi della Grecia*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2015; L. PASSERINI, *Il mito d’Europa. Radici antiche per nuovi simboli*, Giunti, Firenze 2002, pp. 20 e sgg.

¹³ Per la filmografia completa di E. Olmi si navighi nel sito: https://movieplayer.it/personaggi/ermanno-olmi_7064/filmografia/.

¹⁴ Non posso tacere della lezione, su questo tema, di un mio maestro: A. GNISCI, *La letteratura italiana della migrazione*, Lilith, Roma 1998, *Creolizzare l’Europa. Letteratura e migrazione*, Roma, Meltemi 2003, e *Esercizi italiani di anticolonialismo*, Edizioni Efesto, Roma 2016; AA.VV., *L’Europa nel terzo millennio. Identità nazionali e contaminazioni culturali*, a c. di P. PROIETTI, Sellerio, Palermo 2004, specificatamente: M. CERUTI, *L’Europa fra identità locali e processi globali*, pp. 31-40; G. PUGLISI, *Le letterature, le culture, l’Europa*, pp. 49-60.

Benjamin, e Gramsci, dopo Derrida e Deleuze, dopo Said, Hall e Balibar [...], l'uso di questa espressione va incontro a un terreno minato, tanto più se applicato a un “mosaico”, come l'Europa, la cui frammentazione è ben più visibile dell'unità» (Baratta 2003: 101). Questa è anche la sfida lanciata da Olmi che rivela, con la commozione e la compassione che è capace di suscitare attraverso la sua macchina da presa, l'esistenza di un Mediterraneo di uomini e di donne, e di come gli uni e le altre insegnano esemplarmente, con la loro fuga, lo spazio-movimento della vita, della loro speranza nella vita, nonostante tutto, nonostante tutti, e della fiducia nel futuro.

«E che altro c'è di più importante dell'accoglienza?» afferma Olmi in un'intervista rilasciata sul *Villaggio di cartone*: «Io faccio scendere il Cristo in croce come simulacro dell'inutilità. Il simbolo deve avere un valore terreno, deve rimandare alla verità vissuta. Davanti a un Gesù di cartone il mio prete dice: "Quanta menzogna nella pietà"». Crudamente prosegue: «Tutti ci inginocchiamo davanti a un'immagine. Invece bisogna farlo davanti agli ultimi che soffrono. Cristo l'ha fatto davanti a noi. Abbiamo solo questo mezzo per lodare Dio» (Tamburrino).

È un vecchio prete che assiste, con noi spettatori, allo sgombero della sua chiesa, dalla quale, prima d'ogni altro arredo sacro e non, viene smontato un pesante crocifisso, con il lungo braccio di una gru mobile, e dall'abside finisce tra le mani degli operai; poi con ordine vengono eliminati i quadri e le statue dei santi; infine disposti alla rinfusa i banchi, dove un tempo sedevano i fedeli, che partecipavano alle funzioni religiose. Il prete sconsolato è un vero uomo di fede, secondo la definizione di Olmi¹⁵, si rinchiede nella sacrestia: in solitudine e in preghiera. Da uno schermo televisivo si colgono le immagini di un mare in tempesta, che infuria violento. Nella notte, si ode un forte temporale, dalla sacrestia silenziosamente, alcuni clandestini irrompono nello spazio della chiesa, ormai non più sacro, ma sconsacrato e dissacrato da coloro che ne hanno eliminato ogni residuo di inviola-

¹⁵ «Si ha vera fede quando il peso dei dubbi è superiore alla nostre convinzioni e se non si delega a un'ideologia o a una religione ma si pensa in proprio»: <https://www.lastampa.it/2011/09/07/spettacoli/olmi-inginocchiamoci-davantiai-migranti-piu-che-al-crocifisso-R6x4iQRuwbNuxjeW26xiPN/pagina.html> «La Stampa», il 7.9.2011.

bilità religiosa. Vi trovano riparo e rifugio. All'interno di quel freddo luogo di cemento, dove piove da un lucernaio, i clandestini-migranti edificano il loro villaggio con cartone, legno, con i paramenti sacri, i tendaggi; c'è un uomo ferito che viene accolto dal sacerdote e curato da un anziano medico ebreo, che si è salvato da un campo di concentramento, dove bambino era stato recluso. C'è anche, fra loro, una giovane donna incinta: li partorisce, evocando la vicenda della natività di uno splendido Gesù centroafricano. È sola, ha perso il marito nel naufragio: di lui non rimane che un quaderno, restituito dal mare, sulle cui pagine, incollate dalle acque, è segnato in un alfabeto ignoto un sacro canto di speranza: non vive più l'uomo che le ha scritte, ma il suono e la bellezza del loro pronunciamento resistono. La poesia dura, nonostante il fuoco che la divorerà. La aiuta nel parto una ricca prostituta, una Maddalena proveniente dallo stesso stato del Centro Africa, ma ormai da tempo in Italia. Un Giuda li tradirà, dopo aver fomentato le speranze di questi migranti.

Il sacerdote non solo li accoglie, ma li protegge dalla legge e dagli uomini che quella legge vogliono far applicare, e non si curano della condizione umana dei migranti rifugiati. Li aiuta. Ed è egli stesso ad apprendere, grazie a questa esperienza di incontro e di salvezza, il vero significato della sua missione sacerdotale: dagli ultimi, dai bisognosi, dagli emarginati impara nuovamente il valore del dono di sé, dell'amore e della compassione. La chiesa è, ormai, il rifugio degli uomini, nella sua nudità priva di ornamenti e di paramenti sacri; è finalmente abitata dagli ultimi. Fra i migranti, troviamo anche chi è pronto a farsi esplodere, per una non ben identificata causa.

La vicenda filmica non conclude¹⁶, è un'opera aperta quella che Olmi offre agli spettatori, ancora attoniti quando assistono alla fuga dei migranti verso una agognata terra promessa, che viene, tuttavia, impedita dall'arrivo di agenti di polizia che li catturano, mentre escono

¹⁶ Nonostante non tratti del film *Il villaggio di cartone*, tuttavia si consiglia, per comprendere l'arte e la poetica di Olmi, la lettura del bellissimo volume di T. KEZICH, *Ermanno Olmi. Il mestiere delle immagini. Diario (in pubblico) di un'amicizia*, Edizioni Falsopiano, Alessandria 2004. Equalmente il volume a cura di A. APRÀ, *Ermanno Olmi. Il cinema, i film, la televisione, la scuola*, Marsilio, Venezia 2003.

dal loro villaggio di cartone, e incriminandoli del reato di clandestinità faranno far loro la fine forse nota del rimpatrio, oppure...

Il film di Olmi non ha una conclusione esattamente identificabile, nonostante siano rispettate le canoniche convenzioni con i consueti titoli di coda e le immagini di congedo, rimane, appunto, un'opera aperta, che si trasferisce, con la sua vicenda ormai affidata alla quotidianità, nella cronaca contemporanea: il *mare nostrum* si è ormai trasformato in un *mare monstrum*, di dolore, di morte, di solitudine e di inumanità.

«La chiesa smessa è più funzionante perché gli orpelli di cui parlo sono i conformismi culturali, i più nocivi. La chiesa invece è casa senza domande, se non apri la casa agli altri, se non apri la tua casa interiore, non arrivi a niente» (Tamburrino): se volessimo, allora, considerare l'opera filmica di Ermanno Olmi all'interno di un genere letterario, potremmo definirla poema tragico contemporaneo, che del poema presenta l'andamento e la piena fiducia nella bellezza e nella verità, ma del tragico mantiene l'insolubile prospettiva dilemmatica, lascia gli spettatori interdetti e attoniti. Un film letterario e colmo di letteratura¹⁷. Bellezza e verità della vita, dei volti, delle riprese e dei movimenti di macchina, ma prospettiva dilemmatica che ci impone di riconsiderare criticamente il complesso e articolato cosmo valoriale occidentale. *Il villaggio di cartone* pone interrogativi sul significato della nostra Europa¹⁸, sulle sue strut-

¹⁷ Non solo la scrittura cinematografica di Olmi è una scrittura che affonda le sue radici nella letteratura europea, ma la sua cultura è letteraria e il suo modo di girare un film appare improntato alla creazione-composizione letteraria, alla conoscenza e all'uso degli strumenti della letteratura. In particolare, *Il villaggio di cartone* ha la struttura compositiva di un poema, che procede per folgoranti scene di sintesi, ove nulla può andare disperso, e tutto è alonato da una poesia straziante e malinconica. Inoltre, fra molti, osserva Luca Finatti: «si può dire che le sceneggiature di Olmi hanno sempre avuto un carattere letterario», in *Stupore e mistero nel cinema di Ermanno Olmi*, ANN-CI, Milano 2000, p. 86.

¹⁸ Ricorda Z. BAUMAN, *Stranieri alle porte*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2016, p. 120: «L'“Europeizzazione” della “questione migratoria”, ossia la linea politica ufficiale dell’Unione europea, al momento viene energicamente perseguita, ma non implica, né tanto meno garantisce, una transizione verso l’“approccio incentrato sui diritti”». E in altre pagine incentra precisamente il discorso sulla deliberata denigrazione e calunnia contro i migranti da parte di alcuni stati dell’Unione, che, attraverso una propaganda serrata, presentano questi uomini e donne come disumanizzati, in tal modo si spiana

ture sociali, politiche, economiche, sull'esperienza migratoria e sul suo mutamento rispetto al passato, nella constatazione di un numero sempre crescente di paesi dai quali partono e di paesi che ricevono migranti. Affrontare il tema-problema delle migrazioni nel Mediterraneo significa porsi l'ingenuo, probabilmente, e al contempo necessario obiettivo di centrare un «bersaglio in perenne movimento: cambiano la direzione e la composizione dei flussi, cambiano i paesi interessati, cambiano le politiche» (Pugliese 2002: 145), quel che non cambia è l'incontrovertibile valutazione che il fenomeno coinvolge direttamente e drammaticamente da un lato le vite degli uomini e delle donne, dei bambini che migrano, dall'altro quelle degli uomini e delle donne, dei bambini che ricevono; da una parte e dall'altra esseri umani impreparati, sempre e comunque, a quel che accade e nella totale incertezza di quel che accadrà. È un film sulla civiltà nella quale stiamo vivendo, dunque è un film religioso, non sulla religione o su una religione, o sul dialogo fra religioni, ma, attraverso la ri-elaborazione estetica e ricorrendo alla poesia, Olmi persuade gli spettatori ad effettuare un'esperienza religiosa, loro malgrado, assolutamente non ortodossa, ma quasi eretica, perché contraria ad ogni imposizione dogmatica, e fondata invece su un sentimento dell'uomo e dell'umano, dell'impegno individuale, di ognuno, nella costruzione della salvezza *hic et nunc*. Di fronte al migrante che è *figura Christi*, incarnazione e manifestazione odierna del dramma, allegoricamente inteso, della persecuzione, della flagellazione, della morte in croce, lo spettatore è assalito dallo smarrimento.

Nel nucleo di questo poema tragico, sembra porsi non tanto o non soltanto il *Vangelo*, quanto più e con più decisione l'*Oratio de hominis dignitate* di Pico della Mirandola: il richiamo necessario non ad una soluzione che provenga dall'alto dei cieli o dall'esercizio contemplativo della fede: il film proclama e dichiara una vera e propria rivoluzione antropologica: mai più l'*homo homini lupus*, bensì una piena fiducia nell'uomo, negli uomini, capaci di un'esperienza del sacro, nell'istante

la strada dell'esclusione alla possibilità di essere “titolari legittimi” di diritti umani, *ergo* ne consegue evidentemente che l'opinione pubblica consideri i migranti agenti di delinquenza, criminalità, in grado di costituire una concreta minaccia alla sicurezza degli stati-nazione.

stesso in cui ognuno comprende quale sia la propria parte nell’edificazione e nella conservazione dell’*humanum*. Soltanto come *faber sui* ogni uomo sarà capace di modificare la realtà, questa realtà.

Il villaggio di cartone è un poema tragico sul sacro, veramente e profondamente ierofanico, è una rappresentazione del sacro che insiste – è immanente – nel mondo e in noi, fra noi che abitiamo il mondo: sequenza dopo sequenza il regista ci invita ad un dialogo misterioso con lui e con il nostro essere umani. Lo spettatore è reclamato a prendere parte alla vicenda narrata ed esposta, quasi in forma di parola laica; e si sospende nell’attesa, attesa messianica di qualcosa o qualcuno che giunga ad attenuare la *spannung*, fino al *dénouement*, con il sospetto che lo scioglimento sia una insuperabile *καταστροφή* tragica. Ma il messia o il salvatore piuttosto che dall’esterno, dall’oltre del tempo e dello spazio, sembra volerci dire l’autore, deve generarsi dall’interno, dall’*hic et nunc* della responsabilità individuale: ognuno dei personaggi o ognuno di noi è invocato a divenire e avvertire in sé la capacità dell’*actio* e della *missio*, volte alla completa *Σωτηρία*. Il progetto di *Σωτηρία* non si compirà se gli uomini e le donne non si renderanno edotti e non intenderanno responsabilmente il loro compito per l’umanità, non per intervento delle indicazioni di una religione o di un ente divino, bensì dal loro essere intrinsecamente e costitutivamente parte del sacro e parte della salvezza qui sulla terra. Così ognuno potrà agire in questa direzione, disubbidendo e opponendosi come avversario di un potere miope, non più politicamente monolitico e monocipite, ma ormai parcellizzato e diffuso, capace continuamente non di consolidare i valori dell’Occidente ed esporsi per il bene e il sano progresso umano e sociale-solidale dei popoli, ma di agglomerare e di spostare il consenso, con lo scopo precipuo di autorigenerarsi e, economicamente, di accumulare profitti (Eco 1997: 17).

Terzo movimento. Adagio

Olmi e la sua opera filmica, tutta ambientata in un imprecisato paesino del sud dell’Italia, dunque, in uno dei paesi fondatori dell’Unione Europea, accordano e dimostrano che il sacro convive nella struttura stessa della coscienza, le è immanente, quando la coscienza si fa anche

storia del suo procedere e divenire; le sequenze filmiche dell'arrivo dei migranti in chiesa, della nascita del bambino, della fuga e della cattura finale, ad esempio, inoltre, interpellano sulla nostra identità di popoli, che hanno fondato un organismo politico sovranazionale, al centro e a principio edificante del quale è incardinata una *Carta dei diritti fondamentali dell'Unione Europea*, che a sua volta si trova egualmente a dichiarare e ribadire i valori sui quali è stato redatto il *Trattato che adotta una Costituzione per l'Europa*¹⁹. Il *Preambolo* della *Carta* recita, non senza precisi richiami alla *Dichiarazione universale dei diritti umani*²⁰:

I popoli europei nel creare tra loro un'unione sempre più stretta hanno deciso di condividere un futuro di pace fondato su valori comuni. Consapevole del suo patrimonio spirituale e morale, l'Unione si fonda sui valori indivisibili e universali di dignità umana, di libertà, di uguaglianza e di solidarietà; l'Unione si basa sui principi di democrazia e dello stato di diritto. Essa pone la persona al centro della sua azione istituendo la cittadinanza dell'Unione e creando uno spazio di libertà, sicurezza e giustizia. L'Unione contribuisce al mantenimento e allo sviluppo di questi valori comuni, nel rispetto della diversità delle culture e delle tradizioni dei popoli europei, dell'identità nazionale degli Stati membri e dell'ordinamento dei loro pubblici poteri a livello nazionale, regionale e locale; essa cerca di promuovere uno sviluppo equilibrato e sostenibile e assicura la libera circolazione delle persone, dei beni, dei servizi e dei capitali nonché la libertà di stabilimento. A tal fine è necessario, rendendoli più visibili in una Carta, rafforzare la tutela dei diritti fondamentali alla luce dell'evoluzione della società, del progresso sociale e degli sviluppi scientifici e tecnologici. La presente Carta riafferma, nel rispetto delle competenze e dei compiti della Comunità e dell'Unione e del principio di sussidiarietà, i diritti derivanti in particolare dalle tradizioni costituzionali e dagli obblighi internazionali comuni agli Stati membri, dal trattato sull'Unione europea e dai trattati

¹⁹ https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty_establishing_a_constitution_for_europe_it.pdf fra molti almeno: J. ZILLER, *La nuova Costituzione europea*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2003.

²⁰ https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/itn.pdf. Nel 2018, fra polemiche e reticenze, si è rimembrato l'anniversario dei 70 anni, dalla promulgazione della *Dichiarazione*, firmata il 10 dicembre 1948, dall'Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite.

comunitari, dalla convenzione europea per la salvaguardia dei diritti dell'uomo e delle libertà fondamentali, dalle carte sociali adottate dalla Comunità e dal Consiglio d'Europa, nonché i diritti riconosciuti dalla giurisprudenza della Corte di giustizia delle Comunità europee e da quella della Corte europea dei diritti dell'uomo. Il godimento di questi diritti fa sorgere responsabilità e doveri nei confronti degli altri come pure della comunità umana e delle generazioni future²¹.

Nella sintesi, chiaramente politica e inequivocabilmente sociale, del documento, che contiene le radici della storia e della civiltà europea, ritroviamo il nostro sistema valoriale e identitario di riferimento; e leggiamo, esplicitata con una sicurezza disarmante e indiscutibile, quale debba essere la nostra porzione di responsabilità, non solo come appartenenti ad uno dei paesi membri, ma come uomini e donne della comunità umana; responsabilità da agire nei confronti di tutti gli altri esseri umani e delle generazioni future. Il nostro primo dovere, il primo dovere dei popoli europei è di affermare, con voce forte e chiara, che i respingimenti e le politiche che negano l'accoglienza dei migranti annullano ogni anche residuale traccia di umanità, gettandoci nella bassezza della disumanità e della contraddizione, tanto rispetto ai valori dell'Unione, quanto rispetto a quelli cristiani.

Il Mediterraneo del film di Olmi è un mare in tempesta, che non si vive, di cui non ci si accorge nemmeno, è un mare che si affaccia con la sua rabbia (nella realtà) da uno schermo televisivo, il suo archivio fluido, non ha suono, non ha consistenza, è soltanto visivo, la sua poesia è nei corpi e nelle azioni, nelle lingue dei migranti che hanno fatto naufragio su una costa italiana (probabilmente pugliese). Il linguaggio cinematografico di Olmi, lasciando stupefatto lo spettatore, interrompe il rassicurante flusso narrativo, interrompe una concezione lineare e senza traumi della Storia, ma anche delle storie individuali dei migranti e degli altri uomini che interagiscono nella vicenda, per far irrompere l'inatteso e il perturbante, quel che mette in crisi il sapere e la geografia culturale dell'"ognuno al proprio posto", "ognuno a casa propria", perché non c'è un proprio posto per ognuno, decretato *ab*

²¹ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_it.pdf.

aeterno da una sorte superiore: è il caso (o la provvidenza?) ad aver lasciato nascere qualcuno qui e qualcuno altrove. Si potrebbe anche capovolgere la condizione e pensare che chi è nato qui e non altrove deve comprendere e accogliere, proprio perché nato qui e non altrove, chi non è nato qui ma altrove. E questa seconda interpretazione avvalorerebbe ulteriormente il riferimento alla responsabilità e all'azione individuale, che è, a mio avviso, fondante la poetica dell'opera filmica.

Il confine, ogni confine, è anch'esso fluido e discontinuo, artificiale. È attraverso un profondo choc, generato dall'opera filmica del regista di Asiago, che, per mezzo dei frammenti della condizione umana, narrata quasi come in una sequenza di parabole laiche esemplate sulla vicenda evangelica, dall'interno di un luogo sconsacrato, si risanano i valori dell'Occidente, quelli guastati prima e riemersi poi dalle macerie del secondo conflitto mondiale; quei valori che dovrebbero "splendere" e conseguire concreta attuazione nelle politiche dell'Unione.

Sovviene la riflessione di Simone Weil, formulata proprio negli anni Quaranta del secolo scorso, anni nei quali si sono sperimentati tutti i mali e al contempo dai quali è sorta la civiltà contemporanea. Se si è provveduto a legiferare e a dotare gli Stati di documenti che possano salvaguardare i diritti, non si considera con sufficiente interesse che la tutela dei diritti senza la contropartita dell'obbligo a dei doveri rimane solo un mero auspicio: «La nozione di obbligo sovrasta quella di diritto, che le è relativa e subordinata. Un diritto non è efficace di per sé, ma solo attraverso l'obbligo cui esso corrisponde; l'adempimento effettivo di un diritto non proviene da chi lo possiede, bensì dagli altri uomini che si riconoscono, nei suoi confronti, obbligati a qualcosa». E con ogni evidenza o secondo la logica corrente, anche alla *Carta dei diritti fondamentali dell'Unione* si deve applicare quanto la Weil energeticamente evidenzia, quando afferma: «L'obbligo è efficace allorché viene riconosciuto. L'obbligo, anche se non fosse riconosciuto da nessuno, non perderebbe nulla della pienezza del suo essere. Un diritto che non è riconosciuto da nessuno non vale molto. Non ha senso dire che gli uomini abbiano dei diritti e dei doveri a quelli corrispondenti». Perché, nonostante ciò sia comunemente accertato, tuttavia senza un organismo politico, e nella nostra contemporaneità, sovranazionale, in grado di consentire l'esercizio e il rispetto dei diritti, questi sarebbero poco più di un utopico desiderio; infatti, prosegue la Weil: «Queste

parole esprimono solo differenti punti di vista. La loro relazione è quella da oggetto a soggetto. Un uomo, considerato di per se stesso, ha solo dei doveri, fra i quali si trovano certi doveri verso se stesso. Gli altri, considerati dal suo punto di vista, hanno solo dei diritti. A sua volta egli ha dei diritti quando è considerato dal punto di vista degli altri, che si riconoscono degli obblighi verso di lui». Inoltre, proponendo un paradosso, chiarisce poco oltre la filosofa: «Un uomo, che fosse solo nell'universo, non avrebbe nessun diritto, ma avrebbe degli obblighi. La nozione di diritto, essendo di ordine oggettivo, non è separabile da quelle di esistenza e di realtà». Proviamo ad applicare questo discorso al campo dei diritti del migrante: nel film di Olmi la legislazione nazionale²², di una determinata nazione, non consente a questi uomini e donne considerati clandestini nemmeno il diritto a curarsi. Simone Weil, infine, spiega che la nozione di diritto: «appare quando l'obbligo entra nel campo dei fatti; di conseguenza essa comprende sempre, in una certa misura, la considerazione degli stati di fatto e delle situazioni particolari. I diritti appaiono sempre legati a date condizioni. Solo l'obbligo può essere incondizionato. Esso si pone in un campo che è

²² Si consulti il volume di S. ANASTASIO, S. CENTONZE, *Ingresso e soggiorno illegale nel territorio dello stato*, Key Editore, Vicalvi 2016, dove si commenta con attenzione e perizia l'art. 10 bis T.U. sull'immigrazione. Di grande interesse, e necessario per lo svolgimento del presente saggio, anche il lucidissimo e apprezzato contributo di F. COLOMBO, *Clandestino. La caccia è aperta*, La nave di Teseo, Milano 2018. In particolare con durezza, fin dall'*Avvertenza*, Colombo chiarisce che tutto quello che viene diffuso dagli organi di stampa e da molta politica rispetto a «traffico in mare, di soldi, barche, navi, soccorso, vita e malavita dei migranti, non è vero: in nessun tempo, in nessun luogo, in nessun punto» e conclude: «Il punto non è il salvataggio di naufraghi in mare. Il salvataggio è visto come la stravaganza di una ONG stranamente ricca che si ostina a impedire a donne e bambini di affogare. Il punto è chi paga, come se l'impresa fosse criminale. Le autorità adesso diranno “altòà, molli il corpo salvato dal mare e ci dica dove ha preso i soldi, altrimenti qui vanno in prigione tutti”. Manca qualcosa a questa storia. Primo, non ci viene detto qual è la legge a cui tutti si stanno inchinando, dal ministro al procuratore. È la Bossi-Fini, che nega tutti i trattati umanitari firmati dall'Italia? Secondo: salvano in mare. Qual è il reato?» pp. 7-9. Mentre scrivo, conservo un bel ricordo di un incontro, fra molti, con Furio Colombo, e mi dico che sarebbe stato bello poter far conoscere e ascoltare in dialogo Colombo e Olmi, ma Ermanno è venuto a mancare proprio mentre questo volume di Colombo era in stampa, esattamente il 5 maggio 2018.

al di sopra di ogni condizione, perché è al di sopra di questo mondo» (Weil 1990: 13). In calce alla *Dichiarazione universale dei diritti umani* si dovrebbe poter aggiungere la prescrizione dell'obbligo degli uomini a rimanere umani, e farla rispettare: così nel *Villaggio di cartone* lo stato di pericolo e di paura dei migranti è espresso dall'incertezza dell'esercizio dei loro diritti, ma ancor più dalla condizione di clandestinità, che concede ad un'intera comunità il diritto all'ingiustizia e ad un comportamento persecutorio e violento, praticato dalle forze dell'ordine²³. In questa direzione, il film piuttosto che offrire soluzioni apre a dubbi e affina complesse problematiche: è una costante petizione sul significato dell'accoglienza nel presente, e della nostra incapacità a focalizzare e snebbiare le condizioni epocali più spinose, nelle quali viviamo e che sovente azzardiamo a rimuovere. Ogni sequenza filmica diviene, allora, un ammonimento doloroso al dilemma di un'intera civiltà al bivio di una scelta fra le istanze economiche e gli egoismi, e la tentazione di rimanere umani. Manifestava, correttamente e non senza ironia, nel secolo scorso, rispetto ad un vizio tutto italiano e immutato, Antonio Gramsci: «L'Italia è il paese classico dell'ospitalità. Gli italiani hanno tutti il cuore più grande del duomo. Piangono e s'inteneriscono agli spettacoli pietosi, non rifiutano l'obolo di una buona parola a nessuna miseria. Ma lo spirito evangelico non ha saputo trasformarsi nella forma moderna della solidarietà e dell'organizzazione disinteressata e civile. Esso è rimasto pura esteriorità, inutile e melensa coreografia» (Gramsci 1917: 12). Oggi, non è più prerogativa italiana, ma si potrebbe estendere a numerosi stati dell'Unione.

Nella scena 29 del film, così come segnalata dalla sceneggiatura, dopo che un ferito fra i clandestini è stato accolto nella canonica, il sacerdote vorrebbe chiamare il pronto soccorso, ma uno dei soccorritori, anch'egli probabilmente ha attraversato la condizione di clandestino, lo avvisa: «Sono clandestini. Se chiama il pronto soccorso, c'è obbligo di denuncia: sarà la fine del loro viaggio» (Olmi 2011: 32). Il religioso diviene pienamente cosciente, in quel momento, delle ragioni che

²³ E. OLMI, *Il villaggio di cartone. Diabasis*, con la collaborazione di C. MAGRIS e G. RAVASI, con un saggio introduttivo di V. MANCUSO, Archinto, Milano 2011, p. 71, scena 67.

animano la sua professione di fede. Accoglie, ospita, si commuove, e al sagrestano che domanda per quale ragione abbia fatto entrare dei clandestini nella sua chiesa, risponde semplicemente e direttamente: «Perché è una chiesa». Di fronte alle ulteriori rimostranze del sagrestano che evidenzia il grosso rischio per tutti nell'accoglienza, osserva: «Quando la carità è un rischio... quello... è il momento della carità» (Olmi 2011: 45-46). Se con *Camminacammina*, del 1982, Olmi aveva dichiarato di aver voluto realizzare un film di mediazioni nel senso più ampio possibile del termine, perché la realtà della vicenda narrata era poco afferrabile e soltanto attraverso mediazioni la si sarebbe potuta approssimativamente accogliere, al contrario, con *Il villaggio di cartone*, lo spettatore non può far ricorso ad alcun elemento di mediazione, perché tutto vi è immediato, diretto, tempestivo e non rimane più spazio o tempo per mediare.

La vera e sincera carità agisce solo se e quando affronta il rischio, mette in gioco le sicurezze, apre all'incertezza e dunque al coraggio: qui l'eco dopo un secolo e in un differente contesto delle parole di Gramsci o, altrimenti, del discorso che Stefano Rodotà propone nel suo volume *Solidarietà. Utopia necessaria*²⁴. Ed è lo stesso Olmi che riafferma con decisione questa poetica: «Cara Chiesa di tutti i cristiani in buona fede, anch'io sono consapevole che non sei riducibile ad un edificio, né alla magnificenza delle cattedrali [...], ma che devi essere! – il cuore di tutti gli uomini», e diserne, quasi didascalizzando e

²⁴ «Per entrare in questa dimensione può essere utile, tra le molte possibili, la memoria di quel che scriveva nel 1748 Montesquieu. “Qualche elemosina fatta a un uomo nudo per le strade non basta ad adempire gli obblighi dello Stato, il quale deve a tutti i cittadini la sussistenza assicurata, il nutrimento, un abbigliamento decente, e un genere di vita che non sia dannoso alla salute”. Siamo di fronte a un testo intenso, stratificato, nel quale si manifestano molteplici discendenze, e che senza troppe forzature può indicare una prima linea di analisi. Si coglie l'eco del Vangelo di Matteo e delle sue opere di misericordia – dar da mangiare agli affamati, vestire gli ignudi. Ma si va subito oltre la dimensione puramente caritatevole e, se pure non si abbandona un dovere morale universale che riguarda tutti e ciascuno, questo si concretizza poi intorno a un soggetto determinato, lo Stato, con i suoi obblighi. Una discontinuità evidente, che non si manifesta soltanto nella direzione segnata dalla tradizione religiosa, ma rispetto ad altre e diverse tradizioni di pensiero»: S. RODOTÀ, *Solidarietà. Un'utopia necessaria*, Laterza, Roma Bari 2014, p. 11.

commentando il suo film, girato due anni prima, «la Chiesa di Cristo è la casa che attende l'amico ma ancor più il nemico» (Olmi 2013: 14). Dove, per esplicitarlo senza rischio di faintendimenti, il nemico non è lo straniero, il migrante o chi crede in un'altra religione, ma coloro che non hanno compreso e non sanno applicare nella vita quotidiana il messaggio evangelico.

Il sacerdote, non temendo di apparire né eretico né blasfemo, in un momento di struggente tormento interiore, quasi confessandosi e confidandosi con l'anziano medico, ammette: «Ho fatto il prete per fare del bene... Ma per fare del bene, non serve la fede. Il bene è più della fede» (Olmi 2011: 68). Sulla solidarietà, che è forse la vera protagonista del *Villaggio di cartone*, senza reticenze o attenuazioni concettuali, rispondendo alla domanda se lui è un uomo di fede, Olmi dichiara: «Io continuo a interrogare Dio che non risponde. E non risponde perché dobbiamo risponderci da soli». E ribadisce: «Io dico: guardate che sono ebreo perché Gesù è partito da lì. Se ritroviamo solidarietà e unità, potremo risolvere molti problemi. È il segno della mia forza, sarà piccola ma è la mia forza»²⁵. È in questa affermazione o convinzione che il film affronta, attraverso un dilemma contingente, quello dell'accoglienza o della denuncia di un gruppo di clandestini, una riflessione su ciò che Julien Ries chiama *l'esperienza del sacro*, aggiungerei io, nella condizione neomoderna.

L'opera filmica di Olmi, questo suo poema tragico contemporaneo, affida alla provocazione e all'inquietudine che suscita negli spettatori il dramma dell'identità occidentale: fra valori evangelici e laicismo illuminista, rimangono, appunto, la fratellanza e la solidarietà come prassi-*vita activa*; a Natalia Aspesi rivela il regista-poeta tragico:

Questo film l'ho molto meditato, nei 70 giorni in cui ho dovuto stare immobile a letto in seguito a una caduta: e ho capito che c'è una sola cosa da fare oggi: cambiare, cambiare il mondo, certo, ma prima di tutto noi stessi. C'è in giro troppo disagio, ci sono troppe differenze, troppa vergogna, troppe cose inutili. Così come stiamo vivendo ades-

²⁵ <https://www.lastampa.it/2011/09/07/spettacoli/olmi-inginocchiamoci-davanti-migranti-più-che-al-crocifisso-R6x4iQRuwBNwxjeW26xiPN/pagina.html> «La Stampa», 7.9.2011.

so, anche dentro di noi, si precipita solo in un baratro, a meno che già non sia accaduto. [...] Dal senso di giustizia, dal rispetto dell'altro, dal ritorno necessario all'onestà [può venire il cambiamento]. Siamo vivendo in un mondo di cartone. È di cartone il potere, lo sono gli uomini di potere, lo è la finta giustizia, la ricchezza, l'economia: basta un po' di umidità e il cartone si scioglie, come si sta sciogliendo in questi ultimi tempi tutto ciò che sembrava indistruttibile. Non ne resterà niente se non ce ne spogliamo, come la chiesa del film, se non apriamo gli occhi sugli altri, i meno fortunati. Siamo circondati da uomini che si credevano importanti, e invece oggi sappiamo che sono di cartone, destinati a scomparire. Sono disperati, soli [...]²⁶.

Dal Mediterraneo giunge un'umanità derelitta e silenziosa, affamata non solo di cibo, ma anche di giustizia e di verità²⁷, e prima di lambire le rive del mare ha attraversato un deserto²⁸; nella chiesa dismessa e ormai vuota, edifica un accampamento che assomiglia a quelli che vediamo nei deserti del sud del mondo, uno di quelli che si montano e facilmente si smontano, per andare altrove, quando lo spazio diviene inospitale o le oasi esauriscono le riserve d'acqua.

Quarto movimento. Rondò agitato

Il crocefisso, in una sequenza dai rumori di guerra, è ormai stato staccato, i banchi sono confusi e in disordine, l'acquasantiera serve solo per raccogliere l'acqua piovana, resiste per poco anche quel villaggio di cartone. Nonostante i movimenti di macchina vogliono ri-

²⁶ <http://trovacinema.repubblica.it/news/detttaglio/la-sfida-di-olmi-ho-80-anni-ma-voglio-cambiare-il-mondo/406949/7.9.2011>.

²⁷ La lettura del libro intervista a cura di Daniela Padoan è stata davvero edificante e formativa per completare la visione dell'etica e dell'estetica cinematografica: E. OLMI, *Il sentimento della realtà*, Editrice San Raffaele, Milano 2008, in particolare le pagine 41-71, 84-100.

²⁸ L'irrinunciabile volume di Fernand Braudel anima e ha animato, dalla metà degli anni Ottanta, gli studi sul Mediterraneo, su tutto riapre e mantiene aperte le questioni più cogenti sul *mare nostrum*, sulle migrazioni, sui paesaggi e sui problemi del passato e del futuro. F. BRAUDEL, *Il Mediterraneo. Lo spazio, la storia, gli uomini, le tradizioni*, Bompiani, Milano 1987.

evocare il Neorealismo, e non mancano le citazioni da Antonioni e da Rossellini, la macchina da presa ferma sui volti ricorda Pasolini, e sempre presente è la lezione tanto di Truffaut quanto di Rohmer, amati dal regista di Asiago; tuttavia Olmi, non più soltanto testimone ma protagonista e attivamente impegnato, ha l'intenzione di comporre un apolojo paradigmatico: «Il film è un apolojo, non è realistico, ogni presenza è un simbolo preciso: il ragazzo suggestionato dalla ragazza terrorista, la non accettazione del diverso, la mancanza di dialogo. È la rappresentazione dell'umanità con le sue delusioni, con le debolezze. Solo nel confronto con gli altri c'è la salvezza»²⁹. La purezza dello sguardo di Olmi si posa sugli oggetti e sulle persone, per penetrarne il significato profondo e l'anima, in una essenzialità che lascia lo spettatore di fronte ad una spaesante sorpresa, intesa come «esperienza della precarietà dell'esistenza umana e della provvisorietà di ogni tentativo umano d'ipotecare il futuro» (Finatti 2000: 20), evitando il regista ogni tentazione di smania storizzante, per giungere quasi a voler sfidare l'essenza del tempo, e osare così l'azione, prima o più che persistere nella contemplazione.

La migrazione, il passaggio o l'attraversamento, l'origeniana διάβασις³⁰, del Mediterraneo fa conoscere e riconoscere, ogni giorno attraverso la cronaca, la condizione di uomini e donne clandestini, stranieri, profughi: sono gli ultimi, ma dalle sequenze filmiche del *Villaggio di cartone* gli spettatori incontrano – nel senso che vanno loro incontro quasi psicologicamente – persone reali, che si prestano ad interpretare il ruolo di personaggi, fino ad assumere lo *status* di simboli della loro condizione anonima: il vecchio prete, il sagrestano, una donna, il soccorritore, il cherubino, Jonas, Magdahà, i clandestini, la ragazza estremista, il graduato, il medico, il bardo, il ragazzo testimone, l'avverso, i soldati, l'appartato, Neto, Melvis, la vittima. Non si danno nomi, come recita il Cherubino: «qui nessuno dice il suo vero nome: per non essere identificato» (Olmi 2011: 69): ognuno può riconoscer-si nei differenti perso-

²⁹ <https://www.lastampa.it/2011/09/07/spettacoli/olmi-inginocchiamoci-davantai-i-migranti-piu-che-al-crocifisso-R6x4iQRuwbNwxJeW26xiPN/pagina.html> «La Stampa», 7.9.2011.

³⁰ È lemma che Olmi pospone al titolo della sceneggiatura.

naggi, nei loro ruoli, a seconda della propria parte nel mondo, perché gli uomini e le donne del film sono pensati e realizzati come emblemi, che alludono alla ritualità dell'esistenza, e la certificano, con la grazia e la perizia di Olmi. E giova rimembrare che il regista inizia la sua carriera come documentarista. È la presenza, come entità immanente, del divino e di (un) Dio nella vita, nella realtà, nella quotidianità che anima le sequenze, anche quelle che documentano nel film la disperazione: così l'arte è tale, se «riesce a comunicarci il senso forte dell'incarnazione, l'immanenza di Dio sulla terra, l'eterno che diventa tempo»³¹.

Aveva avvisato Lucien Febvre che «il Maghreb è una chiave tra due mari, il Mediterraneo e il Sahara. Ora, di questi due mari, il più irraggiungibile è il Sahara. [...] Il Maghreb è un ponte tra due mari». Ma con il cammello diviene più semplice muoversi nel continente africano, evidentemente in un passato ormai remoto, e allora prosegue: «E dunque l'Africa del Nord si salda facilmente al blocco africano, e si scinde radicalmente dall'Europa» (Febvre 2014: 53). Oggi l'Europa e il continente Africano sembrano, invece, molto più vicini di quanto non si fosse sperimentato in passato, e il mare diviene una strada rapida fra due continenti, per le migliaia di disperati che cercano una speranza, un approdo, una nuova vita. Attraverso una irrinunciabile διάβασις.

Se nelle prime inquadrature lo spettatore era rimasto attonito, del tutto impreparato, all'esperienza di una chiesa che viene privata di tutto quanto la rende tale, almeno per quanto attiene agli arredi e alle suppellettili, ai segni, alle presenze simboliche della religione cristiana, in particolare privata di un grande crocifisso, che viene deposto dall'alto con un rumoroso braccio meccanico, dallo sbuffante fumo nero; poco dopo, il frastuono di elicotteri si ode provenire dall'esterno; è alla fine che la titubanza diviene sbigottimento e resa di fronte alla violenza con la quale si aprono le porte della chiesa, ormai non più chiesa, e irrompe la luce abbagliante mista all'azzurro intermittente dei lampeggianti delle auto della polizia, le forze dell'ordine prorompono

³¹ <https://www.lastampa.it/2011/09/07/spettacoli/olmi-inginocchiamoci-davantiai-migranti-piu-che-al-crocifisso-R6x4iQRuwbNwxJeW26xiPN/pagina.html> «La Stampa», 7.9.2011.

all'interno dello spazio del villaggio di cartone, per arrestare i migranti. Mentre scorrono i titoli di coda, nuovamente il mare in tempesta che osserviamo imperterriti, iroso, senza misericordia, capace di divorare nelle sue fauci uomini e oggetti, lambire la terra, nella burrasca, tutto è mostrato ancora dal video di un televisore; alla fine campeggia sullo schermo cinematografico una profezia che è insieme un avvertimento: «O noi cambiamo il corso impresso alla Storia o sarà la Storia a cambiare noi» (Olmi 2011: 89).

All'interno della chiesa non più chiesa, ormai non più nemmeno un villaggio di cartone, c'è un lucernaio a forma di grande occhio: durante tutto il film, dal vetro gocciolava dell'acqua come un pianto inconsolabile, che veniva raccolta nell'accusantiera ormai inservibile. I clandestini vengono portati via, traditi da qualche loro compagno, che si fa delatore per denaro o per qualche risarcimento, ecco: l'occhio di vetro del lucernaio, che evoca l'occhio di Dio nel triangolo della Trinità della Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, va in frantumi.

L'enigma della conclusione, per un'opera filmica che non conclude, non manca (come del resto tutta l'opera filmica, contro ogni allettamento di conformistica posizione populista) di continuare ad interrogarci e a lasciarci nella condizione del dilemma, che non trova risposte o soluzioni: Olmi stesso spiega, nel suo *L'apocalisse è un lieto fine*, che «ci sono momenti in cui un Paese, che si dice democratico, ha bisogno della mobilitazione di ogni suo cittadino. Ma compiere bene quel che si può fare per noi stessi non basta più: occorre aggiungere quel che potremmo e dovremmo fare per tutti. Il futuro ci giudicherà soprattutto per quel che potevamo fare e non abbiamo fatto»³².

³² E. OLMI, *L'apocalisse è un lieto fine. Storia della mia vita e del nostro futuro*, Rizzoli, Milano 2012, p. 174. Si tratta di un volume composto di frammenti, memorie e idee, riflessioni e confessioni. Ulteriormente essenziale per la poetica e il pensiero di Ermanno Olmi è il dialogo-intervista con Vito Mancuso, alla Fiera delle Parole a Padova, mercoledì 9 ottobre 2013, presso Cinema Teatro Multisala Pio X, dal titolo: *Il principio passione. La forza che ci spinge ad amare*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wTNCdVs9c>.

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“Identity frontiers: necessary borders and porous challenges”: ovvero criticità, ambiguità e valenze plurali dello spazio di frontiera in ottica plurilingue*

Rosita Deluigi, Livia Cadei

Abstract: This paper focuses its attention on the construction of the problematized identity in view of the concept of borders within the intercultural pedagogy approach. We will place our emphasis on borders and frontiers as crossing places of prohibited or interrupted transit. These spaces of exchange are either restricted and blocked or they can become an opportunity to transform or hybridize identities in research. The article is divided in three parts and each one corresponds to a different “linguistic frontier”, with the intention of crossing through several cultural elements.

In the first part, in Italian, we will introduce the main theoretical issues: How are identities being built in frontier spaces? Is the border porous? Can it be generative? The second part, in French, deepens the theme of identity in the migrant condition: what kind of identity is produced in the suspended spaces and times of refugee camps? Finally, the third part, in English, emphasizes the recognition of the non-neutrality of identities in transit and of the formative process of identifying one's own internal frontiers in direct contact with otherness in contexts different from one's own.

Keywords: Frontiers, Barriers, Identity, Border-Crossing

* The article is the result of the joint reflection of the two authors. The first paragraph was written jointly, the second paragraph is edited by Livia Cadei and the third paragraph is edited by Rosita Deluigi.

Introduzione

Il concetto di frontiera è centrale nello studio delle ineguaglianze etniche e razziali e introduce un’alternativa a più statiche teorie culturali o biologiche in merito a tali differenze. Lo spazio della frontiera dialoga con la dimensione del confine e, declinarne il significato nelle sue diverse sfaccettature, consente di metterne in luce criticità, ambiguità e valenze plurali (Giordana, 2018): dalla linea di demarcazione alla frontiera, dalla separazione alla contiguità, dalla riflessione che traccia e determina i limiti alla modalità-intenzionalità di attraversarli.

Afferma Debray: «dire di una frontiera che è un colabrodo, significa farle un complimento: essa è lì per filtrare» (Aime, 2018, p. 19). In gioco quindi è il concetto di cultura così come lo intende Remotti (2011): «ogni cultura è sempre non soltanto una coperta troppo corta per coprire i vari aspetti del reale, ma è anche una prigione troppo stretta: ogni cultura produce in sé il bisogno di uscirne». Le culture però si declinano al plurale in un lavoro continuo di costruzione e ri-formulazione, qualora siano abitabili ed attraversabili. In questo modo si allontana il rischio di pensare le culture in modo reificato, cioè come una ‘cosa’ dotata di confini rigidi (Favole, 2018), necessari per vincolare, separare e preservare.

Frontiere: spazi di confine e luoghi di attraversamento

La frontiera è uno spazio costituito da «una linea fatta di infiniti punti, infiniti nodi, infiniti attraversamenti» (Leogrande, 2015, p. 40), in cui si compiono movimenti precari e instabili, spesso all’ombra di muri che tracciano pesanti ombre e che dividono gli immaginari, impedendo la possibilità di incontro e d’interazione (Fugier, Carrier, 2013). La dimensione spaziale dei confini mette in discussione i luoghi fisici e relazionali e ci interroga su come la stessa identità diventi “di confine”, porosa, instabile, migrante, errante, soprattutto quando intercetta delle barriere. Nel momento in cui si incontra il limite (fisico-relazionale), ciò che rende ogni soggetto esterno, estraneo, non collocato in qualcosa di familiare e riconoscibile, e quando io stesso divento non riconoscibile, allora posso decidere di interrogarmi a livello identitario,

decostruendo architetture rigide, correndo il rischio di fare spazio ad elementi instabili di ridefinizione del proprio sé. Ancora Remotti riflette: «che una cultura prenda per mano i suoi viaggiatori e li accompagni nei loro viaggi anche drammatici e in luoghi lontani [...] o che invece gli individui, intraprendendo un viaggio cerchino di strapparsi di dosso la loro cultura, l’importante è sottolineare il tema dell’uscita dalla propria cultura» (Remotti, 2012, p. 14).

In transiti, scambi e passaggi l’identità appartiene e si differenzia, «l’estensione di ciò che è noto prende forme imprevedibili» (Favole, 2018, p. 105). L’identità rigida, invece, cerca il confine per demarcare e definirsi; in che modo provare a sconfinare, varcando la soglia delle (in) sicurezze in cui siamo immersi? Intanto possiamo partire dal riconoscere che l’identità confina con l’alterità e con gli spazi ed i tempi che abitiamo e che ci spingono a revisionare il nostro modo di essere e di interpretare la porzione di mondo (interno ed esterno) in cui viviamo. La porosità e la non neutralità identitaria devono poter coesistere nella ricerca di contatto-ibridazione con l’esterno e di coerenza-consistenza interna (personale). Tale dinamica può generare delle dissonanze e delle divergenze, in quanto negli sconfinamenti risuonano elementi “altri” e “oltre” a “noi”, in una continua convergenza di scoperta di un sé incerto e approssimativo (Deluigi, 2016).

Se l’identità è in navigazione, se si mette in viaggio, deve fare i conti con situazioni difficili e scomode, chiedendosi se è disponibile ad interrogarsi. L’inquietudine del nomadismo accentua l’instabilità del viaggiatore-errante e necessita di alcune “stelle polari” verso cui orientarsi. I confini diventano veri e propri snodi fisici-relazionali in cui mettersi alla prova, o in cui si è messi alla prova, non solo nel transito-attraversamento, ma nella permanenza e appartenenza connotate dall’abitare contesti inediti percorrendo traiettorie impreviste.

Collocarsi in spazi di frontiera assume significati molteplici, a partire dalla possibilità di avere la libera scelta dell’attraversamento o dall’essere spinti necessariamente o in modo coercitivo a stare in bilico, piuttosto che in equilibrio, su confini costruiti da altri, in spazi che bloccano la progettualità, creando una persistenza forzata. Nel contesto frontaliero, le pratiche di controllo e di espulsione insieme alla permanenza nei campi, partecipano alla medesima dinamica. In entrambi i casi, la gestione dei migranti da parte delle autorità implica

una riformulazione dei progetti migratori. Tempo e spazio sono sospesi e “messi in pausa”. La sospensione rende più acuta la condizione liminare di chi si trova sulla soglia, collocato nella zona di margine segnato da protezione e intensa sorveglianza.

In questa staticità anche il tempo diventa sovrano e scandisce possibili traiettorie esistenziali o inarrivabili speranze, lasciando una scia di incertezze o di fallimenti destinati a naufragare, se non trovano uno spazio effettivo e affettivo di realizzazione. La stessa permanenza può essere transitoria e la variabile temporale non va sottovalutata nella mutevolezza della ridefinizione identitaria. Insomma, sono le stesse categorie dello spazio e del tempo a riconfigurarsi. A primo acchito, la frontiera comunica l'estensione spaziale come limite che circoscrive e definisce, ma a ben vedere il confine chiama in causa anche la dimensione temporale, che in quel valico coniuga e trasforma ‘prima’ e ‘dopo’, ‘già’ e ‘non ancora’. Due assi allora si intersecano nella frontiera: quello orizzontale dello spazio e quello verticale del tempo. Segnare un confine è anche un modo per legare uno spazio ad un’epoca.

Nel contatto con la frontiera riaffiora in modo potente il progetto identitario. Il confine rende evidente un’appartenenza e consente di riconoscere la «tensione tra la costruzione simbolica e materiale di un’identità» (Gianfrancesco, Morawski, 2018, p. 166). In equilibrio sottile e delicato, il margine diventa occasione di riconoscimento, ma può sbilanciarsi e divenire ostacolo e divieto, esclusione e limitazione. Il confine può creare lo straniero e il richiamo all’identità può significare appello all’uniforme e al respingimento del diverso.

In tal senso, l’identità assume forme molteplici, talvolta dissonanti, tra interdipendenze, spazi e tempi che la rendono eterogenea e alla ricerca di una mediazione, comunque parziale, in grado di superare fissità stereotipate, anche attraverso forme comunicative difformi e linguaggi plurali. I gesti, le immagini, le competenze linguistiche, le rappresentazioni legate a differenti codici comunicativi, contribuiscono a stabilire delle connessioni con le realtà e con le alterità, individuando un punto di approdo da cui partire-ripartire per l’esplorazione del proprio sé navigante-errante-viandante (Bauman, 2002). Talvolta si salpa in solitudine, talvolta si spiegano le vele con altre persone, per scelta o per forza, e le dinamiche di attraversamento diventano complesse e

mettono alla prova la coerenza interna del proprio sé, non senza generare malessere. Tra la molteplicità di identità articolate che incontriamo, anche solo sfiorandole, nei contesti complessi, e le pluralità di appartenenze e di assenze che risiedono dentro di noi, quali connessioni possiamo creare? Quali fili di significato possiamo riallacciare? Quali rappresentazioni e immagini abbiamo di noi e del mondo e viceversa?

La nostra riflessione prende in considerazione le traiettorie della libertà e della coercizione, dimensioni in cui la postura di scoperta dell'uomo cambia assetto. Ci focalizzeremo, inoltre, sulla dinamica tra confine fisico, collocato sulle carte ed identitario, e relazionale, sapendo che siamo immersi nella relatività del tempo e nell'eterogeneità dei contesti in cui può essere complesso riconoscerci. Vedremo che le trasformazioni dell'identità possono avvenire in un luogo fisico definito da confini concreti e da limiti imposti e forzati, generando non poche sofferenze e confinamenti dell'umano. Allo stesso tempo, osserveremo l'identità che si trasforma in situazione, compiendo al suo interno sconfinamenti possibili, cercando di comprendere come ricollocarsi e destrutturarsi fino a raggiungere una linea di confine tratteggiata per ri-definirsi e ri-trovarsi.

Quale generatività è insita in questi processi? E quale rigeneratività? Davvero le ibridazioni identitarie permettono di riposizionarsi (dentro e fuori di sé) e di assumere forme plastiche che abbiano una sufficiente “tenuta”? Abbiamo bisogno di avere un confine interno per riconoscerci, per raccontarci, per riposizionarci nuovamente nelle situazioni e per cambiare. Gli itinerari identitari sono necessariamente plurali, tra libertà-coercizione e spostamento di senso; non sempre comunicabili e descrivibili, richiedono tempo per prendere-perdere forma e poter dire di sé; non sono mai definitivi e necessitano di una costante instabilità. Milioni di persone migranti si spostano nella quotidianità, in uno spazio-mondo che non è in grado di contenere tutte le istanze, i bisogni, i desideri che le soggettività portano con sé, pur viaggiando leggeri, solo “con bagaglio a mano” per resistere alla disintegrazione del proprio io. «Il confine lineare continua [...] a giocare un ruolo importante [...]. Ma non solo questo confine si è fatto mobile ed elastico, più di quanto non lo sia mai stato in passato: oggi si articola con altri limiti (linguistici, culturali, urbani) facendo dell'esperienza del confine qualcosa di profondamente complesso e

non di rado spiazzante» (Mezzadra, 2018, p. 7). La forza resiliente di chi deve compiere degli attraversamenti forzati si confronta con l'intenzionalità creativa di chi vuole vivere nelle frontiere dell'alterità. I significati delle esperienze assumono sfumature molteplici, accomunati da uomini, donne, ragazzi, bambini che, mentre compiono uno spostamento fisico, devono necessariamente attraversare le proprie profondità. Sembra quasi di poter sentire lo stridere tra confinamenti geografici e trasformazioni identitarie. Spesso restiamo intrappolati sulla superficie terrestre, mentre il subbuglio interno percorre altre traiettorie migranti.

Dopo lo shock culturale e il “displacement”, quali sono le dinamiche, le strategie, le modalità per intraprendere un percorso di ricerca identitario ed educativo? Come tenere aperte nuove piste di conoscenza, oltre sé stessi, al di là della familiarità, verso la prossimità? I confini necessari e le sfide porose sollecitano una ricerca educativa volta a intraprendere esplorazioni identitarie, a partire dalla decostruzione di traiettorie lineari e standardizzate, che conducano verso interazioni autentiche. La sfida è saper restare in bilico su più crinali, nell'incertezza di una convivenza che sfida il proprio sé e lo rende sufficientemente instabile e, allo stesso tempo, riconoscibile, da potersi revisionare in modo permanente.

L'osservazione critica dei confini plurali è solo un primo passo di un'analisi che conduce all'intervento e che richiede la presenza, l'attraversamento, il fare esperienza con gli “altri identitari”. I ponti relazionali si costruiscono nella fatica della quotidianità e diventano architetture instabili continuamente sollecitate da transiti interrotti e parziali, in una precarietà che richiede progettualità disponibili alle sollecitazioni di divergenze e derive. Prima di tutto, interiori.

In questo scenario frammentato e incerto si colloca la riflessione pedagogica, con l'intento di alimentare prospettive plurali e permanenti di esplorazione ed erranza identitaria. Con il singolo, nei contesti sociali e nelle interdipendenze comunitarie in cui si articolano le appartenenze e le convivenze. La consapevolezza di essere in un attraversamento permanente, di costruire un pensiero nomade non pre-fabbricato, di essere in sospeso tra più appartenenze e autenticità relative, può comunque portare con sé il rischio di assumere una postura troppo certa nel percepirti come decentrati e di alimentare

nuovamente l'assunzione di un punto di vista statico. La sfida, invece, continua ad essere quella di riposizionarsi in situazione, di osservare e di mettersi in ascolto delle molteplici dinamiche che affiorano dalle svariate narrazioni della realtà, decostruendosi e, allo stesso tempo, ristrutturandosi come soggetti interdipendenti e plurali.

Poussés à la limite

De Lesbos à Lampedusa, de Vintimille à Calais, les routes migratoires sont aujourd’hui parsemées de camps, campements et refugés (Agier & Babels, 2017). Les camps représentent des dimensions sociales, spatiales, temporelles généralement associées à l’immobilité, plus précisément à l’immobilisation des personnes en mouvement. L’idée même de frontière se transforme en processus d’externalisation et se multiplie en espaces où sont imposées les logiques de l’état d’urgence. «La sécurisation et la militarisation des frontières nationales ajoutent un nouvel élément à l’élaboration des politiques postcoloniales» (Agier, 2018, p. 159). En soi, la question de la frontière est dominante et se redessine par les routes maritimes, les murs récents et même par les «fermetures de l’extérieur», comme dans le cas des migrants cantonnés sur des bateaux que on interdit d'accoster sur les côtes nationales.

Mais les cols, points de passages fermés génèrent également des espaces qui interpellent, qui mobilisent des pensées et des actions sous forme de nouvelles solidarités transnationales. La frontière représente alors un lieu paradoxal: d'espace pour bloquer, elle peut devenir lieu de transformation, et même lieu génératif, obligeant les habitants «stables» à penser au nouveau sujet comme à un individu bloqué dans un camp-frontière et à «ce lieu initialement illégitime et indigne devenant de plus en plus ‘significatif’ et se transformant même en un lieu politique dans une Europe confuse, à la recherche de nouveaux symboles mobilisateurs» (Agier, 2018, p. 150). Dans le camp on vit souvent dans les limbes: incompréhensible est le sens de l'attente qui «n'est pas toujours temps de vie, de narrations, de preuve de soi, de délégation, de responsabilité, de clarification de projets, d'engagements, de devoirs aussi, d'inclinations. Souvent le temps est organisé,

confiné, rythmé de façon précise et détaillée par les activités prévues par l'organisme qui gère la structure» (Gandolfi, 2018, p. 77).

Espace et temps suspendus ont un impact sur la vie de celui qui transite et qui, arrêté dans son parcours, se voit obligé de réorganiser son projet migratoire; en revanche, celui qui atteint la frontière et voyage vers les confins, s'oriente non seulement vers la découverte de nouveaux mondes et de nouvelles possibilités de vivre et de penser, mais aussi vers le retour qui conduit à regarder le monde familier habité jusqu'à hier avec des expectatives, des nuances et des degrés de conscience nouveaux. Se vérifie l'expérience de «l'espace absolument autre», d'après l'enseignement d'hétérotopie foucaldien, qui permet de comprendre les mécanismes à travers lesquels on se projette dans un ailleurs sans lieu précis pour se retrouver soi-même (Foucault, 2004). Par conséquent, de la frontière émerge l'apparition de la différence, c'est à dire de la distance. Le seuil prend le sens de l'évènement significatif qui dépasse la donnée concrète ou factuelle. Cela signifie un moment de transition et de passage d'une pratique à l'autre, d'une figure à l'autre, d'un «ici» à un «là», desquels ressortent une identité et une altérité. Dans cette perspective, les frontières transforment les confins qui divisent les personnes en identité et groupes opposés, de préférence en des lieux d'interaction entre individus provenant d'horizons différents, et en des lieux de négociations et d'hybridations; elles peuvent constituer des espaces de laboratoire, des lieux de contact et de vie, s'ils sont animés et habités par des gestes et des liens. Espaces, temps, mouvements, relations sont des dimensions propres au voyager et à l'être ensemble. Dans ces conditions, le voyage met profondément en jeu la corporéité, car tous les jours, le corps se fait le réceptacle de notre vécu, mais également mouvement qui, au travers des gestes, véhicule les expressions et les significations.

Les gestes sont interprétés comme instrument principal de relation de communication dans les situations d'interaction verbale difficiles. Les gestes ont une valeur autre que celle du langage. Ils jouent sur le terrain de l'évocation, suscitent des représentations et sont porteurs de messages implicites; ils constituent une sorte d'accompagnement aux moyens explicites de communication car la variété des mouvements est plus ample et permet d'observer de multiples aspects dans l'échange réciproque. Dans l'interaction, lorsque l'on s'adresse à l'autre, le corps

exprime un message complet. Certains gestes définissent le cadre de référence du discours, ce qui signifie que le geste dit le discours et, par conséquent, la phrase verbale ne semble pas être fermée en soi mais en ressort enrichie.

Un groupe d'étudiantes du cours de Pédagogie interculturelle de Master en Psychologie des interventions cliniques dans les contextes sociaux de l'Université Catholique du Sacré Cœur de Brescia (Italie) a fait l'expérience de la frontière, chargée de corporeité mais également d'isolement, au travers de l'activité de «Service Learning» réalisée au siège de la Caritas de Vintimille et dans le camp de réfugiés Roja de la Croix Rouge Italienne. Désorientation, distanciation et chocs culturels ont fait l'objet d'apprentissage et d'élaboration. Sans complètement renvoyer à la pratique didactique, il est intéressant ici de relever comment l'expérience de la frontière, limite fermée et infranchissable, territoire d'urgence et de relégation, a représenté l'expérimentation de «l'isolement» qui permet de penser soi-même grâce à la confrontation avec l'Autre, avec les cultures d'autres lieux et d'autres temps. L'épreuve du lieu de frontière a mis en jeu des processus d'adaptation et de repositionnement imposés par les interrogations sur sa propre identité.

Ainsi les réflexions élaborées par les étudiantes sous forme d'écritures collectives sont emblématiques justement en référence à la dimension de la corporéité, qui la première entre en contact avec les espaces et les temps d'autrefois et qui incite à s'interroger sur ses propres postures.

Ci-dessous quelques-unes de leurs réflexions qui attestent selon nous de façon indicative le gain du sens et des significations à partir des gestes de la rencontre (Cadei et al., 2018).

Entrer sur la pointe des pieds: Quand on arrive pour la première fois dans un lieu inconnu, quel qu'il soit, la tentation est de retrouver le plus rapidement possible l'équilibre perdu. On *regarde* autour de soi, on étudie les personnes, les choses, les objets, les bruits, les odeurs. Il y a un moment d'immobilité embarrassant, mais durant lequel il est utile de se déplacer lentement et sur la pointe des pieds, pour éviter de rompre un autre équilibre, celui des autres. Il n'est pas facile de rester immobiles, de s'accorder ce temps. L'embarras et le sentiment d'inutili-

té poussent à l'action. «Je veux faire quelque chose, je ne veux pas que ma présence soit une charge supplémentaire pour ceux qui sont ici». Autant de débuts, de lieux, d'histoires qui s'entremêlent. Un entrelacement qui réclame avant tout un grand respect et de la délicatesse: regarder autour de soi, comprendre où l'on est et surtout comprendre qui est devant soi. Le *regard* est discret, un peu craintif, mais surtout curieux et c'est la seule façon pour que l'entrelacement ne rompre pas un équilibre, une harmonie mais génère quelque chose de bon.

Initier, sur la pointe des pieds, une expérience qui laisse de la place entre l'autre et nous, en nous émergeant graduellement dans une réalité différente et toujours renouvelée. Le contexte est toujours la relation, dans ce cas avec des identités complexes qui veulent être traitées avec tact (Ibid., p. 125).

A travers les mains et les gestes de la rencontre: Les mains ne parlent pas, cependant il semble qu'elles aient appris à le faire, car elles communiquent, elles communiquent beaucoup... et souvent elles le font au travers de gestes simples, mais chargés d'émotions et de sensations qui pénètrent l'autre de façon invisible mais fortement perceptible. Depuis toujours, la gestuelle permet de révéler les émotions, les pensées et les sentiments. Un *geste*, un *signe*, un *sourire* peuvent être de simples moyens de manifester à l'autre proximité et compréhension, dans le but de créer un lien qui, simple et bref, peut faire que l'autre se sente accueilli et non jugé. La première rencontre se fait par l'échange de *regards* et par *la poignée de mains*. Des regards qui ont peur, des regards qui étudient, des regards qui remercient. Des mains qui racontent la fermeture et des mains ouvertes qui expriment la confiance (Ibid., p. 126).

Regards, visages, récits: on a l'habitude de prêter attention au *visage* des personnes la première fois qu'on les rencontre. Mais au cours de cette expérience, cela s'est passé tout à fait différemment. Je ressentais une forme d'embarras à me promener dans les rues de Vintimille et à regarder les visages des personnes que je rencontrais. Il y avait les visages des habitants de Vintimille, ceux des touristes et ceux des migrants. J'étais là pour eux, pour comprendre ce qu'il se passait dans ce lieu de frontière et justement pour cela, croiser un regard devenait le signe d'une curiosité qui me semblait presque irrespectueuse. Enfin, il y avait les regards curieux des autres, du moins c'est ce qu'il nous

semblait, qui étudiaient ce petit groupe bizarre de jeunes filles à peine arrivé de la gare et chargé de valises et d'une paire de guitares. Musiciennes? Voyage scolaire? Vacances anticipées? Ce sont d'autres personnes ici pour «eux»? C'est ce que j'imaginais que les gens pensaient à notre arrivée. La couleur de nos peaux racontait notre provenance, la fatigue du visage racontait le voyage, mais le sourire parlait d'espoir (*Ibid.*, p. 127).

Pour conclure et réouvrir les débats, on pourrait dire que définir soi-même est une pratique de vie et de savoir qui traverse les lieux, transite et se transforme dans le temps, détermine les confins et les frontières toujours en mouvement. En vertu de cette rencontre qui désoriente, qui incommode, ou qui permet l'échange et la confrontation, il est possible de se reconnaître réciproquement comme des êtres différents et de réélaborer une identité. La frontière qui établit là ou au-delà le seuil de l'appartenance et qui transforme les lieux et les temps en opportunité, uniquement dans la mesure où comme l'affirme Foucault (1984, pp. 13-14) «il y a des moments dans la vie où la question de savoir si l'on peut penser autrement et percevoir au-delà de ce que l'on voit, est indispensable pour continuer à regarder ou à réfléchir. C'est la curiosité; la seule forme de curiosité cependant qui peut être témoignée avoir avec une certaine obstination: pas celle, bien sûr, qui essaie d'assimiler ce qu'il convient de connaître, mais celle qui consent à perdre ses propres certitudes».

Il s'agit d'une condition éphémère et précaire, pourtant indispensable. Sans cette disposition vers le provisoire et le transitoire, il ne reste que le danger et la défense.

Seeking identity: nuances of the encounter

The experience of being able to freely choose to cross a border, strengthening one's capacity for the decentralization and decolonization of thought, opens up new possibilities for reflection and intercultural experience (Aman, 2018; Andreotti, 2011). First of all, we must put our mental paradigms of received knowledge in “crisis”, as all too often they create a safe haven full of linear and routine patterns. Rec-

ognizing and being critically aware of one's own existing intellectual and relational framework allows the researcher to deliberately create spaces and instances of reciprocity, aimed at self-discovery in complex contexts.

Becoming a foreigner to oneself, being perceived as a foreigner and truly being a foreigner in a given situation, without experiencing constraint and confinement, are dimensions that allow for the creation of a greater openness and willingness to learn in an unusual and nontraditional way. This exception is created by proximity, defined as a condition in which the subjects are liberated because they interact in an authentic manner, with all the weight of their cultural baggage, presuppositions, interpretations, and superficial and approximate representations.

In so doing, we leave the islands we all construct for ourselves and break down the ethnocentric walls we often erect to protect ourselves from that which is different (Greder, 2008). Promoting reciprocity is now more crucial than ever, based on firsthand knowledge and the building of trust, not so much as ideals to strive for but as part of the shared experience of being human. The concreteness of an educational action or situational learning directs an intercultural process that is not afraid of crumbling under the weight of diversity, but tends to take steps towards the transformation of its own identity through interaction.

Spaces of encounter, interdependence and exchange can give rise to opportunities for the hybridization of identities, creating forms of contrast and preventing stereotypical labeling of the Other and of realities that do not "belong to us".

Being in concrete contexts inhabited by people and characterized by specific traits means coming into contact with certain ways of building relationships, certain community spaces, concertations of cultural values and definitions of tradition as seen within family and community frameworks. The encounter takes place between specific identities: bearers of wisdom, knowledge, and skills that relate to those to whom they belong and are therefore multifarious. In order to initiate an effective intercultural dialogue, we must mutually recognize one another as the bearers and keepers of our own originality and as subjects who interpret their own cultural roots, becoming active witnesses.

In order not to be satisfied with a superficial, stereotypical vision of the world one must take a journey both inside and outside oneself, patiently setting out in search of the unprecedented, unexpected and unusual (Deluigi, 2017). The decentralization work requires a strong investment in this discovery of the unexpected, and makes a more pluralistic perspective possible. Boundaries open up, identities become porous and interactions allow us to experience the self, the other, and the "us". This results in the generation of new spaces and times that blend to create common interpretive paradigms, based on our desire to be astonished by the "Other", to have experiences alongside the other, and to establish bonds of meaning and delve deeper into them (Cima, 2017).

The intercultural experience is a migrant experience: in inviting the subject to leave and then re-enter his own identity, it creates a displacement that requires the subject to "get lost" in order to place himself in other dimensions. According to this perspective, each person must become aware of the categories they represent, and at the same time must be ready to be surprised by the relational spaces they become part of. The researcher's restlessness oscillates between immersing themselves in a situation and cultivating reflection, not as a consequence but as joint elements of the same process of lifelong learning. The ability to be amazed in context and the need to distance oneself from the concreteness of educational action must lead to a continuous process of questioning. Real enrichment also lies in accepting that many questions will remain open, and that not all phenomena can be explained or categorized. Otherwise, we run the risk of making the mistake of cataloguing an experience in a way that fragments it, trapping it within limited typologies and causing it to lose the nuances of meaning that the climate of interactions is characterized by, and that cannot be impoverished by a reductive definition.

Crossing the frontiers of difference means running the risk of overcoming delimited references and immersing oneself in cultural frameworks relativized by their subjects. We confront ourselves with these interpretations, trying to open channels of communication and understanding. Aware, nevertheless, that such paths are often treacherous mountain passes that must be crossed in heavy rain. Embarking on intercultural journeys destabilizes us in a creative manner, as

it involves travelling northwest knowing that our compass, or that of others, might be pointing to the southeast.

Generativity is not a line of demarcation at the border, but is in itself an essential condition for making the crossing. This border crossing cannot be done quickly. It requires many stays, accompanied visits and guided journeys to explore unknown territories. Otherwise, we will continue to briefly visit heterogeneous contexts, not even coming close to the borders, leaving individual and isolated identities adrift. Our personal space closes up and ceases to be a space to be shared, isolating itself from the closeness that requires a passion for humanity – even that part of humanity that remains outside the door, full of fragility and need, bearing potential and resources (Bauman, 2016). Enclosing oneself in rigid and static boundaries impoverishes us all. Dialogues are mono-cultural and self-referential, pockets of exclusion are generated by opposition and inequalities are determined on a cultural basis. All are locked out, even those who think they are “inside”: this gives rise to decadent and inhospitable living conditions.

We must work on transparencies and imperfections, on the cracks that allow us to broaden the horizons of our gaze, and to promote interactions in which we recognize one other as subjects to be discovered. Only in this way can we have a chance to cross the border and savor the taste of closeness.

This is what happened during my last stay in Kilifi (Kenya) as part of the *Ticass – Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Sciences* (H2020-MSCA-RISE-2016) project. The planned movement between Europe and Africa involved a heterogeneous group of researchers focused on the analysis of visual communication and intercultural dialogue (Fleming, Lukaszewicz Alcaraz, 2018). The beginning of my stay in that new place, rich in cultural stimuli and different codes of communication, awakened my desire to listen to what the environment communicates to us. Awareness of a context’s demands means not fixating on the interpretative models we already possess and on the content that we intend to convey, even in terms of research. It is not possible to explore new scenarios and learn from our experience if we insist on interpreting reality through our same immutable paradigms of received knowledge, and if our logic is exclusively linked to the monolithic idea of one culture of reference.

The experience of border-crossing that I intend to address took place in several primary schools in the city where, in July 2018, I carried out numerous workshops and creative labs with children and young people aged 7 to 13 years. The project, built in close coordination with the heads of three schools (public and private), the teachers' coordinators and the teachers themselves, took place during school hours, with total immersion in the activities and educational situations involving the participation of about 300 pupils. The use of images, geometric shapes, primary colors, parts of the body, sounds and animated stories facilitated the approach of non-neutral identities – tracing, in fact, a pathway capable of making the distance between differences less marked (Lionni, 1987; Tullet, 2014; 2017). It was essential for all, adults and children, to identify their own borders and decide whether to question them in order to build interactions based on the use of multiple languages, conveyed by the proposal of a welcoming relationship, the real driving force behind creative expression.

Space needed to be “made” for those experiences by encouraging active participation and self-expression. Educational planning grew out of dialogue and their willingness to cooperate to create opportunities for learning, experimentation, discovery and enhancement of their skills in the group (Freire, 2002; 2004; 2008). Only when the distances were reduced thanks to a certain continuity and to working times attentive to the needs of all, did the intercultural process materialize in the relational dimension. The use of primary colors as a pattern from which to create secondary colors through blending facilitated the inclusion of more emotional nuances, relational and educational activities and educational research. Gazes were intertwined, drawing horizons much wider than expected; hands touched, turning red, yellow and blue and giving rise to real hybridizations; words blended across languages and communication styles, promoting proactive dynamics; gestures allowed physical contact that expanded the fields of experience.

From the dialogue with the teachers, it was evident how the pedagogical and formative energy was released in a spiral of involvement and participation, in which the process of mutual recognition also began (Mayo, 2013). Identities were navigated in an educational context

which was unusual for all – allowing me, physically a foreign and external subject, to enter in small steps, both in a dynamic learning environment, and in a physical place that, day after day, became ever more familiar and welcoming. The insistent, curious or frightened reactions to my being foreign faded and my differences began to be relegated to the outward aspect only. The perception of my difference has shifted from my being so ineluctably white, to my desire to look for synergies to learn together.

A different body that becomes a frontier and that, inevitably, brings to mind experiences of the colonial past can create misunderstandings or expectations, conflicting or favoring logic – or obscure the possibility on either side of authentically entering into a relationship. Going beyond skin color and giving each other the opportunity to reveal our identities, becoming part of the world of the other was not taken for granted. We must consider that it is very simple for a cohesive community to create marginality and exclusion without granting access to the intruder. Being in contact with children and youth in educational places and their continuous dialogue with youth and adults belonging to the local community has allowed, facilitated and mediated my entry into the spaces of everyday life, making my presence less exotic and more recognizable.

Conclusions

The impact of the deconstruction of abstract representations (of oneself and of others) has been reciprocal, starting new trajectories of research and educational work, in the awareness of living in precarious balances. It is not easy to stand in that balance between differences that are beginning to get to know each other, and that intend to leave the static nature of overly-prescriptive imagery to give voice to the encounter of differences, to intercultural dialogues, to divergent narratives and to migratory landscapes (Chambers, 2018). Yet we believe that it is one of the most effective ways for identities to take off, sailing together on unexplored routes. For these processes to occur, one must remain in places that become significant in view of the relationships established and the experiences shared among them. A superficial look

is not enough, especially if it is a faraway glance from above. To trigger intercultural dynamics, we must live in and be inhabited by contexts, circumnavigating our temptation to narrow the boundaries, orienting ourselves with the orbit of the polar star of humanity, knowing that it too is in perpetual motion and changes position, depending on the celestial hemisphere in which it sails.

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Shi Yang, Yang Shi o Shi Yang Shi? Identità e cultura nell'opera di un autore sino-italiano

Alessandro Tosco

Abstract: Il presente contributo si propone di analizzare l'opera di Shi Yang, giovane scrittore e attore di origine cinese, il quale entrò illegalmente in Italia nel 1990 e solo nel 2006 ottenne la cittadinanza italiana. Proprio nell'anno di nascita dell'autore, il 1979, la Cina mise in atto una politica di apertura e riforme, promossa da Deng Xiaoping, che permise a molti cinesi di lasciare la madrepatria ed emigrare all'estero. Accanto ai migranti che già da tempo si erano stabiliti fuori dal paese, a partire dagli ultimi anni del secolo scorso nuovi espatriati si spostarono all'estero, Italia compresa, in cerca di fortuna e una vita migliore. Il fenomeno sempre più intenso della migrazione cinese, e il conseguente sviluppo di comunità siniche all'estero, ha modificato il concetto di "identità cinese" e, in anni recenti, ha dato vita ad un nuovo campo di ricerca denominato *Sinophone studies*. All'interno di questo ampio campo di studi, si colloca l'interesse per la letteratura prodotta da autori di origine cinese, che scrivono nella loro lingua madre oppure nell'idioma del paese di accoglienza. Tale fenomeno, inteso come un corollario della letteratura cinese, è oggi conosciuto con la definizione di "letteratura della diaspora" (*liusan wenxue*). Attraverso i *Sinophone studies* quale quadro teorico di riferimento, il presente contributo mira ad analizzare due differenti produzioni artistiche di Shi Yang: la prima è la pièce teatrale *ArleChino: traduttore e traditore di due padroni* (2017), in cui egli è unico attore e co-autore assieme alla regista Cristina Pezzoli. La seconda opera è il racconto autobiografico *Cuore di seta. La mia storia italiana made in China* (2017). In entrambe queste produzioni l'autore racconta la propria esperienza di vita, in bilico fra due lingue, due culture e due identità (di etnia e di genere), tentando di trovare una sintesi o quantomeno un compromesso fra la cultura del paese natio e quella del paese in cui è cresciuto e si è formato.

Abstract: This paper aims to analyse the work of Shi Yang, young writer and performer of Chinese origin, who illegally moved to Italy in 1990 and obtained the Italian citizenship in 2006. In the author's birth year (1979), China started the period of openings and reforms, promoted

by Deng Xiaoping, which allowed many Chinese people to leave the motherland and migrate abroad. Besides the migrants who had already settled abroad since the late nineteenth century, new expatriates began to move to foreign countries for good, including Italy, in search of fortune and a better life. The increasingly intense phenomenon of Chinese migration and the development of sinitic communities abroad has challenged the concept of “Chinese identity”, especially in the People’s Republic of China and, at the same time, gave rise in recent years to a new field of research called “Sinophone studies”. Within this vast field of study, there is an interest in literature produced by authors of Chinese origin, who write in their own mother tongue, or in the language of their country of residence. This corollary of the broader phenomenon of Chinese literature is known today as “Diaspora literature” (*liusan wenxue*). Using Sinophone studies as a reference theoretical framework, this paper aims to analyse two different works of Shi Yang: the first is the theatrical piece *ArleChino: traduttore e traditore di due padroni* [ArleChino: Translator and Traitor of Two Masters, 2017], where he is the main character as well as the screen writer together with the director Cristina Pezzoli. The second text is the autobiographical story *Cuore di seta. La mia storia italiana made in China*. [Silk Heart. My Italian Story Made in China, 2017]. In both these works the author narrates his experience swinging between two languages, two cultures and two identities (ethnicity and gender), compelled to find a synthesis or a compromise through the culture of his native place and the one of the society he grew up in.

Keywords: Sinophone Studies, Diaspora, Literature, Shi Yang

小时候，乡愁是一枚小小的邮票，我在这头，母亲在那头。
 长大后，乡愁是一张窄窄的船票，我在这头，新娘在那头。
 后来啊，乡愁是一方矮矮的坟墓，我在外头，母亲在里头。
 而现在，乡愁是一湾浅浅的海峡，我在这头，大陆在那头。

*Nell’infanzia, la nostalgia era un francobollo piccolo piccolo,
 Io ero qui, mia madre era là.*

*Cresciuto, la nostalgia era un biglietto del traghetto stretto stretto,
 Io ero qui, la mia sposa era là.*

*In futuro, la nostalgia sarà una tomba bassa bassa,
 Io sarò fuori, mia madre sarà dentro.*

*Tuttavia, adesso, la nostalgia è uno stretto di mare sottile sottile,
 Io sono qui, il mio paese natio è là.*

Con questi versi il poeta Yu Guangzhong 余光中 (1928-2017) narrava la fuga a Taiwan, lontano dalla madrepatria, la Cina continentale. La nostalgia per il paese natio (*xiang chou* 乡愁), titolo del componimento, si fa ancora più struggente quando a separare da esso vi è e un nuovo continente e, addirittura, un oceano sconfinato. Il presente contributo si pone l’obiettivo di analizzare l’opera teatrale e letteraria di Shi Yang 石阳, giovane attore e scrittore di origine cinese, emigrato in Italia come clandestino nel 1991, e dal 2006 ufficiale cittadino della Repubblica Italiana.

Prima di procedere nell’analisi degli scritti dell’autore, pare opportuno indagare su come essi si inseriscano all’interno della più vasta produzione letteraria dei cinesi d’oltremare e, prima ancora, proporre una riflessione sulla percezione che essi stessi hanno della cosiddetta “diaspora cinese”.

La diaspora cinese

Il periodo di aperture e riforme, inaugurato da Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904-1997) alla fine degli anni Settanta, riguardò anche il fenomeno della migrazione e degli spostamenti interni. Numerosi furono gli investimenti in tale direzione, permettendo ai cinesi non solo di espatriare, ma anche di guardare alla questione in una prospettiva differente. Fino al periodo maoista, infatti, la migrazione venne considerata come una forma di ostracismo, una questione poco patriottica e, in un certo senso, pericolosa, in quanto i migranti venivano in contatto con le culture, le aspirazioni e i principi occidentali, i quali potevano potenzialmente minare la credibilità nei confronti del Partito. Con le riforme di Deng, invece, divenne più semplice lasciare il paese; dal 1978 venne concesso il permesso di lasciare la Cina per ricongiungersi con i propri familiari all’estero; nel 1985, invece, fu consentito l’espatrio, previo ottenimento del passaporto e una lettera d’invito da parte di un paese ospitante (Ceccagno, 2009).

La storia dell’immigrazione cinese in Italia è profondamente connessa con quella in Europa: l’arrivo di cittadini sinofoni nel Vecchio Continente si può suddividere in due macro-periodi, dove la Seconda guerra

mondiale funge da spartiacque¹. La più importante migrazione dalla Repubblica popolare cinese (RPC) all'Europa è costituita da flussi provenienti dalla regione meridionale del Zhejiang 浙江 e, nello specifico, dai distretti adiacenti alla città portuale di Wenzhou 温州; le prime comunità cinesi stabilitesi sul continente europeo nel primo quarto del secolo scorso provenivano infatti tutte da quest'area (Cologna in Ceccagno, 1997).

Per quanto riguarda la situazione italiana, la formazione delle prime comunità cinesi si fa risalire agli anni Trenta del secolo scorso, dove la migrazione nel Belpaese è nata prevalentemente come movimento di seconda immigrazione da altri paesi europei, collocandosi all'interno di un'articolata rete di rapporti tra comunità situate in diverse nazioni, di più antico insediamento, che facilitarono la nascita e lo sviluppo di ulteriori comunità cinesi sparse in altri paesi. I primi arrivi in Italia furono irrigori: fino alla fine della Seconda guerra mondiale, la presenza di cittadini cinesi fu estremamente scarsa e localizzata prevalentemente nell'Italia Settentrionale. Al termine del conflitto, la formazione delle comunità cinesi riprese vigore grazie ad un nuovo flusso migratorio alimentato in prevalenza dai ricongiungimenti familiari. In questo periodo, infatti, prese forma il cosiddetto modello migratorio "a catena" su cui si fonda la diaspora cinese. La situazione cambiò a partire dagli anni Cinquanta, quando la prima fleibile ondata migratoria, ormai stabilizzata, cominciò ad attrarre a sé la seconda generazione; il secondo flusso di arrivi era costituito da parenti degli immigrati già stabiliti (Cima, Dancelli, Parisi & Rinaldi, 2008).

¹ La prima ondata, arrivata in Europa prima del conflitto, giunse come forza lavoro temporanea a contratto, ripetendo il modello dei primi immigrati cinesi – i cosiddetti *coolies* (in cinese *kuli* 苦力) – nel Sud-est asiatico e nel Nord America di mezzo secolo prima. La seconda ondata iniziò invece nel periodo post-bellico: tale periodo fu caratterizzato da un primo flusso migratorio proveniente dalla Cina continentale, estremamente contenuto a causa della politica maoista di chiusura, e da gruppi più conspicui provenienti da Hong Kong e dall'area dell'Asia sud-orientale; il secondo flusso vide un intensificarsi anche grazie alle riforme promosse da Deng. Dunque, dopo la fine del conflitto mondiale, questi espatriati aprirono la strada per la migrazione a catena, attraverso la quale i nuovi arrivati si ricongiungevano ai loro cari già stabiliti in Europa; questo tipo di migrazione riproduceva il modello che aveva caratterizzato lo spostamento verso il Sud-est asiatico e l'America del Nord (Benton & Pieke, 1998; Warzecha, 2006).

Profilo socio-culturale dei cinesi d'oltremare

È importante riflettere sugli elementi socioculturali celati nelle memorie personali e collettive degli emigrati della diaspora cinese i quali, stabilendosi in nuovi paesi, hanno cercato di riprodurre nella società accogliente la loro identità sociale. Tra gli elementi principali vi sono certamente la famiglia, le associazioni, i legami e le relazioni sociali (*guanxi* 关系), gli aspetti culturali quali le pratiche religiose², le festività e gli usi e costumi.

I cinesi residenti all'estero, chiamati in madrepatria *huaqiao* 华侨³, cercano di mantenere vive non solo le tradizioni culturali, ma anche la lingua e il dialetto, utilizzandoli per comunicare con i propri cari nel quotidiano e organizzando corsi di lingua cinese per le nuove generazioni. Lo scopo è far sì che queste ultime assorbano i principi della cultura d'origine, nella speranza di alimentare in loro il desiderio di identificarsi come cinesi (Khun Eng, Davidson, 2008). Inoltre, da parte della comunità sinofona, vi è anche l'aspirazione a mantenere i rapporti con il paese natio. Di rimando, da parte della madrepatria, vi è il desiderio di rimanere in contatto con l'emigrato, presentandosi come agente attivo nella sua vita socioeconomica. Non a caso, il governo cinese considera i migranti, soprattutto dal periodo delle riforme di Deng, una risorsa per il paese, in quanto portatori di capitali, non solo attraverso i sostegni economici che essi inviano ai familiari rimasti in Cina, ma anche attraverso i cospicui finanziamenti ricevuti dai cinesi d'oltremare arricchitisi all'estero: è la cosiddetta “ideologia del migrante di successo” (Ceccagno, 2009).

Negli ultimi trent'anni, il profilo socio-culturale dei migranti cinesi si è modificato, anche e soprattutto per il nuovo assetto economico mondiale che si sta delineando, complice anche il peso politico che la

² Si pensi alla celebre Festa di Primavera (*Chunjie* 春节), conosciuta in Occidente come “Capodanno cinese”, ormai festeggiata in ogni parte del mondo, ma anche alle regate delle Barche Drago, in occasione della Festa del Doppio Cinque (*Duanwujie* 端午节).

³ Il riferimento al rapporto con la terra d'origine trova riscontro anche nell'etimo della parola; il termine *huaqiao* è infatti composto da *hua* 华 “Cina” e *qiao* 侨 “ponte”, ad indicare il collegamento con il paese natio.

Cina sta assumendo a livello internazionale. Si possono dunque individuare due modelli di migrazione cinese: uno tradizionale, dove sono stati prevalentemente i maschi a dare avvio alla catena di migrazione, mentre le mogli lasciano il paese in seguito; uno moderno, in cui le donne emigrano per prime e perfino, a volte, da sole. Inoltre, non sono solo più persone con scarsa educazione e modeste competenze lavorative a espatriare; anzi, si assiste all'incremento della presenza di migranti con un maggiore livello di istruzione, buoni mezzi economici e, a volte, con alte competenze professionali. Tuttavia, a differenza di altri paesi europei, in Italia, dove è mancata una politica atta a favorire i profili di migranti qualificati e specializzati, arrivano soprattutto cittadini cinesi con cultura e competenze mediocri e modesti capitali (Ceccagno, 2009).

Con l'intensificarsi della presenza di cittadini di origine cinese, sparsi in tutti i continenti, iniziarono a sorgere le cosiddette Chinatown⁴, ovvero quartieri all'interno delle grandi città densamente abitati da popolazione sinica; esse sono quasi una città nella città, una sorta di enclave su base nazionale che continua a mantenere uno stretto legame con le proprie tradizioni e i propri usi e costumi. Nel corso della storia, le Chinatown hanno assunto un'accezione negativa: nell'immaginario collettivo, sono luoghi di perdizione in cui proliferano gioco d'azzardo, prostituzione e traffici illeciti gestiti da organizzazioni malavitose. L'origine delle Chinatown è connessa all'atteggiamento di discriminazione e sfruttamento da parte dei paesi ospitanti nei confronti degli immigrati cinesi; spesso questi venivano schiavizzati sul lavoro e percepivano salari minimi, lavorando in condizioni di estrema criticità⁵. Per far fronte alle dure condizioni imposte dalla società ospitante, questi lasciarono le pic-

⁴ Il termine cinese per identificare le Chinatown è Tangrenjie 唐人街, letteralmente la strada (*jie 街*) dei Tang (*Tangren 唐人*), dove Tang identifica il periodo storico che va dal 618 al 907, considerato una delle massime epoche di fioritura e splendore della cultura cinese. Le Chinatown, una vera e propria porzione di Cina all'interno di un'altra nazione, sono di norma facilmente riconoscibili dagli archi in stile tradizionale (*paifang 牌坊*) posti al loro ingresso.

⁵ Ciò succedeva, ad esempio, nelle miniere californiane o durante la costruzione della ferrovia trans-americana alla fine del XIX secolo.

cole città e le zone rurali per formare le Chinatown in grandi aree urbane, solitamente nelle periferie disagiate interne alla città. Furono dunque quasi costretti a rifugiarsi in un proprio spazio sociale, dove abitano, lavorano e cercano di proteggersi dalle discriminazioni esterne. Per i cinesi, le Chinatown divennero una sorta di “santuario”, un luogo di protezione e di libera espressione della propria identità culturale, nonché uno stimolo alla formazione di coesione sociale e solidarietà etnica. In ogni parte del mondo, le Chinatown sono il risultato di una combinazione di fattori di spinta esterni da parte della società accogliente (pregiudizi e discriminazione) e fattori di spinta interni (solidarietà etnica e interessi reciproci) dovuti in parte anche alle politiche di immigrazione dei paesi ospitanti (Wei, 2005).

Letteratura sinofona e letteratura della diaspora

Il fenomeno, sempre più intenso, delle narrative prodotte dalle comunità siniche all'estero ha dato luogo negli ultimi anni, prevalentemente nel mondo occidentale, ad un nuovo campo di ricerca denominato *Sinophone studies* (Shih, Chien & Bernards, 2013). All'interno di questo vasto campo di studi, rientra l'interesse per la letteratura prodotta da autori di origine cinese, che scrivono nella loro lingua madre (*haiwai huawen wenzxue* 海外华文文学), oppure che decidono di scrivere nell'idioma del paese di residenza (*haiwai huaren wenzxue* 海外华人文学)⁶ (Bernards, 2016); nella Cina continentale vi è una distinzione netta fra queste due categorie, dove la seconda pare suscitare scarso interesse da parte degli studiosi. La differenza fra *huawen* 华文 (scritti in lingua cinese) e *huaren* 华人 ([scritti] ad opera di cinesi) non è mera disquisizione terminologica, bensì implica ridefinire il concetto di “sinità” (*zhonghuaxing* 中华性) nel contesto globale e la percezione che si ha della Cina nel mondo

⁶ A quest'ultima categoria appartiene il celebre scrittore e drammaturgo Gao Xinjian 高行健 (1940), di espressione francese, insignito del premio Nobel per la Letteratura nel 2000.

convenzionalmente definito “occidentale”, come ha ben argomentato Zhang Yinde (2003).

La letteratura dei cinesi d’oltremare, a prescindere dalla lingua in cui si esprima, pare trovare una propria identità e valenza ontologica, in rapporto alla letteratura cinese *tout court*, nella felice definizione di “letteratura della diaspora” (*liusān wénxué 流散文学*) (Kong Shuyu, 2003; 2016), che ha i suoi prodromi addirittura in alcune opere di Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896-1945) e Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966)⁷ (Kong Shuyu, 2016) e approda a produzioni contemporanee come la *graphic novel* di Gene Luen Yang 杨谨伦 (1973), fumettista di origine cinese nato in California⁸.

Oggi, dopo il rutilante sviluppo di una letteratura sino-malese o sino-americana, per elencare solo i fenomeni più rappresentativi e produttivi, si assiste alla nascita di una letteratura sino-italiana che, sebbene ancora poco conosciuta, si dimostra vivace e feconda per generi proposti e tematiche affrontate, come dimostra Pedone (2014).

“Come una banana: giallo fuori, bianco dentro”

All’interno del più vasto corollario della letteratura migrante di espressione italiana e, nello specifico, di quella sino-italiana, composto da autori di prima e seconda generazione, si ascrive la produzione di Shi Yang, in bilico fra la cultura in cui è nato e quella in cui è cresciuto e si è formato.

Shi Yang, che ha assunto il nome d’arte di Shi Yang Shi, ripetendo il cognome (Shi) anche dopo il nome (Yang)⁹, al fine di mantenere intatta la propria identità anche al contrario, in una sorta di palindromo, è arrivato in Italia all’inizio degli anni Novanta, in maniera non troppo

⁷ Si pensi al racconto *Naufragio* (*Chenlun 沉沦*) del 1921 di Yu Dafu, che narra dei cinesi esuli in Giappone, e al romanzo *I due Ma* (*Er Ma 二马*) del 1929 di Lao She, che prende avvio dalle esperienze di vita dell’autore a Londra.

⁸ L’opera si intitola *American Born Chinese* ed è stata pubblicata negli Stati Uniti nel 2006; nel 2008 è stata tradotta in lingua italiana.

⁹ Secondo l’onomastica cinese, il cognome precede sempre il nome.

dissimile rispetto al sistema di emigrazione a catena a cui si accennava in precedenza.

Figlio di un ingegnere e di una dottoressa di medicina tradizionale cinese, è cresciuto in Cina fino all'età di undici anni, quando emigrò nel Belpaese con la madre. La famiglia, di estrazione sociale agiata proveniente dalla città di Jinan 济南, capoluogo della provincia nord-occidentale dello Shandong 山东, cercò di cavalcare l'onda delle riforme economiche promosse da Deng, decidendo di trasferirsi all'estero, per cercare di innalzare le proprie condizioni di vita e offrire un futuro migliore al figlio, nato proprio nell'anno (1979) in cui nella RPC entrò in vigore la politica di pianificazione delle nascite. Senza conoscere una parola di italiano, né lui, né la madre, entrarono in Italia come clandestini con un falso passaporto di nazionalità giapponese. La loro destinazione finale era Milano dove, attraverso la fitta rete di relazioni interpersonali (*guanxi*) su cui si basano i rapporti cinesi, avevano contatti con un'altra famiglia di connazionali già emigrata in precedenza.

Contestualmente all'esperienza di umili lavori, quali il lavapiatti, il venditore ambulante e il massaggiatore in spiaggia – “come cadere dal cielo in un buco” è la triste sintesi con cui sua madre raccontava l'esperienza di vita in Italia – frequenta la scuola italiana, dove prende consapevolezza delle differenze fra la cultura di origine e quella dove ora si trova immerso. Ottenuto il diploma di ragioneria, si iscrive, con grandi difficoltà economiche, alla facoltà di economia della Bocconi, dove, per circostanze fortuite, ha modo di scoprire la sua vera vocazione: il teatro. Diventa così attore, sceneggiatore e inviato televisivo per la trasmissione “Le iene”, dove si occupa prevalentemente di inchieste riguardanti l'immigrazione e l'intercultura.

La produzione artistica di Shi Yang si focalizza sul faticoso cammino che egli ha dovuto percorrere per ridefinire la sua nuova identità nel paese che l'ha accolto¹⁰. La sua opera prende avvio da una riflessione all'apparenza molto semplice, ma che in realtà apre uno spiraglio su una voragine interiore. L'autore si domanda: “Sono cinese perché sono

¹⁰ È doveroso precisare che, a parte qualche sporadico caso di bullismo, Shi Yang afferma di non essere mai stato vittima di atti di razzismo in Italia.

nato in Cina, oppure sono italiano perché sono cresciuto in Italia?”. Come nota lo stesso Shi Yang, la riflessione accomuna molti immigrati, e non solo di origine cinese.

L'autore sintetizza la propria doppia natura nella metafora della banana: gialla fuori, bianca dentro. L'immagine, nei ricordi d'infanzia di Shi Yang, assume un'accezione negativa, dal momento che con questo termine lo schernivano gli ex compagni cinesi di scuola, dopo che aveva abbandonato il paese in cui era nato. Oggi, a quarant'anni e con una forte consapevolezza, utilizza invece in toni ironici tale metafora per affermare la propria identità, come paiono dimostrare diverse interviste (Prudenzano, 2017; Viale, 2017).

Intorno al 2010 inizia un sodalizio artistico con la regista Cristina Pezzoli (1963), con cui nel 2014 debutta a Prato con uno spettacolo di cui è co-autore. La produzione prende avvio dall'esperienza teatrale presso lo spazio Compost di Prato, diretto dalla Pezzoli, che, dopo vari anni di attività, ha dovuto chiudere per il mancato rinnovo di fondi da parte della regione Toscana e delle amministrazioni locali. La scelta della città di Prato, per un progetto teatrale di quel tipo, non era a caso, bensì ben oculata, in quanto rappresentava – secondo quanto afferma la Pezzoli stessa – un modello esemplificativo di sperimentazione teatrale all'interno di un contesto urbano a forte presenza di immigrati, cinesi e non (Zheng, n.d.).

La *pièce*, in lingua italiana e in lingua cinese, ha per titolo un gioco di parole che sfrutta la natura omofona del cinese: *Tong Men-g* 铜门/同梦. La trascrizione fonetica, a seconda dei morfemi con cui è pronunciata, può essere tradotta sia come “porta di bronzo” (*tongmen* 铜门) sia come “stesso sogno” (*tongmeng* 同梦). Altro titolo con cui l'opera è stata portata in scena è *ArleChino: traduttore e traditore di due padroni* (*Yi pu er fan, yi pu er pan* 一仆二翻，一仆二叛); tale titolo, facendo riferimento alle vicende autobiografiche di interprete e mediatore culturale dell'autore, da un lato evoca la commedia di gol-doniana memoria, modulando, nella resa della parola “arlecchino”, la fonetica di “chino”, nel senso di “cinese”, dall'altro lato invece riprende il celebre adagio del “traduttore traditore”. I due padroni a cui questa maschera dalla natura ibrida è asservita sono ovviamente la Cina e l'Italia. Seppur il personaggio portato in scena da Shi Yang

è molto distante dalla celebre maschera bergamasca, tuttavia ne conserva l'indole e la scaltrezza, ovvero “la capacità di sopravvivere e di avere la meglio sulle angherie dei padroni e sui momenti più cruciali della sua vita, la forza di volontà e la furbizia di cavarsela sempre nelle situazioni più difficili che si trova a dover affrontare” (Tomeo, 2017).

Il riferimento ad arlecchino si ritrova anche nel costume che l'attore indossa sul palco, ovvero una tuta aderente con immagini di simboli e stilemi cinesi quali il drago, la bandiera nazionale, il busto di Mao, e italiani quali la Divina Commedia, Venezia, la Vespa: l'abito di scena appare variopinto come quello del celebre personaggio della Commedia dell'Arte. La scenografia è scarna ed essenziale; sul fondale si susseguono filmati d'epoca e foto personali del protagonista, scorci di vita privata suoi e della propria famiglia, che incorniciano le parole dell'attore.

La *pièce* è un lungo monologo diviso in tre atti, dove si rincorrono scene divertenti e scene commoventi, suscitando fra il pubblico ilarità nei racconti più grotteschi e sgomento in quelli più drammatici.

Nel primo atto il protagonista narra le vicende dei suoi antenati: le piccole storie dei familiari che si dipanano sullo sfondo della grande storia del Novecento cinese: la fondazione della Repubblica nazionalista nel 1912, le lotte fra nazionalisti e comunisti, l'invasione giapponese, la nascita della RPC nel 1949, la Rivoluzione culturale. Dischiude i ricordi personali e indugia nella narrazione delle vicende di alcuni parenti, come lo zio martire morto in nome della causa socialista. Tocante il racconto delle umiliazioni subite dal nonno materno durante la Rivoluzione culturale quando, a causa della sua professione e della sua estrazione considerata “borghese”, fu costretto dalla guardie rosse prima a pulire i bagni dell'ospedale senza guanti e a mangiare senza potersi lavare le mani, poi, incaprettato, fu trascinato per i capelli giù dalle scale. L'episodio è ripreso anche nel racconto autobiografico (Shi Yang Shi, 2017). Qui l'attore dà prova della sua abilità interpretativa, rappresentando diversi personaggi attraverso la modulazione della voce e facendo appello alla mimica facciale e gestuale; minimi gli oggetti di scena: un copricapo, uno scialle.

Nel secondo atto Shi Yang cerca di tracciare e definire la propria identità. Da un lato i ricordi felici della sua infanzia cinese: la fierezza

di essere il nipote preferito della nonna paterna, in quanto erede maschio; l'orgoglio di essere il più alto della scuola e, con il fazzoletto rosso ben annodato intorno al collo, avere l'onore di portare la bandiera nazionale durante le parate. Dall'altro lato il racconto sofferto dei primi anni in Italia: la vergogna di dormire in un letto improvvisato nella cucina di una famiglia di sconosciuti, fra il ronzio degli elettrodomestici; l'umiliazione prima di essere bocciato a scuola – per la scarsa conoscenza della lingua italiana, meritandosi delle metaforiche orecchie da somaro – e in seguito di ritrovarsi a fare il lavapiatti in Calabria o l'imbonitore sulle spiagge della Romagna per mettere assieme qualche soldo per la famiglia e per sé.

Il terzo atto si apre con il riferimento ad una data ben precisa: il primo dicembre del 2013. Quel giorno a Prato morirono carbonizzati sette operai cinesi in un capannone in cui lavoravano come clandestini.

Il fatto, a due anni di distanza da un altro incidente in cui erano già decedute in un incendio tre donne cinesi che lavoravano illegalmente come operaie, scosse molto l'opinione pubblica, facendo emergere il grave problema del lavoro sommerso nel più grande distretto di produzione tessile d'Italia, forse d'Europa. Auspicando maggiore collaborazione fra le autorità italiane e le istituzioni cinesi, con queste parole Enrico Rossi, presidente della regione Toscana, commentò quanto accaduto: “Questa tragedia l'abbiamo sulla coscienza tutti. Occorre andare più a fondo nella denuncia della più grande concentrazione di lavoro nero in Italia. Siamo sotto la soglia dei diritti umani” (Reali, Nencioni & Fastelli, 2013).

Il ricordo di quei tragici eventi viene reso, nelle parole di Shi Yang, attraverso un fittizio dialogo tra le autorità italiane e i padroni cinesi dell'attività e dei capannoni, dove egli si ritrova a fare da interprete e mediatore¹¹ fra queste due entità che si rimpallano le responsabilità e si incolpano a vicenda: gli italiani accusano i cinesi di produrre mer-

¹¹ Rispetto alla propria esperienza di mediatore culturale, Shi Yang parla di se stesso come di un costruttore di ponti; con queste parole esemplifica il suo vissuto: “Mi sento un ponticello fra tanti, e credo che i distruttori dei ponti siano per primi quelli che sponsorizzano a prescindere l’idea che le seconde generazioni siano dei ponti culturali” Cfr. l’intervista di Prudenzano, 2017.

ce contraffatta e di far lavorare i propri connazionali in condizioni di sfruttamento e clandestinità, mentre i cinesi accusano gli italiani sia di pretendere troppe tasse dai lavoratori dipendenti sia questi ultimi di non volere lavorare oltre le otto ore giornaliere, il tutto in un contesto di fabbriche piene di amianto e mai adeguate a norma di legge. L'autore, schiacciato da queste due forze contrarie, intravede in questa diatriba l'esemplificazione del dissidio interno fra le due culture che abitano dentro di sé.

Con queste parole la critica commenta questo segmento di spettacolo, che costituisce di certo l'apice della *pièce*, dove non mancano elogi alle abilità recitative e alla prossemica teatrale dell'attore:

Un momento questo di alta prova teatrale, dove Yang interpreta contemporaneamente i due litiganti (l'italiano e il cinese) facendo da interprete per entrambi nelle due lingue. E non si limita a farlo con le sole parole, ma impersonando i tre personaggi usando, con il corpo e con il viso, oltre che con le tonalità diverse delle voci, tre mimiche adeguate alla discussione accesa che avviene tra le due parti. (Tomeo, 2017).

Il racconto autobiografico viene ripreso anche nell'opera *Cuore di seta. La mia storia italiana made in China*, che la casa editrice Mondadori gli ha commissionato nel 2017. I fatti narrati riprendono quelli presenti nei primi due atti della *pièce*; secondo le intenzioni dell'autore, l'obbiettivo infatti era raccontare “teneramente” la sua storia, in una sorta di ideale prosieguo del progetto Compost di Prato.

L'ultima parte del racconto penetra nella sfera più intima dell'autore, dove narra della presa di consapevolezza della propria omosessualità, delle prime esperienze sessuali e degli scontri e delle liti che si innescarono con i genitori dopo che si fu dichiarato. Nel rapporto con questi ultimi, Shi Yang palesa la sua appartenenza alla cultura cinese; in riferimento al precetto confuciano dell'obbedienza filiale (*xiao 孝*)¹², egli vive la propria sessualità come una grande colpa e

¹² Secondo Confucio, la virtù dello *xiao*, “comportarsi in modo filiale, devozione verso i genitori”, indica uno stato emotivo, un sentimento di amore naturale – presente nel cuore di ognuno fin dalla nascita – verso i propri genitori e di autentico rispetto nei loro confronti. Tale virtù implica *jing 敬*, rispetto, e *ai 愛*, amore. Tali sentimenti,

un totale tradimento nei confronti dei genitori, avendo disatteso le aspettative che essi avevano riposto nel loro “piccolo drago”, il loro unico figlio, per cui avevano compiuto molti sacrifici e sopportato molte avversità. Li avrebbe inoltre lasciati senza nipoti, rinnegando ancora una volta i dettami della morale tradizionale. Non a caso, il padre lo ammonì affermando che l’omosessualità era “antiumanità” – appellandosi al concetto di *ren* 仁, senso d’umanità, la massima virtù confuciana – colpa del capitalismo occidentale (Shi Yang Shi, 2017, p. 153).

Considerando il proprio vissuto, in ogni suo aspetto, Shi Yang – come egli stesso ha affermato – sente dunque di appartenere ad una “doppia minoranza”, una etnica e una sessuale.

Oggi Shi Yang vive con il suo compagno in una famiglia arcobaleno, ritrova se stesso nella lettura dei romanzi degli autori cinesi Mo Yan 莫言 (1955), suo corregionale, e Yu Hua 余华 (1960)¹³, come nei versi delle poetesse italiane Alda Merini (1931-2009) e Vittoria Palazzo (1929). Afferma di essere cinese, ma anche di essere italiano. Il legame con la terra dei suoi avi lo ritrova nella spiritualità buddhista, di cui si dichiara fervente credente; in questo modo si riappropria del credo e dei valori della cultura di origine.

La consapevolezza di avere una natura ibrida e di appartenere ad una doppia minoranza si esemplifica nell’immagine del seme biforcuto che l’autore ha sempre sentito crescere dentro di sé, nel suo cuore di seta dove, a ogni difficoltà e amarezza che la vita gli poneva davanti, si creava un nuovo squarcio. Come un Dao 道 squilibrato sconquassato

che si manifestano attraverso un atteggiamento di devota deferenza, non possono essere sviluppati con l’imposizione, l’intimidazione o il ricorso a sanzioni e punizioni, ma attraverso l’educazione e l’emulazione di modelli che nella famiglia e nella società eccellono per la loro condotta irreprendibile. Cfr. Scarpari, 2015.

¹³ Shi Yang dichiara di leggere i romanzi di Mo Yan in traduzione italiana e quelli di Yu Hua in originale cinese; questo *in primis* per la complessità della scrittura del primo autore rispetto al secondo, ma anche perché la lingua madre – secondo le parole dell’autore – “si attacca direttamente al mio inconscio”, ovvero ai suoi primi anni in Italia, quando scriveva lettere in cinese al padre e alla nonna, rimasti in patria, raccontando solo eventi positivi ed omettendo le gravi difficoltà che lui e sua madre stavano affrontando. Cfr. Prudenzano, 2017.

dal *qi* 氣¹⁴, questo seme biforcuto si è sempre mosso in un moto oscillatorio fra l'obbedienza e la ribellione, in famiglia e nella società. Oggi Shi Yang ha compreso che quella piantina bicefala può potenzialmente divenire un albero, il grande albero della sua vita, di cui egli stesso deve prendersi cura. Nelle sue parole, sarà un “albero anfibio in grado di vivere sia nell’acqua che sulla terra, ma con le radici sprofondate nell’eredità culturale e spirituale degli uomini, a partire da quella dei miei antenati” (Shi Yang Shi, 2017, p. 159).

Le radici, appunto. Come recita un adagio popolare caro ai *huaqiao* o cinesi d’oltremare, “le foglie cadute ritornano alle radici (*luoye guigen* 落叶归根)”. Come una spirale, in questo modo la vita italiana da adulto di Shi Yang si ricongiunge idealmente alla sua infanzia cinese.

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¹⁴ Il Dao, termine che sta alla base del pensiero daoista, è l’Assoluto, l’ineffabile principio che governa il cosmo. Il *qi* è invece il soffio vitale che permea ogni cosa e tutto muove. A riguardo, cfr. Andreini & Scarpari, 2007.

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“Se questo è un uomo”: l’istituzione totale, l’assurdo, la barbarie, l’identità sociale azzerata e l’umano

Francesco Paolo Pinello

Abstract: Nel 1959 Erving Goffman pubblicava *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*; nel 1961 *Asylums. Essay on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*; nel 1963 *Stigma. Notes on The Management of Spoiled Identity*. Oggi l’individuo stigmatizzato, scriveva in *Stigma*, pensa e crede di essere un uomo come chiunque altro, e quindi (aggiungo io) di meritare libertà fondamentali e diritti umani universali. Questo è un fatto fondamentale, osservava. Ma cosa accade quando queste categorie sociali si azzerano, per esempio in un Lager? Quando l’identità sociale di un uomo è azzerata? È a queste domande che il mio studio mira a rispondere, individuando tre casi che ho definito “Sistema Lager” (istituzione totale), “Sistema Caligola” (sistema totale) e “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf” (“Cosa devo fare per essere felice?”), nonché un modello che ho definito “Modello di scrittura autobiografica di Levi”. Ho segnalato anche alcuni profili della questione del passaggio dal “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf” al “Sistema Caligola”. Lo scopo è quello di stimolare l’immaginazione sociologica, al tempo dell’*Intelligenza artificiale* (AI), sul grande problema dell’istituzionalizzazione, delle manipolazioni burocratiche nella società contemporanea e dell’esigenza della concettualizzazione di un nuovo modello di uomo.

Abstract: In 1959 Erving Goffman published *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*; in 1961 *Asylums. Essay on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*; in 1963 *Stigma. Notes on The Management of Spoiled Identity*.

Today the stigmatized individual, as he wrote in *Stigma*, thinks and believes he is a man like anyone else, and therefore (I add) he deserves fundamental freedom and universal human rights. This is a fundamental fact, he observed. But what happens when these social categories fall to zero, for example in a Lager? When the social identity

of a man is totally erased? My study tries to answer these questions by identifying three cases that I have defined “Sistema Lager” (total institution), “Sistema Caligola” (total system) and “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf” (“What do I have to do to be happy?”), as well as a model that I have defined “Levi’s model of autobiographical writing”. I have also reported some profiles of the question of the transition from the “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf” to the “Sistema Caligola”.

The aim of the paper is to stimulate a sociological imagination, at the time of artificial intelligence (AI), on the great problem of institutionalization, bureaucratic manipulations in contemporary society and the need to conceptualize a new model of man.

Keywords: identità, burocrazia, amministrazione, razionalizzazione, mutamento

Presentazione

Questo contributo è volto a mostrare che il processo fondamentale della sociologia è la tensione tra naturale e artificiale, tra natura (compresi l'uomo, l'antropocene e l'epigenetica) e società umana (compresi l'AI e le Reti Neurali artificiali). Per natura intendo l'ambiente terrestre, nelle sue caratteristiche fisiche, chimiche e biologiche, nel quale si svolge e si evolve la vita. Anche l'azione sociale, intesa come unità minima della sociologia, è espressione di tale tensione.

Relativamente al concetto di natura, riferito all'uomo, può essere preso in considerazione anche il concetto di *sacro*, sulla scia di Émile Durkheim (2013).

Per Goffman, l'attore sociale non è un individuo esclusivamente impegnato in calcoli razionali, né un puro e semplice esecutore di precetti culturali, né una mera espressione di istanze profonde, come pretenderebbero le teorie sociali più in voga nel XX secolo, come il marxismo o la psicoanalisi (o le loro versioni caricaturali). O, meglio, è un po' tutto questo, e insieme molto di più: è soprattutto un virtuoso della sopravvivenza in un mondo quotidiano irto di pericoli potenziali per il suo rispetto di sé o, ciò che è la stessa cosa, per il rispetto *del suo sé*. In questo senso, è stato notato che Goffman applichi al campo dell'interazione sociale l'intuizione durkheimiana della sacralità della società.

Il sacro non va cercato oggi nelle grandi ceremonie collettive, la «religione civile» a cui pensava Durkheim (cerimonie che già Max Weber, all'inizio del XX secolo, considerava grottesche, e che oggi, a maggior ragione, sono inevitabilmente condizionate dall'artificialità della loro natura mediale). Il sacro è piuttosto la posta dei rituali di interazione a cui l'attore sociale partecipa creativamente tentando sempre di affermare la supremazia del suo *self* contro le pretese del formalismo delle organizzazioni, dei ruoli artificiali che gli vengono assegnati dalla divisione del lavoro, delle istituzioni del controllo sociale. Questo è il filo che collega le ricerche di Goffman sul lavoro cooperativo, sulla teoria dei ruoli, fino alle ultime ricerche sugli schemi cognitivi che governano l'interazione sociale e sulle conversazioni quotidiane. E questo è precisamente il senso di *Asylums*, in cui la descrizione delle pratiche di controllo e disumanizzazione degli internati è complementare al riconoscimento della lotta di «resistenza» per l'identità (Del Lago, 2010, pp. 16-17).

Il mondo delle istituzioni totali viene anche descritto dalla capacità degli internati o dei pazienti (e in generale dei «clienti» delle organizzazioni che pretendono di disciplinare la vita) di «resistere» alle mortificazioni e alle pratiche di spoliazione che vi sono abituali.

Questa è la definizione che Goffman dà di “istituzione totale”: “Un’istituzione totale può essere definita come il luogo di residenza e di lavoro di gruppi di persone che – tagliate fuori dalla società per un considerevole periodo di tempo – si trovano a dividere una situazione comune, trascorrendo parte della loro vita in un regime chiuso e formalmente amministrato (Goffman, 2010a, p. 29).

Gli esseri umani, nella loro doppia evoluzione biologica e culturale (Tomasello, 2005), danno delle forme artificiali, astratte, alla natura mediante la ragione e l'intelligenza naturale, i calcolatori elettronici e l'intelligenza artificiale, per poi ritrarsi da esse, sostituendole con altre forme artificiali e astratte. Come scrive Dan Sperber, «La questione interessante non è se le scienze sociali siano scienze, ma se siano in continuità con le scienze naturali (assumendo, come faccio qui, che le scienze naturali siano tra di loro in continuità)» (Sperber, 1999, p. 10), con la precisazione che, diversamente da quanto pensa Sperber, un obiettivo naturalistico prototipico non è soltanto

«scoprire [se possibile] qualche meccanismo che spieghi un ampio spettro di fenomeni in una maniera controllabile» (*idem*), ma è anche continuare a riflettere sulla domanda «perché l’umanità, invece di entrare in uno stato veramente umano, sprofondi in un nuovo genere di barbarie», che costituisce il “cuore pulsante” della *Dialettica dell’illuminismo* di Horkheimer e Adorno (2010, p. 3)¹.

Ma come continuare a riflettere? La risposta a questa domanda, parafrasando Charles Wright Mills, è la seguente: partecipando all’avveramento della *Promessa dell’Immaginazione sociologica*, perché questo è il *compito politico e intellettuale del sociologo* (Wright Mills, 2014), avendo però riguardo, diversamente da quanto sostenuto dall’autore, alle scienze fisiche, biologiche e neuroscientifiche. Partire dalle azioni, dagli individui, dalle biografie, ma senza cadere nelle secche dell’individualismo metodologico estremo, che nega radicalmente il concetto di struttura. E cioè azionare, con la *qualità della mente* (Wright Mills, 2014), un individualismo metodologico a medio raggio, che sia capace di muoversi e di mantenersi, in chiave storica, tra individuo/biografia e struttura/funzione, tra naturale/biologico/fisico e artificiale. Non soltanto vincoli cognitivi biologico/biografici e difficoltà (*troubles*), ma anche vincoli istituzionali e problemi (*issues*), contraddizioni di struttura; non soltanto dinamiche e processi di razionalizzazione, ma anche dialettica burocrazia/carisma (Gerth – Wright Mills, 1993); non soltanto esame dei *pensieri lenti*, ma anche di quelli *veloci, immediati* (Kahneman, 2019); non soltanto sociologia, ma anche filosofia della mente (De Palma – Pareti, 2015).

¹ Per una lettura critica di alcuni concetti fondamentali della *Dialettica dell’Illuminismo*, si veda PINELLO F.P., *Identità scientifica e mito di appartenenza all’isola disciplinare: la dialettica dell’illuminismo, il naturale e l’artificiale razionalizzato*, in O. M. VALASTRO, H. FISCHER (a cura di), *Mitanalisi dell’insularità* (in M@gm@, Collana I Quaderni di M@gm@. Immaginari del patrimonio culturale immateriale), Vol.17, n. 1, 2019, URL: http://www.analisiqualitativa.com/magma/1701/articolo_18.html

Giudicare o comprendere? L’«infezione latente», propria della natura umana, l’identità sociale e il potere del comprendere e del giudicare

Come testimoniato dalla letteratura (Levi, 1989; Camus 1983), dando alla letteratura lo stesso peso specifico che le dava Wright Mills in relazione alla sociologia (Wright Mills, 2014), è “normale”, conforme al senso comune, che l’odio verso il tiranno che ha ucciso il padre “dia vita”, nel figlio, alla volontà di uccidere il tiranno, scatenando in lui un’«infezione latente», propria della natura umana, che giace da sempre nel fondo dell’uomo, nella sua parte più arcaica e primordiale, quella che lo rende più vicino e più simile alle bestie selvatiche, e che si manifesta «solo in atti saltuari e incoordinati»: l’istinto bestiale sanguinario omicida. Si tratta della manifestazione di quella che chiamo la “costante N” (Natura), il fattore umano insopprimibile. È altrettanto “normale”, conforme al senso comune, che la società imponga delle regole da rispettare, che la morale inculchi dei valori da far valere, che si creda che prima di giudicare qualcuno, incluso il tiranno, sia necessario cercare di comprendere. Il giudizio, infatti, è l’emissione di una sentenza e di una condanna, pregiudizievole (perché stigmatizzante) anche nel caso in cui essa non venga effettivamente eseguita, e può dar luogo a un appello, che si può anche perdere, e a conseguenze pericolose. Meglio poi se a una comprensione generica, di senso comune, faccia seguito una comprensione specialistica, scientifica.

Di fronte all’odio, la morale esige che si ascolti «la parte migliore del proprio cuore» (a cui sono sensibili soprattutto i poeti) e la società pretende che si comprendano anche il tiranno e le sue ragioni, perché il tiranno ha i suoi seguaci e i suoi sostenitori, persino chi lo ama, e perché bisogna capire e spiegare il movente delle sue azioni e le sue stesse azioni, e la viralità della sua propaganda, e perché anche il tiranno è un uomo e la pena di morte è una barbarie. Ma può anche accadere che il tirannicidio sia considerato “normale”, e cioè legittimo per il ristabilimento della naturalità della comunità e del bene comune (*Lex est quaedam rationis ordinatio ad bonum commune, ab eo qui curam communitatis habet promulgata*, e cioè *legitime manifestata*), perché il tiranno non è più un uomo ma una “cosa”, una forza bruta, che entra dentro l’umanità naturale interiore di altri uomini (nel loro *self sacro*), senza il loro consenso e in modo sanguinario e violento, per azzerarla e

per farli diventare a loro volta delle “cose”, oggetti della sua forza bruta (Dietrich Bonhoeffer per esempio voleva ammazzare Hitler, perché soltanto eliminando il tiranno, che non vuole comprendere e che non è più un uomo, si può salvare l’uomo, Ghezzi, 2006). Ed è “normale”, conforme al senso comune, che vi sia tensione tra queste “normalità”.

Comprendere veramente questa tensione tra naturale e artificiale, che è semplice e difficile allo stesso tempo, significa avere coscienza e consapevolezza di come si «scatena l’unica rivoluzione possibile sulla terra». Si tratta della rivoluzione *dialettica* della società umana e della comunità sociale, rispetto al totalmente naturale (anche se concepibile soltanto per ipotesi). E si tratta anche della resistenza della società – che continua a portare in sé il naturale come natura negata – al totalmente artificiale (anche se concepibile, fino a oggi, soltanto per ipotesi). La società infatti, a tutt’oggi, non è mai stata costruita dal di fuori della natura, è cioè anche una comunità sociale naturale.

Quest’ultimo aspetto della questione, di recente, ha dato luogo a nuove riflessioni. Da una parte si sono posizionati i catastrofisti, come per esempio Stephen Hawking e Elon Musk, che hanno espresso i loro timori verso uno sviluppo incontrollato dell’intelligenza artificiale (AI), perché del tutto incosciente e priva di emozioni e di scrupoli (si veda il documentario *Do you trust this computer*, diretto da Chris Paine, ma anche la questione dei cambiamenti climatici che è sfuggita alle possibilità di controllo umano, così come potrebbe accadere per l’AI). Dall’altra parte ci sono gli ottimisti, come per esempio coloro che sostengono la *Singularity University* e le “teorie della singolarità”, o il materialista Yuval Noah Harari (Harari, 2018, 2019a, 2019b).

Elon Musk, in modo particolare, ha ipotizzato l’avvento di una AI (la dittatura dell’intelligenza artificiale) costituita da una rete di milioni di computer interconnessi tra di loro, in grado di controllare ogni dettaglio della vita di ciascun singolo uomo e di effettuare miliardi di calcoli in frazioni di secondo (Mantovani, 2018).

A tutt’oggi, il nucleo genetico delle principali categorie che hanno strutturato il corso della civiltà occidentale, «di quel ‘sistema’ la cui caratteristica è tanto di costruire una ‘totalità’ quanto di essere, al tempo, disarticolato in *disiecta membra*» (Galli, p. VIII), e cioè dell’*illuminismo* (per dirla con Horkheimer e Adorno), è quell’inscindibile unità di società (concetto diverso da comunità sociale naturale) e dominio

che produce totalità e crisi, unità e lacerazione. Per comunità sociale naturale intendo una comunità, distinta dalla società anche se a essa legata, almeno fino a tutt’oggi, non costruita dall’esterno della natura e a prescindere totalmente da essa, i membri della quale hanno dei diritti naturali che nessuno può togliere loro e ai quali non possono rinunciare, perché fanno parte integrante della loro stessa natura. Secondo Galli,

Nell’illuminismo non c’è solo la contraddizione originaria per cui il soggetto perde – nella totalità – la propria identità precisamente quando la raggiunge: un’altra aporia è quella che Horkheimer e Adorno constatano a proposito del rapporto tra *logos* e natura, che nell’autocomprendere dell’illuminismo è di esclusione, e invece è per loro di perversa co-implicazione (...). L’origine del pensiero non sta, pertanto, nell’uscita dalla natura – come l’illuminismo proclama –; piuttosto, il pensiero porta dentro di sé la natura negata, come una colpa rimossa che dà origine a una sorta d’inconscia ma potente coazione, nel soggetto razionale, a negare la natura fuori di sé e dentro di sé: ma tale negazione coatta è anche un’inconscia e paradossale riproposizione della natura (Galli 2010, pp. XI, XII).

Da qui le due modalità di repressione delle passioni naturali (Odisseo e Juliette, Omero e De Sade) e la trattazione dell’industria culturale e degli elementi di antisemitismo da parte di Horkheimer e Adorno, nella *Dialectica dell’illuminismo* (Horkheimer – Adorno, 2010). Ho utilizzato sopra l’espressione «la parte migliore del proprio cuore» non in senso sociologico, ma per marcire le differenze e le distanze della poesia e della teoresi dalla sociologia, pur mettendo in relazione quest’ultima disciplina con quelle, per dare *senso pieno* alla sociologia (si veda, per esempio, Whigt Mills, 2014) e perché una sociologia totalmente asservita al ritocco, più o meno digitale, della fotografia funzionale dell’ordine sociale costituito – un ordine sociale sempre più strutturato dall’AI – può essere facile strumento di tirannide, in un quadro generale di sostanziale livellamento della teoria sociale.

Cesonìa

(freddamente) [Caligola] Ha ucciso tuo padre?

Scipione

Sì.

Cesonìa

Lo odi?

Scipione

Sì.

Cesonia

Lo vuoi uccidere?

Scipione

Sì.

[...]

Cesonia

[...] Ma vorrei dirti qualcosa – anzi vorrei parlare alla parte migliore del tuo cuore.

Scipione

(con una certa enfasi) Io avevo un cuore.

Cesonia

Bisogna avere la tua età per pensare che il cuore si possa perdere o cambiare. Ora sentimi bene. Vorrei dirti qualcosa di difficile ma semplice al tempo stesso – qualcosa che, se compresa veramente, potrebbe scatenare [nel “Sistema Caligola”] l'unica rivoluzione possibile sulla terra.

Scipione

Sentiamo.

Cesonia

(distaccata e superba) No, aspetta. Pensa prima all'espressione sconvolta di tuo padre quando gli strappavano la lingua. Pensa a quella bocca piena di sangue e a quel grido d'animale torturato.

Scipione

Sì

Cesonia

E ora pensa a Caligola.

Scipione

(con tutta la forza dell'odio) Sì.

Cesonia

E adesso senti: cerca di capirlo

Esce, lasciando il giovane Scipione senza parole (Camus, 1983, pp. 31-1).

Caligola

[guardandosi allo specchio] [...] Mi capiranno mai? No, mi giudicano. Ed anche tu mi giudichi. Come ti ammiro per questo tuo potere di giudicare (*ivi*, p. 62).

Il comprendere e il giudicare sono funzioni del potere o della mancanza di potere, nel senso che per comprendere si deve esercitare potere e per giudicare e far eseguire – o eseguire personalmente – la sentenza di condanna, la sanzione, la pena, bisogna possedere l'esercizio della forza, e tutto ciò è, a tutt'oggi, intriso e macchiato di sangue, di violenza, di natura. E ancora, “l'individuazione del singolo si dà nell'identificazione autoritaria con la logica del potere: e il potere del soggetto sull'oggetto è pagato con la sottomissione di entrambi al potere universale, al sistema del dominio, del quale non sono che funzioni” (Galli, p. XI). Aggiunge a tal proposito Goffman,

Quando ci troviamo davanti un estraneo [interazioni faccia-a-faccia], è probabile che il suo aspetto immediato ci consenta di stabilire in anticipo a quale categoria appartiene e quali sono i suoi attributi, qual è, in altri termini, la sua “identità sociale”. È meglio dire così piuttosto che “status sociale”, perché in questo contesto attributi personali come “l'onestà” si presentano insieme ad attributi strutturali come “l'occupazione”. Ci fidiamo delle supposizioni che abbiamo fatto, le trasformiamo in aspettative normative e quindi in pretese inequivocabili (Goffman, 2010b, p. 12).

La poesia, che opera dalla parte del cuore (la poesia di Scipione), la natura negata dalla sociologia e dai processi razionali sociologici che è però necessaria alla sociologia affinché essa abbia un *senso pieno* sociologico, affinché rimanga ancorata all'umanità dell'uomo e non diventi strumento, seppur inconsapevole, di tirannide e di barbarie, può anche cantare se stessa, la natura selvaggia (l'odio di Scipione), in modo consolatorio e incerto, ma non può essere lirismo sanguinario. Se è lirismo sanguinario, è infetta (la parte infetta del cuore, la poesia infetta, il *lirismo sanguinario* che conduce lo stesso Caligola, che un tempo amava Drusilla, al “Sistema Caligola”).

Caligola

Ah, sei tu.

(*Si ferma, come per darsi un tono*) È tanto che non ti vedo.

(*Gli va lentamente incontro*) Che stai facendo? Continui a scrivere?

Puoi farmi leggere le tue ultime cose?

Scipione

(anche lui a disagio, diviso tra l'odio e qualcosa di diverso) Ho scritto delle poesie, Cesare.

Caligola

Su che?

Scipione

Non lo so, Cesare. Sulla natura, forse.

Caligola

(riprendendo tono) Bell'argomento. Ampio. E che ne hai ricavato?

Scipione

(riprendendosi a sua volta, con ironia e cattiveria) La consolazione di non essere Cesare.

Caligola

Ah! Pensi che potrebbe consolare anche me per il fatto di esserlo?

Scipione

(come sopra) Ne sono certo. Ha guarito ferite più gravi.

Caligola

(stranamente sincero) Ferite? Lo dici con cattiveria. È perché ho ucciso tuo padre? Eppure hai scelto la parola adatta. Ferite! [la ferita di Caligola è la morte di Drusilla, sua sorella e amante amata].

(Cambiando tono) Non c'è che l'odio per rendere la gente intelligente.

Scipione

(gelido) Ho risposto alla tua domanda sulla natura.

[...]

Caligola

Certo, quella tua poesia è bella. Ma se posso dirti che ne penso...

Scipione

Dimmi.

Caligola

Ci manca il sangue

Scipione

[...] Ah, mostro – mostro infetto (Caligola, 1983, pp. 31-3).

Il “Sistema Lager” (l’istituzione totale)

Sempre la letteratura ci consente di portare in primo piano l’importanza delle regole sociali e il “senso di appartenenza” di chi “giace sul fondo”, quando le lingue cessano di essere potenti veicoli transculturali, quando il potere concesso alla lingua contro la repressione, l’oppressione, i fraintendimenti e gli stereotipi viene progressivamente azzerato e quando le traduzioni cessano progressivamente di svolgere le loro funzioni tipiche e mancano, persino, alcune parole “vitali”. Ci consente di portare in primo piano anche la questione dell’esistenza “salutare” che si colloca al di fuori di ogni restrittiva categorizzazione di lingua, cultura, genere, classe e religione.

Goffman, nel suo *Asylums*, ha individuato cinque tipi di istituzioni totali. I *Lager*, nello specifico, rientrerebbero nel terzo tipo:

Il terzo tipo di istituzioni totali serve a proteggere la società da ciò che si rivela come un pericolo intenzionale nei suoi confronti, nel qual caso il benessere delle persone segregate non risulta la finalità immediata dell’istituzione che li segrega (prigioni, penitenziari, campi per prigionieri di guerra, campi di concentramento) (Goffman, 2010a, p. 34).

Esistono delle testimonianze dirette che collegano il *Lager* a un’«infezione latente», che non è da intendere né come irrazionalità né come insieme di disvalori morali, ma come “costante N”. Con ciò non voglio sostenere che la causa del *Lager* sia un’«infezione latente», voglio soltanto focalizzare l’attenzione su questo profilo della questione, perché ha a che fare con una viralità di tipo naturale (*infezione virale latente*), primordiale, primitiva, estranea alla “parte migliore del cuore”, che, divenuta manifesta (non però come malattia conclamata, come patologia mentale) e spiegabile – per esempio dalle neuroscienze (a livello di *hardware*) –, dà origine a un sistema razionale astratto (a livello di rappresentazioni, di processi di rappresentazioni e di teorie computazionali) (Marr, 1982; Tabossi, 1998) del tutto disancorato dalla morale (in questo senso “parlo” di incoscienza morale).

Nel suo romanzo autobiografico «Se questo è un uomo», Primo Levi, un ebreo italiano, chimico, internato a Auschwitz, annota ciò che accade, faccia-a-faccia, a se stesso e agli altri internati di Auschwitz,

a causa di un'«infezione latente» (così egli si esprime), propria della natura umana, che giace da sempre nel fondo dell'uomo e che si manifesta «solo in atti saltuari e incoordinati» e che «non sta all'origine di un sistema di pensiero.

Ma quando questo avviene, quando il dogma inespresso diventa premessa maggiore di un sillogismo», quando l'«infezione latente» diventa espressione razionalizzata virale, e cioè sistema di pensiero collettivo, di un gruppo, razionalizzato, istituzionalizzato e burocratizzato da chi ha il potere per farlo, allora, «al termine della catena, sta il Lager».

Ecco a seguire la *questione del sillogismo di Levi*, nel *Caligola* di Camus:

Caligola

[...] Sapevate che sto lavorando con Elicone molto seriamente? Stiamo mettendo a punto un manualetto sull'esecuzione, del quale ci direte presto qualcosa.

Elicone

Sempre che vi si chieda un parere.

Caligola

Via, siamo generosi! Mostriamo loro i nostri piccoli segreti. Dunque, sezione terza paragrafo uno.

Elicone

(si alza e declama meccanicamente) «L'esecuzione dona conforto e libertà. È rassicurante e giusta nelle sue applicazioni pratiche come negli scopi che si prefigge. Si muore perché si è colpevoli. Si è colpevoli perché si è sudditi di Caligola. Ma tutti sono sudditi di Caligola. Quindi sono tutti colpevoli. Dal che si desume che tutti devono morire. È solo questione di tempo e di pazienza» (Camus, 1983, p. 27).

Il sillogismo implica l'uso della maschera nelle interazioni simboliche:

Caligola

(per la prima volta naturale, si direbbe, dall'inizio dello spettacolo) Che rea, non credi che due uomini che si assomigliano per carattere ed orgoglio possano parlare sinceramente tra loro, almeno una volta nella vita, come se fossero nudi l'uno davanti all'altro, spogliati d'ogni pregiudizio, d'ogni interesse particolare, d'ogni necessità di mentire?

Cherea

Credo di sì, Caligola. Ma penso che tu ne sia incapace.

Caligola

Hai ragione. Volevo solo verificare se la pensavi come me. Rimettiamoci dunque la maschera. Riprendiamo a mentire (*ivi*, p. 44).

Che cos’è il Lager per Levi? È un’istituzione totale, un «prodotto di una concezione del mondo portata alle sue conseguenze con rigorosa coerenza». Il punto di partenza è *l’immaginazione infetta*, sanguinaria, di qualcuno che detiene il potere (Caligola, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, i signori del Lager libici dove attualmente sono internati i migranti, le élite che hanno fatto loro riferimento, perché un’idea infetta che nasce nella mente di qualcuno può infettare le menti di altri). È la sua «poesia omicida» razionalizzata e razionalizzante («il potere omicida della poesia») che, per gli altri, se non fidelizzati dalla propaganda, è fondata nel caso e nell’assurdo (perché non rispondente ad alcun sistema di valori morali che possa orientare la comprensione e la spiegazione). Finché tale sistema di pensiero virale razionalizzato, istituzionalizzato e burocratizzato come Lager, logico e coerente nel suo ordine totale e nei suoi sistemi di controllo totalizzanti, ma assurdo a causa delle fantasie, delle immagini (distinte dai segni naturali), dalle quali si è originato e che lo alimentano, sussiste e persiste, le «conseguenze ci minacciano» (Levi, 1989, p. 2). Il limite che separa dalla patologia (il sadismo, per esempio, del quale scrivono Horkheimer e Adorno nella loro *Dialectica*) è sottilissimo.

Come scrive Dan Sperber “Attraverso un processo materiale [...] un’idea, nata nel cervello di un individuo, può avere discendenti che le somigliano nel cervello degli altri” (Sperber, 1999, p. 7)².

Il Lager è una questione di potere. Si tratta della stessa genealogia del potere, dell’impenetrabile unità di società e dominio. Per chi lo subisce, invece, è soprattutto una questione morale (di profonda ingiustizia morale) e di fede. Ma fino a un certo punto, perché superato un

² Si veda anche PINELLO F.P., *Profilo di una festa: il pane dei Burgisi e il Corteo di Cerere/Demetra*, in R. DEIDIER (a cura di), *Kore, la ragazza ineffabile. Un mito tra passato e presente*, Donzelli, Roma 2018, p. 157.

certo limite, anche la morale e la fede, alle quali in un primo momento le vittime del *Lager* si aggrappano, finiscono per essere svuotate.

Quando Levi è catturato dalla Milizia fascista, il 13 dicembre 1943, ha ventiquattro anni, «poco senno, nessuna esperienza», egli scrive, «e una decisa propensione, favorita dal regime di segregazione» delle leggi razziali degli ultimi quattro anni, a vivere in un suo mondo «scarsamente reale, popolato da civili fantasmi cartesiani, da sincere amicizie maschili e da amicizie femminili esanguini». Coltiva «un moderato e astratto senso di ribellione» (Levi, 1989, p. 4), e non gli è «stato facile scegliere la via della montagna, e contribuire a mettere in piedi quanto», nella opinione sua e di altri amici di lui poco più esperti, «avrebbe dovuto diventare una banda partigiana affiliata a “Giustizia e Libertà”» (*ibidem*).

Prima del Lager, dell’istituzione totale, quindi, c’è la segregazione, ci sono le leggi razziali, c’è la razionalizzazione normativa, normata e normante, strutturata e strutturante. C’è una situazione di *sonnambulismo* (Broch, 2010). Ed è dalla segregazione e dal sonnambulismo che Levi passa poi al Lager. Nei campi di internamento, scrive, ci si va a finire perché catturati dai fascisti o dai nazisti per propria imprudenza, o in seguito a delazione. Alcuni, pochi, si consegnano spontaneamente, «o perché ridotti alla disperazione dalla vita randa-gia, o perché privi di mezzi, o per non separarsi da un congiunto catturato, o anche, assurdamente, per “mettersi in ordine con la legge”» (Levi, 1989, p. 5).

Dopo la cattura, quando ha inizio l’internamento, quando gli internati cominciano a essere sommersi nel fondo infetto e infettato, razionalizzato e assurdo, socialmente istituzionalizzato e burocratizzato, che giaceva latente negli individui e nei popoli, i diversi sentimenti che si agitano negli internati, «di consapevole accettazione, di ribellione senza sbocchi, di religioso abbandono, di paura, di disperazione», confluiscono, dapprima, «in una collettiva incontrollata follia». Il tempo di meditare, il tempo di stabilire sono conclusi, e ogni moto di ragione si scioglie nel tumulto senza vincoli, su cui, dolorosi come colpi di spada, emergono in un lampo, così vicini ancora nel tempo e nello spazio, i ricordi buoni delle proprie case (*ivi*, p. 7), delle proprie mogli, dei propri figli, dei propri genitori, degli oggetti di proprietà. Ma dopo un po’ di tempo, constatato che non si è ancora morti, tutto appare

incomprensibile e folle, nella perfetta coerenza razionale delle regole del Lager, nel controllo totale esercitato per mezzo delle guardie.

Goffman, a proposito del “senso di appartenenza”, scrive che,

Nelle istituzioni totali c’è una distinzione fondamentale fra un grande gruppo di persone controllate, chiamate opportunamente «internati», e un piccolo staff che controlla. Gli internati vivono generalmente nell’istituzione con limitati contatti con il mondo da cui sono separati [...] Ogni gruppo tende a farsi un’immagine dell’altro secondo stereotipi limitati e ostili... (Goffman, 2010, p. 37).

Ecco, a seguire, alcuni profili normativi del *Sistema Lager*, relativi alla fase iniziale dell’internamento e all’emergere dell’apparente irrazionalità di alcuni comportamenti distruttivi e disgreganti dello staff che controlla gli internati.

Bisogna mettersi in fila per cinque, a intervalli di due metri fra uomo e uomo; poi bisogna spogliarsi e fare un fagotto degli abiti in un certo modo, gli indumenti di lana da una parte e tutto il resto dall’altra, togliersi le scarpe ma far molta attenzione di non farcele rubare (...) Poi viene un altro tedesco, e dice di mettere le scarpe in un certo angolo, e noi le mettiamo, perché ormai è finito e ci sentiamo fuori del mondo e l’unica cosa è obbedire. Viene uno con la scopa e scopa via tutte le scarpe, via fuori dalla porta in un mucchio. È matto, le mescola tutte, novantasei paia, poi saranno spaiate. (...) Ma ormai la mia idea è che tutto questo è una grande macchina per ridere di noi e vilipenderci, e poi è chiaro che ci uccidono. (Levi, 1989, pp. 14-16)

Nel Lager plurilingue, sempre nella fase iniziale dell’internamento, le lingue cessano di essere potenti veicoli trans-culturali. Il potere concesso alla lingua contro la repressione, l’oppressione, i fraintendimenti e gli stereotipi viene progressivamente azzerato e le traduzioni cessano progressivamente di svolgere le loro funzioni tipiche. La conoscenza e la corretta gestione delle categorie predeterminate e degli oggetti quotidiani cessano progressivamente di essere d’aiuto. Mancano persino alcune parole. «Come pensare? Non si può più pensare, è come essere già morti». E ancora, «Flesch [il traduttore], che si adatta molto a malincuore a tradurre in italiano frasi tedesche piene di gelo, e rifiuta di volgere in tedesco le nostre domande perché sa che è inutile, è un

ebreo tedesco sulla cinquantina» (*ivi*, pp. 16-17). Levi, unitamente agli altri internati, comincia a capire allora che, nella gabbia (nel Lager), c'è la metamorfosi ad attenderli. E con l'emergere della metamorfosi, emerge anche il valore delle regole sociali che ordinano la vita quotidiana, fuori dal Lager, dandole senso e significati:

Allora per la prima volta ci siamo accorti che la nostra lingua manca di parole per esprimere questa offesa, la demolizione di un uomo. In un attimo, con intuizione quasi profetica, la realtà ci si è rivelata: siamo arrivati al fondo. Più giù di così non si può andare: condizione umana più misera non c'è, e non è pensabile.

Nulla più è nostro: ci hanno tolto gli abiti, le scarpe, anche i capelli; se parleremo, non ci ascolteranno, e se ci ascoltassero, non ci capirebbero. Ci toglieranno anche il nome: e se vorremo conservarlo, dovremo trovare in noi la forza di farlo, di fare sì che dietro al nome, qualcosa ancora di noi, di noi quali eravamo, rimanga. Noi sappiamo che in questo difficilmente saremo compresi, ed è bene che così sia. Ma consideri ognuno, quanto valore, quanto significato è racchiuso anche nelle più piccole nostre abitudini quotidiane, nei cento oggetti nostri che il più umile mendicante possiede: un fazzoletto, una vecchia lettera, la fotografia di una persona cara. Queste cose sono parte di noi, quasi come membra del nostro corpo; né è pensabile di venirne privati, nel nostro mondo, ché subito ne ritroveremmo altri a sostituire i vecchi, altri oggetti che sono nostri in quanto custodi e suscitatori di memorie nostre. Si immagini ora un uomo a cui, insieme con le persone amate, vengano tolti la sua casa, le sue abitudini, i suoi abiti, tutto infine, letteralmente tutto quanto possiede: sarà un uomo vuoto, ridotto a sofferenza e bisogno, dimentico di dignità e discernimento, poiché accade facilmente, a chi ha perso tutto, di perdere se stesso; tale quindi, che si potrà a cuor leggero decidere della sua vita o morte al di fuori di ogni senso di affinità umana; nel caso più fortunato, in base ad un puro giudizio di utilità. Si comprenderà allora il duplice significato del termine «Campo di annientamento», e sarà chiaro che cosa intendiamo esprimere con questa frase: giacere sul fondo. Häftling: ho imparato che io sono uno Häftling. Il mio nome è 174 517; siamo stati battezzati, porteremo finché vivremo il marchio tatuato sul braccio sinistro (*ivi*, pp. 19-20).

Il marchio tatuato sul braccio è lo stigma, il segno dello *scredimento* (Goffman, 2010b, pp. 11-15). Che tipo di “appartenenza” può

prodursi in tali situazioni circostanziate, oltre alla distinzione fondamentale fra il grande gruppo delle persone controllate, degli «internati», e il piccolo staff che controlla?

Nel Lager, l'esperienza dello stigma, a causa delle informazioni che esso veicola, può essere oggetto della creazione di ulteriori stereotipi e pregiudizi (substereotipi e subpregiudizi), da parte degli stessi stigmatizzati, per senso di appartenenza.

Pare che questa sia l'iniziazione vera e propria: solo «mostrando il numero» si riceve il pane e la zuppa. Sono occorsi vari giorni, e non pochi schiaffi e pugni, perché ci abituassimo a mostrare il numero prontamente, in modo da non intralciare le quotidiane operazioni annonarie di distribuzione; ci son voluti settimane e mesi perché ne apprendessimo il suono in lingua tedesca. Solo molto più tardi, e a poco a poco, alcuni di noi hanno poi imparato qualcosa della funerea scienza dei numeri di Auschwitz, in cui si compendiano le tappe della distruzione dell'ebraismo d'Europa. Ai vecchi del campo, il numero dice tutto: l'epoca di ingresso al campo, il convoglio di cui si faceva parte, e di conseguenza la nazionalità. Ognuno tratterà con rispetto i numeri dal 30.000 all'80.000: non sono più che qualche centinaio, e contrassegnano i pochi superstiti dei ghetti polacchi. Conviene aprire bene gli occhi quando si entra in relazioni commerciali con un 116.000 o 117.000: sono ridotti ormai a una quarantina, ma si tratta dei greci di Salonicco, non bisogna lasciarsi mettere nel sacco. Quanto ai numeri grossi, essi comportano una nota di essenziale comicità, come avviene per i termini «matricola» o «coscritto» nella vita normale: il grosso numero tipico è un individuo panciuto, docile e scemo, a cui puoi far credere che all'infermeria distribuiscono scarpe di cuoio per individui dai piedi delicati, e convincerlo a corrervi e a lasciarti la sua gamella di zuppa «in custodia»; gli puoi vendere un cucchiaio per tre razioni di pane; lo puoi mandare dal più feroce dei Kapos, a chiedergli (è successo a me!) se è vero che il suo è il Kartoffelschälkommando, il Kommando Pelatura Patate, e se è possibile esservi arruolati (*ivi*, pp. 20-21).

Ma fino a quando? Cosa deve intendersi, in questi casi, per esistenza più “salutare”, che si colloca al di fuori di ogni restrittiva categorizzazione di lingua, cultura, genere, classe e religione? In che modo si distribuiscono gli individui, relativamente a queste domande?

Levi distingue: la classe dei pessimisti, la classe degli ottimisti, gli oscillanti tra le due posizioni-limite dei pessimisti e degli ottimisti e gli agnostici.

... E fino a quando? Ma gli anziani ridono a questa domanda: a questa domanda si riconoscono i nuovi arrivati. Ridono e non rispondono: per loro, da mesi, da anni, il problema del futuro remoto è impallidito, ha perso ogni acutezza, di fronte ai ben più urgenti e concreti problemi del futuro prossimo: quanto si mangerà oggi, se nevicherà, se ci sarà da scaricare carbone. Se fossimo ragionevoli, dovremmo rassegnarci a questa evidenza, che il nostro destino è perfettamente inconoscibile, che ogni congettura è arbitraria ed esattamente priva di fondamento reale.

Ma ragionevoli gli uomini sono assai raramente, quando è in gioco il loro proprio destino: essi preferiscono in ogni caso le posizioni estreme; perciò, a seconda del loro carattere, fra di noi gli uni si sono convinti immediatamente che tutto è perduto, che qui non si può vivere e che la fine è certa e prossima; gli altri, che, per quanto dura sia la vita che ci attende, la salvezza è probabile e non lontana, e, se avremo fede e forza, rivedremo le nostre case e i nostri cari.

Le due classi, dei pessimisti e degli ottimisti, non sono peraltro così ben distinte: non già perché gli agnostici siano molti, ma perché i più, senza memoria né coerenza, oscillano fra le due posizioni-limite, a seconda dell'interlocutore e del momento. Eccomi dunque sul fondo. A dare un colpo di spugna al passato e al futuro si impara assai presto, se il bisogno preme (*ivi*, pp. 30-31) Guai per gli internati a immaginare, a sognare (non sono l'imperatore, loro!). D'altra parte, “il momento di coscienza che accompagna il risveglio è la sofferenza più acuta. Ma non ci capita sovente, e non sono lunghi sogni: noi non siamo che bestie stanche” (*ivi*, p. 39)

Il “Sistema Caligola” (il sistema totale)

Il concetto di sistema totale è diverso dal concetto di istituzione totale. Definisco sistema totale un’infrastruttura critica interconnessa nel settore dell’informazione, costituita da una rete di milioni di computer interconnessi tra di loro in grado di controllare ogni dettaglio della vita di ciascun singolo *ex-uomo* e di effettuare miliardi di calcoli in frazioni

di secondo, tagliando fuori la “costante N” e la comunità sociale naturale e facendo vivere ogni *ex-uomo* in un regime chiuso e formalmente amministrato. Dato che la tecnologia oggi non è ancora in grado di realizzare un sistema totale, prendo in considerazione il “Sistema Caligola” perché consente di mettere a fuoco, senza nessuna pretesa di completezza, alcuni profili della questione e alcune linee di tendenza.

Il “Sistema Caligola” consta di poche regole:

1. Liberarsi da ogni alibi (Drusilla, per Caligola, è un alibi, un legame affettivo profondo della “parte migliore del cuore”; morta Drusilla, Caligola è “più libero”);
 - 1.1. Anche il dolore (per la morte di Drusilla, per la liberazione dai legami affettivi profondi) non ha senso;
 - 1.2. Totale incoscienza morale, niente emozioni e niente scrupoli;
 - 1.3. Niente ricordi e niente illusioni;
2. Avere il potere adeguato per agire ogni fantasia sanguinaria, violenta;
 - 2.1. Distinguere l'uomo dallo *status* e dai ruoli;
3. Agire ogni fantasia sanguinaria, violenta (esercitare «il potere delirante del distruttore, al confronto del quale il potere del creatore non è che una pallida imitazione»);
 - 3.1. Le azioni sono tutte uguali (uno vale uno), svuotano progressivamente chi agisce (si ritrova così «il grande vuoto in cui l'anima si placa») e lo “liberano” (la *libertà spaventosa e insopportabile*, la *felicità demente*, il *disprezzo universale*, la *gioia infinita del delitto impunito*, la *logica implacabile che cancella vite umane*), facendogli raggiungere «la divina chiaroveggenza della solitudine» (rendere *perfetta l'eterna solitudine*) evitando la *soddisfazione* (che la presenza di Drusilla in vita avrebbe causato);
4. Si può agire l'impossibile anche se non lo si può ottenere (il ritorno in vita di Drusilla e la richiesta di avere portata la Luna; limiti imposti dalla natura);
 - 4.1. Non ottenere l'impossibile (pur essendo l'imperatore e pur avendolo agito) causa paura, ferite e solitudine non *perfetta* e *non eterna*, fino al punto di indurre il tiranno a desiderare il proprio tirannicidio (la coscienza e consapevolezza della necessaria e invalicabile incompletezza del totalmente artificiale, dell'impossibilità della sua integrale realizzazione a causa di li-

miti naturali insopprimibili per l'uomo, a causa della “parte migliore del cuore”, a causa dell'amore per Drusilla e della Luna dei poeti innamorati che si vorrebbe possedere);

5. Generare paura nei politici (senatori), nei funzionari pubblici e nei sudditi:

Caligola

(rovesciandosi sul letto, scosso da una risata irresistibile) Ma guardali, Cesonia. Guardali davanti alla paura. Niente va più. Onestà, dignità, saggezza – niente vuol dire più niente. Tutto sparisce davanti alla paura. La paura questo bel sentimento, Cesonia – senza artifici, un sentimento puro e disinteressato, uno dei pochi che traggono la propria nobiltà dal ventre (Camus, 1983, p. 24).

- 5.1. Utilizzare validi strumenti di propaganda;

6. Distruggere le istituzioni (dell'impero) per strutturare la tirannide.

6.1. Soppressione di gruppi familiari, attuali o potenziali.

6.2. Tutti gli aspetti della vita devono svolgersi sotto la stessa unica autorità;

6.2.1. Ogni fase delle attività giornaliere si svolge a stretto contatto di un enorme gruppo di persone, trattate fondamentalmente tutte allo stesso modo e che fanno fondamentalmente tutte le medesime cose;

6.2.2. Le diverse fasi delle attività giornaliere devono essere rigorosamente schedate e orientate da un corpo di addetti;

6.2.3. Le varie attività forzate devono essere organizzate secondo un unico piano razionale, appositamente designato al fine di adempiere allo scopo dell'istituzione;

6.3. Il tiranno può non essere un uomo. Può essere anche un sistema totale;

6.3.1. Il fatto cruciale è il «“manipolare” molti bisogni umani per mezzo dell'organizzazione burocratica di intere masse di persone – sia che si tratti di un fatto necessario o di mezzi efficaci cui l'organizzazione sociale ricorre in particolari circostanze» (Goffman, 2010, p. 36).

Queste regole possono essere suddivise in cinque gruppi, che hanno funzioni diverse, suddivisi, a loro volta, in due sezioni.

Prima sezione. Operazioni che il tiranno compie su se stesso:

– Primo gruppo (da 1. a 1.3): distacco dalle emozioni, dai sentimenti e dalle passioni. Essere “freddi” e razionali. Svuotare progressivamente la propria naturale umanità interiore (“la parte migliore del cuore”), fino ad azzerarla (per cessare di continuare a essere uomo pre-tecnologico, per esempio).

– Secondo gruppo (da 2 a 2.1): distinguere il ruolo e lo *status* dall’uomo. Più l’uomo svuota se stesso più aumenta il potere “freddo” e assolutamente distaccato e razionale del suo *status* e dei ruoli.

– Terzo gruppo (da 3. a 4.1): svuotato l’uomo e azzerata la sua naturale umanità interiore, tutte le sue azioni, in relazione allo *status* e ai ruoli, sono uguali e contribuiscono a svuotarlo ulteriormente. Bisogna però fare attenzione a non agire l’impossibile, perché l’insuccesso può causare paura, apprendo ferite e rimettendo in discussione il livello di svuotamento e di azzeramento già raggiunto, che non è mai definitivo e irreversibile (almeno, a tutt’oggi è così).

Seconda sezione. Operazioni che il tiranno compie sugli altri:

– Quarto gruppo (da 5. a 5.1.): generare paura nei politici, nei funzionari pubblici e nei sudditi, per svuotare anche loro della loro naturale umanità interiore. Per farlo, utilizzare la propaganda;

– Quinto gruppo (da 6. a 6.3.1.): governare la paura per distruggere le istituzioni preesistenti e per strutturare la tirannide.

Il “Sistema Caligola” è figlio del mondo in cui viviamo da pochissime generazioni, e cioè della configurazione che l’uomo ha assunto nell’«età della tecnica», se la si rappresenta come una gigantesca istituzione totale. Da qui l’esigenza di rivedere i concetti di individuo, identità, libertà, salvezza, verità, senso, scopo, ma anche quelli di natura, etica, politica, religione, storia, di cui si nutre l’età pre-tecnologica e che ora, nell’età della tecnica (che è la nostra singolare contemporaneità), dovranno essere riconsiderati, dismessi o rifondati dalle radici.

(...) La tecnica è l’essenza dell’uomo. Con il termine “tecnica” intendiamo sia l’universo dei mezzi (le tecnologie) che nel loro insieme compongono l’apparato tecnico, sia la razionalità che presiede al loro impiego in termini di funzionalità ed efficienza. Con questi carattere-

ri la tecnica è nata non come espressione dello “spirito” umano, ma come “rimedio” alla sua insufficienza biologica. (...) La tecnica [...] non tende a uno scopo, non promuove un senso, non apre scenari di salvezza, non redime, non svela la verità: la tecnica *funziona*. [E il suo funzionamento è planetario] (Galimberti, 2003, p. 33-34).

Il “Sistema Caligola” è anche figlio degli esperimenti medici nei campi di concentramento nazisti e della propaganda di Goebbels.

Il “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf” (“Cosa devo fare per essere felice?”)

Nella differenza tra azioni che sono tutte uguali e azioni che sono migliori di altre sono in gioco l’intelligenza artificiale (le azioni sono tutte uguali) e l’intelligenza naturale (alcune azioni sono migliori di altre, in base a una teoria morale o a una Legge naturale). Ed è in gioco, soprattutto, la società umana di tipo tradizionale (basata sul modello di uomo intelligente in modo naturale).

Cherea

[...] Amo e desidero sentirmi sicuro. La maggior parte della gente è come me. Non è in grado di vivere in un mondo nel quale la più folle fantasia può introdursi nella realtà in un attimo, come una lama nel cuore. Neanch’io posso più vivere in un simile mondo. Preferisco non perdere la testa.

Caligola

È una contraddizione.

Cherea

È vero. [...] Io sono un uomo come gli altri [...] arrivo ad augurarmi talvolta la morte di quelli che amo, a desiderare donne che le leggi della famiglia e dell’amicizia mi proibiscono di desiderare. Per essere logico, allora, dovrei uccidere o possedere. Ma credo che queste fantasie non abbiano alcuna importanza. Se tutti si lasciassero andare all’idea di realizzarle non potremmo più vivere né essere felici a questo mondo. E ancora una volta ti dico che è questo che conta.

Caligola

Allora credi in qualcosa di superiore.

Cherea

Credo che delle azioni siano migliori di altre.

Caligola

Io credo che siano tutte uguali (Camus, 1983, pp. 44-45).

Cherea

[...] Io – e dico io, sottolineo che sto parlando di me – io sono con voi, con la società. Non perché mi piaccia. Ma perché non sono io ad avere il potere, quindi le vostre ipocrisie e le vostre viltà mi danno maggiore protezione – maggiore sicurezza – delle leggi migliori [...]

Secondo Senatore

(saltando su una panca) Io non ti capisco bene, ma sono d'accordo con te quando dici che le fondamenta della nostra società sono minate. Per noi la questione è soprattutto morale. Non è così? Ditelo anche voi. La famiglia vacilla. Non c'è più pudore. Tutta Roma ha perduto la fede. Congiurati, la virtù ci chiama. Noi siamo il partito dell'onore e della proprietà. Su questi sacri principi si fondano l'ordine e la famiglia, che noi dobbiamo difendere (*ivi*, pp. 20-21).

Caligola

Tutto questo è molto chiaro e legittimo. Per la maggior parte degli uomini sarebbe anche logico. Non per te comunque. Tu sei intelligente [si veda anche la questione dell'intelligenza artificiale]. E l'intelligenza si paga cara, o la si rifiuta. Perché vuoi rifiutarla? (*idem*, p. 45)

Ecco alcuni profili del *Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf*, dai quali si evince che la conoscenza e la corretta gestione delle categorie predeterminate (tradizionali) possono essere d'aiuto ai fini della costruzione dell'identità, all'interno della società basata sull'intelligenza naturale.

In questo luogo [e cioè nel Lager, scrive Levi], lavarsi tutti i giorni nell'acqua torbida del lavandino immondo è praticamente inutile ai fini della pulizia e della salute; è invece importantissimo come sintomo di residua vitalità, e necessario come strumento di sopravvivenza morale. Devo confessarlo: dopo una sola settimana di prigonia, in me l'istinto della pulizia è sparito. Mi aggirò ciondolando per il lavatoio, ed ecco Steinlauf, il mio amico quasi cinquantenne, a torso nudo, che si strofina collo e spalle con scarso esito (non ha sapone) ma con estrema energia. Steinlauf mi vede e mi saluta, e senza ambagi mi domanda severamente perché non mi lavo. Perché dovrei lavarmi? starei forse meglio di quanto sto? piacerei di più a qualcuno? vivrei un giorno, un'ora di più? Vivrei anzi di meno, perché lavarsi è un lavoro, uno

spreco di energia e di calore. Non sa Steinlauf che dopo mezz'ora ai sacchi di carbone ogni differenza fra lui e me sarà scomparsa? [...] Ma Steinlauf mi dà sulla voce [...] e [...] mi somministra una lezione in piena regola. [...] questo ne era il senso, non dimenticato allora né poi: che appunto perché il Lager è una gran macchina per ridurci a bestie, noi bestie non dobbiamo diventare; che anche in questo luogo si può sopravvivere, e perciò si deve voler sopravvivere, per raccontare, per portare testimonianza; e che per vivere è importante sforzarci di salvare almeno lo scheletro, l'impalcatura, la forma della civiltà. Che siamo schiavi, privi di ogni diritto, esposti a ogni offesa, votati a morte quasi certa, ma che una facoltà ci è rimasta, e dobbiamo difenderla con ogni vigore perché è l'ultima: la facoltà di negare il nostro consenso (Levi, 1989, pp. 34-35)

Questa è l'unica regola del sistema *Cherea-Steinlauf*: per vivere e per tentare di essere felici è importante sforzarci di salvare almeno lo scheletro, l'impalcatura, la forma della civiltà, e cioè salvare la comunità sociale naturale.

Il “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf” e il “Sistema Caligola a confronto”. Il passaggio dall’uno all’altro e il “Modello di scrittura autobiografica di Levi”

Caligola, dopo la morte di Drusilla, prende alla lettera un'affermazione di un intendente (un burocrate) riguardante il tesoro dello stato e decide di portarla alle estreme conseguenze logiche, costruendo, a partire da essa, un sistema totale. È in questo modo che, nel «Caligola» di Camus, si passa dal preesistente “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf” (del quale faceva parte integrante lo stesso Caligola) al “Sistema Caligola”.

Caligola

(rialzando a stento il tono della voce, [mentre si guarda allo specchio, in un gioco di doppio]) Mostro, Caligola, mostro. Bisogna andarsene in fretta, subito. Come si può continuare a vivere con le mani vuote [dopo la morte di Drusilla] quando prima stringevano l'intera speranza del mondo? Come venirne fuori? [...]

Scipione

Dimmi, Cesonia, [Caligola] l'amava fino a questo punto [Drusilla]?

Cesonia

Di più, ragazzo mio. La desiderava.

Scipione

In che modo strano lo dici.

Cesonia

Perché, vedi, se l'avesse solamente amata, la sua morte non avrebbe cambiato niente. Le malattie dell'anima non sono gravi. Ci si salva con la malinconia. Invece no, lui oggi sente i morsi della carne. Brucia tutto.

Scipione

(*indiscreto*) Ma desiderava anche te.

Cesonia

Questo non ti riguarda.

(*Pausa*) Sì, mi desidera. È vero. Però non m'ama.

[...]

Scipione

(*con slancio*) Non puoi immaginare come [Caligola] è stato buono con me [prima che morisse Drusilla]. Mi ha aiutato. Ha aiutato la mia famiglia. Mi parlava del mio lavoro. Mi incoraggiava. Mi spiegava che la vita non è facile ma c'è pur sempre l'arte, la religione, l'amore. Mi diceva che non si deve mai fare soffrire nessuno. Che questo è il solo errore da evitare. E che bisogna cercare di essere giusti con se stessi e con gli altri, cantare la felicità ed essere in armonia con il mondo.

[...]

Entra Caligola [...]

Intendente

Eraamo preoccupati, Cesare.

Caligola

(*furioso, andandogli incontro*) Con che diritto?

Intendente

Beh, insomma...

(*Colto da improvvisa ispirazione, tutto d'un fiato*) Sì, tutto sommato, sai che ci sono da sistemare certi problemi che riguardano le finanze pubbliche, il Tesoro.

Caligola

(*scoppiando a ridere*) Il Tesoro? Ma certo, è vero, il Tesoro – è d'importanza capitale il Tesoro!

Intendente

(*soddisfatto*) Ma certo, Cesare, certo.

Caligola

(*continuando a ridere, a Cesonia*) Non è vero, cara? Non è vero che il Tesoro è fondamentale?

Cesonia

(*dolcemente*) No, Caligola. Non fino a questo punto.

Caligola

Non capisci niente. Il Tesoro è di un interesse estremo. È tutto così importante: le finanze, la morale pubblica, la politica estera, le spese militari, le leggi agrarie! Tutto fondamentale, te lo dico io. Tutto sullo stesso piano, la grandezza di Roma e la sua artrite. Ma ora ci penso io. [...] (*Con rabbia*) Sentitemi bene. Se il Tesoro è fondamentale, la vita umana non lo è. Ho deciso di essere logico. Vedrete quanto vi costerà la logica. Il potere ce l'ho io. Eliminerò chi mi contraddice, e anche le contraddizioni. [...]

È un imperatore che ve lo ordina. Sapete che cos'è un imperatore? È quello che detta la storia agli storici e dà dignità alle istituzioni che ne hanno bisogno (Camus, 1983, pp. 6-14)

Perché Levi scrive il suo romanzo autobiografico «Se questo è un uomo»? Questa domanda introduce l'ultima e breve questione del “Modello di scrittura autobiografica di Levi”. Lo fa per un bisogno che «assume il carattere di un impulso immediato e violento, tanto da rivaleggiare con gli altri bisogni elementari» (Levi, 1989, p. 2). In un certo senso, ciò accade anche per Camus.

Anche per lui, infatti, non è una questione di regole del vivere sociale, né di vivere con saggezza e in modo virtuoso, ma è qualcosa di ben più profondo che è nella natura umana e che con molta confusione può essere considerato sistematico.

Conclusioni

Rispetto alle domande poste all'inizio, è possibile concludere che, in presenza di ben precise situazioni circostanziate nelle quali il fattore umano dell'identità tende a essere azzerato con contestuale svuotamento dell'identità, si può ipotizzare che, in contesti plurilingue, possono esistere alcuni elementi minimi che ci consentono di sostenere:

- che le lingue cessano di essere potenti veicoli trans-culturali;
- che il potere concesso alla lingua contro la repressione, l’oppressione, i fraintendimenti e gli stereotipi può risultare progressivamente azzerato;
- che le traduzioni possono cessare progressivamente di svolgere le loro funzioni tipiche;
- che la conoscenza e la corretta gestione delle categorie predeterminate e degli oggetti quotidiani possono cessare progressivamente di essere d’aiuto, ma che *per vivere e per tentare di essere felici è importante sforzarci di salvare almeno lo scheletro, l’impalcatura, la forma della civiltà*;
- che possono mancare persino alcune parole “vitali”;
- che l’esperienza dello stigma, a causa delle informazioni che esso veicola, può essere oggetto della creazione di ulteriori stereotipi e pregiudizi (substereotipi e subpregiudizi), da parte degli stessi stigmatizzati, per senso di appartenenza;
- che relativamente alla questione dell’esistenza più “salutare”, è possibile individuare delle classi: la classe dei pessimisti, la classe degli ottimisti, gli oscillanti tra le due posizioni-limite dei pessimisti e degli ottimisti e gli agnostici.

Per l’ulteriore approfondimento teorico e empirico della questione, in base alle ipotesi qui formulate, i tre casi che ho definito “Sistema Lager” (istituzione totale), “Sistema Caligola” (sistema totale) e “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf”, nonché il modello che ho definito “Modello di scrittura autobiografica di Levi”, e anche la questione che ho segnalato del passaggio dal “Sistema Cherea-Steinlauf” al “Sistema Caligola”, possono costituire un vantaggio teorico.

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Part II

IDENTITÉ, EXIL ET QUÊTE DE L'ÂME LOCALE

«Comme dans une patrie du milieu»: l'écriture de l'exil dans les romans de Bijan Zarmandili

Alexandra Khaghani

Résumé: Le thème de l'exil parcourt l'oeuvre entière du romancier italien d'origine iranienne, Bijan Zarmandili (1941-2018). Qu'il soit entendu comme oubli de soi, comme nostalgie pour sa terre d'origine ou comme exclusion politique, l'exil est une zone d'indifférence entre *lieu* et *non-lieu* que Zarmandili (2004) représente par la métaphore de «la terre de l'entre-deux» (p. 14). Cette étude propose, en ce sens, une réflexion sur la fonction poétique de ce que l'auteur appelle «l'écriture hybride de l'exil» (2004, p. 13). L'identité fluctuante, et en constante évolution, de ses personnages est en effet indissociable de l'hybridité de l'écriture à travers laquelle l'auteur exilé accueille et exprime, dans le tissu de la langue, le déchirement que provoque la séparation de la langue maternelle. Cette zone médiane de l'écriture de l'exil rend compte, aux yeux de Zarmandili, de la valeur mythopoïétique de la littérature qui peut traduire, dans la langue, le «changement anthropologique» que connaît l'Italie multiéthnique de l'époque contemporaine.

Abstract: The theme of exile pervades the entire work of the Italian writer of Iranian origin, Bijan Zarmandili. The exile, a place of self-oblivion, of nostalgia for the lost homeland, of political exclusion, is a zone of indifference between place and no-place that Zarmandili (2004) represents through the metaphor of the “in-between homeland” (p. 14). This paper muses on the poetic function of what the author identifies as the “hybrid writing of exile” (2004, p. 13): in fact, the shifting identity, under constant evolution in his characters cannot be separated from the hybridism of the writing the exiled author uses to receive and embrace, through the language, the grief due to the separation from mother language. In that sense, Zarmandili attributes to literature a powerful mythopoetic value allowing to show the “anthropological change” that took place in the multi-ethnic Italy of the modern era.

Keywords: exile, nostalgia, identity, hybridity.

L'exil oblige à abandonner la langue maternelle. Terre des pères, langue des mères: c'est avec la langue de l'autre que l'on se fait une nouvelle patrie.

Cassin 2013, p. 74.

Dans un court essai consacré à la thématique de l'exil dans son œuvre, Bijan Zarmandili¹, écrivain italien d'origine iranienne, écrit:

Je pense que, parmi les quelques possibilités dont dispose l'exilé qui a perdu sa patrie, qui risque même de perdre son identité et peut-être, sa vie (comme ces mercenaires morts, non pas sous les coups d'épée, mais de nostalgie au cours de longues guerres), la capacité de changer la nostalgie en une œuvre créative pourrait être salvatrice (Zarmandili 2011a, p. 423)².

Cette déclaration a une valeur programmatique évidente, notamment parce que l'auteur y exprime des thèmes centraux de son œuvre

¹ Bijan Zarmandili [1941-2018] est né à Téhéran et s'est installé à Rome en 1960 pour y faire ses études universitaires. Après des années de militantisme politique au sein du parti communiste iranien, le *Tudeh*, il entreprend une activité journalistique, en tant qu'expert du Moyen-Orient. Il est l'auteur d'innombrables articles et de quelques monographies sur la politique du Moyen-Orient et s'est consacré, à partir de 2004, à l'écriture romanesque. Il a ainsi publié six romans: *La grande casa di Monirrieh* (2004), *L'estate è crudele* (2007), *Il cuore del Nemico* (2009), *I demoni del deserto* (2011), *Viene a trovarmi Simone Signoret* (2013), *Storia du Sima* (2016). Dans cet écrit, nous avons privilégié l'étude de quatre de ces romans, en laissant de côté *Il cuore del Nemico* ainsi que *Viene a trovarmi Simone Signoret*. Si le thème de l'exil est bien présent dans ces deux œuvres, il nous a semblé, d'une part, que l'activité terroriste du protagoniste de *Il cuore del Nemico* appelaient des considérations d'ordre historique et géopolitique que la brièveté de notre propos ne nous permet pas de traiter de façon approfondie. D'autre part, le protagoniste de *Viene a trovarmi Simone Signoret* – incarcéré par le régime islamique pour prétendue sympathie envers le sionisme – connaît, à travers l'emprisonnement, une forme d'exil. Nous avons toutefois porté notre intérêt sur les récits de Zarmandili qui décrivent des phénomènes d'expatriation, d'errance ou de fuite. Pour une description plus détaillée du profil biographique de l'auteur nous renvoyons à la thèse de doctorat d'Alice Miggiano (2015).

² Nous traduisons en français les extraits tirés des romans et des entretiens de B. Zarmandili.

romanesque: l'exil, bien sûr, mais aussi la nostalgie, l'éloignement de la terre natale et la perte d'identité qui en découle. Chacun de ces thèmes, nous le verrons, fournit une clé d'interprétation précieuse pour éclairer la poétique et la pensée de l'auteur. C'est ce qu'indique, sur le plan narratif, la centralité de la figure de l'exilé et des sentiments de nostalgie, de déracinement et d'errance qui se rattachent à la condition existentielle de l'exil.

Figures d'exilé(e)s

Dans *L'estate è crudele*, second roman de l'auteur, publié en 2007, le jeune militant communiste, Parviz, poursuit ses activités d'opposition au Shah Mohammad Reza depuis Rome où il demeure de 1959 à 1969, avant de retourner clandestinement en Iran où il sera assassiné par la Savak, l'organisation chargée de la sécurité et du renseignement au service du régime monarchique. C'est donc en tant qu'exilé politique qu'il arrive en septembre 1959 à l'aéroport de Ciampino où il tombe immédiatement dans un état de profond désarroi. Le narrateur nous décrit alors, selon un *topos* littéraire classique, le sentiment de regret et de tristesse qui caractérise le mal du pays:

Tout lui semblait hostile et distant, un sentiment d'angoisse et de nostalgie pour sa ville et sa famille lui était monté à la gorge. Ils étaient hors d'atteinte et interdits, les ruelles sombres de son quartier, le mur d'enceinte qui clôturait sa maison en cachant les géraniums et les roses, et la fière maternité de sa mère, enceinte de sa sœur Simin (Zarmandili 2007, p. 38).

Privé de son sol natal, Parviz fait aussi l'expérience douloureuse de l'exil de sa langue maternelle, le farsi. Dix ans après son arrivée en Italie, dans le train qui part de la Gare de Termini en direction de Cologne, d'où il gagnera l'Iran en passant par Istanbul et le Kurdistan, le jeune homme éprouve de nouveau – en quittant sa terre d'exil, cette fois – une agitation intérieure teintée de détresse et de chagrin que désigne le mot persan *ezterâb* et qui n'a pas d'équivalent en italien:

Il voit, au loin, la silhouette d'Orvieto et sa roche de tuf. Un sentiment de désolation envahit Parviz, la même solitude qu'il y a dix ans,

lorsqu'il était descendu à l'aéroport de Ciampino. Et de nouveau, il se tourmente à chercher un terme italien qui pourrait expliquer son *ezterâb* (Zarmandili 2007, p. 38).

Si ce passage correspond parfaitement à ce qu'énonce la citation de Barbara Cassin mise en exergue de cet article, à savoir que «l'exil oblige à abandonner la langue maternelle», il révèle en même temps la situation ambivalente propre à la condition de l'exilé. Sur le plan de l'identité notamment: en se fiançant à Maryam, jeune femme iranienne venue étudier la médecine à Rome, et en intégrant la section du Parti communiste italien du Ponte Milvio³, Parviz s'est bel et bien implanté à Rome où il est à la fois ailleurs et chez lui. Sous l'effet d'un paradoxe qui correspond au statut ambigu de Parviz, le voyage de retour à la terre natale est clairement présenté comme un déracinement et comme une condamnation à l'errance. Pour rentrer clandestinement en Iran, il devra ainsi, par deux fois, adopter une fausse identité: il gagnera la Turquie sous le nom d'Akbar Shustari, commerçant de tapis, puis traversera le Kurdistan sous une identité irakienne, «Mustafa Sharif, né à Shaqlawa, le 7 octobre 1942» et sera finalement fusillé lors de l'été 1978 à la veille de la Révolution iranienne. L'épilogue du roman se déroule dans le grand cimetière de Téhéran, le Behesht-e-Zahra, où sont inhumés Parviz et Maryam qui, même dans la mort et dans leur terre d'origine, n'échappent pas à leur condition d'exilés: les Gardiens de la révolution – ou Pasdaran – ont détruit, à maintes reprises, les pierres tombales «des deux kafar, des sans Dieu, des communistes» que Keivan, leur fils, a fait poser sur leurs sépultures pour empêcher qu'ils «ne restent des morts anonymes, clandestins, comme ils l'ont été vivants» (Zarmandili 2007, p. 177).

³ Le narrateur souligne à plusieurs reprises l'hospitalité de la section communiste du Ponte Milvio. Si, de prime abord, les compagnons italiens peinent à attribuer une identité à Parviz et Maryam qu'ils assimilent à des Espagnols, à des Français ou encore à des Grecs, leur interrogation laisse bientôt place à la volonté d'accueillir et d'inclure. Myriam constate ainsi que «pendant la conversation avec les communistes du Ponte Milvio, elle ne s'était pas sentie exclue et avait été traitée comme une des leurs [...]. Dès son arrivée en Italie, Myriam se sent d'ailleurs «immédiatement à son aise dans cette Rome maternelle, désenchantée et disponible et [trouve] que les Romains ressemblent étrangement aux habitants de son pays» (Zarmandili 2007, p. 25).

Contrairement au récit emblématique de l'exil et du retour chez soi, l'*Odyssée* homérique, dans les romans de Bijan Zarmandili, la fin de l'exil ne coïncide jamais avec la reconnaissance ou la reconquête d'une identité. Dans *I demoni del deserto*, le vieil Agha Soltani, condamné à errer vers la mer du Golfe en compagnie de sa petite-fille autiste qu'il connaît à peine, après que la ville de Bam a été détruite par un tremblement de terre, fait l'expérience tragique de la perte d'identité. Aussi révèle-t-il, au cours d'un long monologue intérieur:

Je me rends compte que je ne connais pas ma petite fille. C'étaient les autres qui s'occupaient d'elle, de ses bizarries: moi, j'étais le grand-père. J'étais le vieil homme de la famille, une autorité. [...] Soudain, tout a changé et je me sens perdu, astreint à des rôles que je ne sais pas jouer, devenu la cible de questions auxquelles je n'ai pas de réponse. «Papi, où allons-nous?» Je ne sais même pas moi-même vers où nous allons (Zarmandili 2011b, pp. 82-83).

Or, cette procédure de dépossession de soi est d'autant plus douloreuse que la destruction de la ville de Bam annule définitivement toute possibilité d'un retour au foyer. Dans l'essai que nous citions en ouverture de notre propos, Zarmandili (2011a) explique: «L'Odyssée du survivant du tremblement de terre est la métaphore du long voyage qu'accomplit l'exilé à vie, pour lequel le moment du retour n'arrive pas» (p. 423). L'odyssée de l'errance de Agha Soltani se déroule de façon significative dans l'immense désert de *Dasht-e-Lut* – le Désert du vide en français – qui s'étend au sud-est de l'Iran. En effet, ce désert est à la fois une étendue sans limite, un lieu de passage, voire un non-lieu, et la terre de l'antique Mésopotamie et du peuple des Sumériens qui, représentent, selon la légende, l'origine de notre civilisation⁴. On ne s'étonnera donc pas que l'anéantissement identitaire du protagoniste advienne dans cet espace de «l'indifférenciation principielle» (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2005, p. 349) dont le désert est le symbole, tant pour la religion judéo-chrétienne que dans l'Islam.

⁴ La citation tirée de l'épopée mésopotamienne de Gilgamesh qui ouvre le sixième chapitre du roman, est un indice de l'importance du paradigme épique dans le roman ainsi que de la stratification temporelle sur laquelle il est construit.

L'entre-deux de l'exil

Cet espace réel mais indéfini, qui brouille les frontières du dedans et du dehors, du passé et de l'avenir, peut être envisagé comme un symbole de l'exil, tel qu'il est représenté dans la production de Bijan Zarmandili. Car si l'exil est aussi bien le résultat d'une mesure juridico-politique de bannissement qu'un «événement traumatique [...] qui éloigne, arrache et déracine» (Fontes Baratto & Gagliano 2013, p. 16), il voue les personnages qui en sont frappés à un sort similaire: Parviz, ainsi que le protagoniste de *I demoni del deserto*, est condamné à mener une existence dans l'espace médian et indéterminé de l'entre-deux. À un niveau temporel d'abord, puisque la nostalgie ne fait pas autre chose que d'exacerber l'entre-temps qui sépare l'avant de l'après, la «patrie d'un autre temps» de celle que l'exilé ne reconnaît plus à son retour (Jankélévitch 1974, pp. 300-301). Au niveau spatial et existentiel, ensuite, puisque le sentiment d'appartenance à la terre origininaire se trouve dénaturé lorsque la vie s'enracine dans un nouveau lieu. Et enfin, au niveau linguistique, car la distance que l'exilé perçoit et subit entre sa langue maternelle et la langue étrangère qu'il pratique le projette dans ce que Barbara Cassin (2016) nomme «l'entre-deux-langues» (p. 228), cette zone complexe où l'opposition binaire de l'identité et de l'altérité s'efface pour ouvrir sur une recherche de nouvelles formes d'expression ou de pensée.

La protagoniste éponyme du dernier roman de l'auteur, la *Storia di Sima* est l'incarnation tragique de cette condition mixte d'inclusion et d'exclusion, d'intégration et de rejet, qui la conduira à un exil volontaire mais fatal. Sima est une jeune femme d'origine chirazienne née à Londres et venue s'installer à Rome où elle mène une vie confortable et bourgeoise après son mariage avec un architecte réputé, Stefano, père de son fils Dario. Sa vie bascule lorsqu'elle éprouve soudainement un désir incestueux envers son fils qui, peu après cet événement traumatisant, disparaîtra au cours d'une sortie avec ses amis: la scène qui ouvre le roman est l'élément déclencheur de la fuite de Sima qui fait alors l'expérience de son extranéité radicale par rapport au monde qui l'entoure. Alors qu'elle observe le quartier aisné de Parioli depuis son balcon, elle confesse:

En levant les yeux sur le feuillage des pins qui couvrait une partie de la petite tour érigée sur le bâtiment d'en face, je me suis demandée ce que je faisais dans ce quartier que je détestais, dans cette maison que je n'avais jamais aimée, dans cette ville envahie par l'odeur nauséabonde de l'encens de ses mille églises, et où je me sentais étrangère (Zarmandili 2016, pp. 13-14).

Si l'on trouve dans cette confession la clef de compréhension de l'exil volontaire de Sima, on comprend également que l'attraction interdite qu'elle ressent pour son fils n'en constitue pas la cause véritable. En effet, Sima, que son époux décrit comme une «étrangère dans l'âme» choisit d'incarner négativement la condition hybride de l'exilé en reniant l'Iran natal de ses parents et en refusant de créer toute attache avec les lieux où elle vit⁵. Significativement, ce processus de détachement de toute appartenance identitaire passe par un refus catégorique de la langue maternelle. À peine arrivée à Rome, où elle s'est installée «sans regrets» et «sans avoir éprouvé la moindre nostalgie en quittant ses parents et sa maison londonienne», Sima nous livre un souvenir éloquent:

Parfois, cependant, – raconte-t-elle – la voix de ma mère et son accent *shirazi* me revenait à l'esprit. [...] Elle parlait avec un ton d'outre-tombe et ses pleurnicheries continues m'irritaient, je ne supportais pas ses jérémiades. Je ne répondais pas et je voyais qu'elle avait les yeux brillants de larmes.

«Je vais étudier, *mommy*».

Je le disais volontairement en anglais et je savais que j'accentuais ainsi la distance infranchissable entre elle et moi (Zarmandili 2016, p. 25).

Exilée, depuis toujours, de sa langue maternelle, Sima ne se retrouve, paradoxalement qu'en faisant le choix de l'auto-exclusion et en anéantissant toute forme d'identité individuelle. Après avoir abandonné sa maison et son époux, elle annonce en termes clairs

⁵ De la ville de Londres où son père se montre «constamment inquiet du fait d'être considéré comme un étranger», elle affirme: «j'avais retiré de ma mémoire les lieux où j'étais née, ma maison du quartier de Swiss Cottage, mais aussi les écoles que j'avais fréquentées à Londres» (Zarmandili 2016, p. 129).

le lien qui existe entre la régression à l'anonymat social et l'espace de liberté qui s'ouvre à elle: «Je me sentais plus que jamais étrangère, une marginale, prisonnière d'un sort qui me suivrait n'importe où; et j'ai eu la nette sensation que le seul salut contre l'ignominie était de me réfugier parmi les invisibles, parmi les étrangers comme moi» (Zarmandili, 2016, p. 60). Commence alors une vie d'errance et de mendicité sur les places de Rome, sur les rives du Tibre où elle se lie d'amitié avec Ahmed, un marginal somalien et enfin dans la Gare centrale de Milan, autant de lieux de circulation et de transit, d'espaces liminaires qui matérialisent l'existence marginale de Sima. C'est dans une totale indifférence qu'elle meurt, plus tard, dans la Gare de Milan où tout le monde la désigne comme «L'Étrangère», une figure anonyme qui incarne l'aliénation totale de Sima. Le médecin dépêché pour constater le décès de la femme précise, en ce sens, que «l'on n'a jamais su son prénom, [qu'] elle est connue ici comme l'Étrangère [...]; à la regarder, elle pouvait même être sicilienne, calabraise, enfin méridionale, mais qui sait?» (Zarmandili 2016, p. 163). Comme le font remarquer Anna Fontes Baratto et Marina Gagliano (2013),

L'exil affecte le corps, et par là, l'identité du personnage, atteint par une défiguration de soi qui le conduit à frôler les limites du non-humain que sont l'animalité ou la mort. Quelles que soient les causes de l'exil ou les formes qu'il prend, il s'agit de toute façon d'une condition qui désocialise: c'est par là qu'il mine en profondeur l'identité, voire l'appartenance au genre humain, des personnages (p. 29).

Qu'il soit subi ou revendiqué, donc, l'exil bouleverse aussi bien les catégories spatio-temporelles qu'il dénature les langues et défigure les corps. Or, pour caractériser le paradigme de l'exil à un niveau stylistique, poétique et énonciatif il n'est pas anodin que Bijan Zarmandili recourt, précisément, à un terme d'origine biologique qui indique le croisement de deux variétés ou espèces différentes: l'hybridité.

L'écriture hybride de l'exil

La métaphore de l'hybridité revient, de façon récurrente, sous la plume de l'auteur pour désigner l'ambivalence et l'angoisse identitaire qui est le propre de l'écrivain exilé. Ainsi, dès son premier roman, *La grande casa di Monirrieh*, Bijan Zarmandili établit un lien étroit entre l'abandon de la terre natale et l'hybridité de l'écriture: alors que Zahra vient de s'éteindre dans sa grande maison du quartier aisné de Monirrieh à Téhéran, il revient à sa fille aînée de prévenir son frère, qui a émigré depuis des années à l'étranger, du décès de leur mère. Ce dernier a besoin de sa sœur pour que «la distance et la proximité dessinent, avec naturel, le fil de l'histoire». Le narrateur précise ainsi: «C'est elle, une femme, qui doit coudre pour lui les images qui livrent leur mère à l'écriture hybride de l'exil, où, comme dans une patrie du milieu, ceux qui restent et ceux qui sont partis, ceux qui sont revenus et ceux qui ne reviendront pas, pourraient vivre ensemble» (Zarmandili 2004, pp. 12-14). Associée à l'image de la «patrie du milieu», «l'écriture hybride» est la transposition poétique de cette figure de l'entre-deux qui, nous l'avons vu, caractérise l'intervalle, temporel, local et linguistique dans lequel se trouve tout personnage exilé. Or, si ce processus de déterritorialisation de la langue peut déboucher sur de nouvelles formes d'inventivité expressive, il est, avant tout, un événement perturbateur qui menace le discours de l'écrivain, en dénaturalisant son rapport à la langue. Dans la préface d'une anthologie de poètes iraniens traduits en italien, Bijan Zarmandili avait thématisé cette métamorphose de la langue d'origine au cours de la traduction en déclarant:

Je connais le farsi, la langue d'origine des auteurs de ce volume. Je sais ce que cela signifie que de la quitter et d'adopter une nouvelle langue: une opération que l'on pourrait comparer, non sans exagération, au meurtre de sa propre mère [...]. Quand on m'a demandé de m'occuper des poètes qui composent leurs vers dans une langue qui n'est pas la leur, j'ai ressenti un certain malaise. J'ai pensé à l'hybride, à l'hybridité. Et ce terme m'a procuré de l'inquiétude, un sentiment de discordance et d'ambiguïté. Avant tout, j'ai eu peur de ne pas comprendre pleinement le labeur du poète qui affronte l'éloignement de sa patrie pour se rapprocher d'une «patrie imaginaire»: une scission sans aucun doute douloureuse et pas toujours féconde (Miggiano 2015, p. 52).

Si Zarmandili insiste sur le déchirement que provoque la séparation d'avec la langue maternelle, c'est parce qu'il confère à l'expérience de la douleur une puissance créatrice: on se souvient qu'il attribuait à l'exilé, «la capacité de changer la nostalgie en une œuvre créative [...]». Ainsi, l'hybridité pourrait apparaître comme une forme d'écriture qui, au lieu de neutraliser les différences et les oppositions, les juxtaposerait pour inviter à repenser les structures institutionnelles et culturelles de notre société. On sait la centralité qu'occupe le concept d'hybridité dans les études coloniales et postcoloniales et la pluralité de sens et d'interprétation qu'il revêt⁶. On ne saurait aborder une question d'une telle ampleur, notamment parce que ses implications sémantiques diffèrent selon que les deux langues prises dans le discours sur l'hybridité entretiennent ou non, un rapport dominant/dominé issu de la colonisation. Dans le cas de Bijan Zarmandili, l'hybridité a d'abord un caractère poétique. Elle se manifeste très clairement à travers les innombrables mots persans qui émaillent ses romans et pour lesquels l'auteur ne fournit aucune traduction: il s'agit, très souvent de termes culinaires, juridiques ou religieux qui ancrent le discours dans une réalité culturelle double⁷. Mais c'est aussi en représentant des personnages – en particulier féminins – contradictoires et excessifs que l'auteur introduit des figures hybrides dans sa langue. On pense au personnage de Sima qui, non seulement prend la parole pour nous faire le récit de son histoire mais exprime un désir sexuel foncièrement transgressif vis-à-vis de son fils: une posture énonciative qui renverse l'un des stéréotypes occidentaux de la femme orientale. Ce stéréotype, Zarmandili le met en évidence par le biais d'une citation de *L'orientalisme* d'Edward W. Said (1980) en exergue de *La grande casa di Monirrieh*: «Prenons par exemple la rencontre de Flaubert avec une

⁶ Nous pensons, entre maints autres ouvrages de référence, au livre fondateur de H.K. Bhabha (1994), *The Location of Culture mais aussi à l'étude de A. Prabhu* (2007) *Hybridity. Limits, Transformations, Prospects*, New York, State University of New York Press.

⁷ Dans *I demoni del deserto*, par exemple, le grand-père déclare au sujet de sa petite-fille: « Elle est obsédée par le sang. Dans ses délires, elle ne fait que répéter *khun, khun*. [...] Aujourd'hui avec cette histoire du *shirin polo*, tu es parvenu à la distraire» (2011b, pp. 86-88).

courtisane égyptienne, rencontre qui devait produire un modèle très répandu de la femme orientale: celle-ci ne parle jamais d'elle-même, elle ne fait jamais montre de ses émotions, de sa présence ou de son histoire. C'est lui qui parle pour elle et qui la représente» (p. 36).

La mise en perspective de deux univers linguistiques et culturels différents a ainsi, en dernière analyse, une portée éminemment politique, que la littérature dite de la migration nourrit en interrogeant les normes et les modèles sociaux et culturels des sociétés européennes. L'auteur écrit en ce sens:

La littérature de l'immigration – mais peut-être serait-il mieux de la définir comme la littérature de l'exil – de notre époque historique, est un phénomène qui repose sur un immense et extraordinaire mouvement de masse qui déplace des millions de personnes d'un continent à un autre, en déterminant la naissance et le développement progressif d'une culture hybride, et donc nouvelle, qui n'est pas la somme ou l'intégration entre deux ou plusieurs cultures [...] mais le résultat d'un processus complexe qui impose une sorte de métamorphose à toutes les cultures impliquées dans ce processus» (2011a, p. 429)

C'est une tâche politique, voire anthropologique, que l'auteur assigne donc à l'écriture, inquiétante mais bel et bien féconde, de l'hybridité.

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Écrire le continent noir

Mary Claire Brunelli

Résumé: Cet article veut montrer comment la vision euro-centrique de l'Afrique à l'époque moderne a été médiatisée par des textes écrits couvrant une région de peuples multiples sans écriture autochtone dépendant entièrement de la tradition orale. Fondé sur la croyance généralisée selon laquelle seule une documentation primaire pouvait alimenter l'histoire, un effort multinational pour construire une narration du continent donna lieu à des recherches archéologiques, des rapports ethnologiques, des fictions mythologiques, des héros légendaires, et une poésie épique émanant d'écrivains européens comme africains de la période coloniale des dix-neuvième et vingtième siècles. Le but de ces textes fut d'imposer une tradition écrite qui humaniserait ses sujets, correspondrait au narratif contemporain de l'histoire globale, et promouvrirait une relation euro-africaine dynamique pour l'avenir. Malgré ces excellentes intentions de l'ethnologie africaniste et de la Négritude littéraire, les écrits qui tentèrent de valider et de célébrer les peuples africains sont décrédibilisés par leur dépendance des langues européennes et leur tendance à romancer à l'excès. Cet article étudiera le reportage ethnographique du dix-neuvième siècle, principalement de Leo Frobenius, et la littérature du vingtième siècle, particulièrement la poésie de Léopold Sédar Senghor, afin de montrer comment l'écriture a été utilisée pour mettre en avant, renforcer et manipuler le portrait de l'Afrique.

Abstract: This paper discusses how the Eurocentric vision of African identity in modern times has been mediated through written texts surrounding a diverse region of peoples all lacking an indigenous writing system and relying entirely on oral tradition. Founded on the predominant belief that only primary documentation could substantiate history, a multinational effort to construct a continental narrative produced archaeological research, ethnological reports, mythological musings,

legendary heroes, and epic poetry from both European and African writers during the colonial period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The purpose of these texts was to impose a written tradition that would humanize its subjects, correspond with the contemporary account of global history, and promote a dynamic Eurafican relationship for the future. Despite the best intentions of Africanist ethnology and Négritude literature, the writings that sought to validate and celebrate African peoples are undermined by their dependency on European languages and their tendency toward extravagant fictionalization. This paper will consider nineteenth-century ethnological reportage, mostly from Leo Frobenius, and twentieth-century literature, especially the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor, to demonstrate how writing has been used to advance, strengthen, and manipulate the portrait of Africa.

Keywords: Africa, ethnology, Négritude, tradition

Des expéditions du seizième siècle à la colonisation impériale du dix-neuvième, un portrait de l'Afrique se dégage, marqué par l'idéologie européenne. Afin de l'intégrer dans l'histoire écrite produite dans les empires coloniaux, il serait nécessaire de fournir des sources: un dossier scientifique et un catalogue littéraire qui indiqueraient l'existence d'une civilisation ancienne et sophistiquée dont l'héritière serait digne de prendre sa place dans le monde moderne. Puisque la tradition africaine se sert exclusivement de l'oralité et n'a pas produit de système d'écriture, il incombe aux occidentaux africanistes et aux Africains occidentalisés d'écrire le vécu de ce vaste continent mystérieux et méconnu. La période coloniale connaît un foisonnement d'activités de la part des africanistes du monde entier. Ethnologues, archéologues et journalistes se consacrent à la découverte objective du territoire et de ses habitants. À partir de leurs écrits à visée scientifique se développe un corpus littéraire en quête d'une connaissance plus intime de l'âme locale. Il comprend des romans coloniaux, des épopées historiques et de la poésie. Pourtant, l'identité africaine qui émerge de cette littérature est largement une construction aux enjeux politiques de l'impérialisme à la Négritude. Cet article examinera la littérature africaine postcoloniale – un mélange de faits (ethnographie)

et de fiction (romans et poèmes) – qui s'appuie sur l'idéologie occidentale pour imposer un patrimoine artificiel servant les intérêts d'un fantasme eurafricain.

Le mouvement africaniste se déclenche dans un contexte politique façonné par certains impératifs économiques. Au dix-neuvième siècle, le désir d'empire domine la pensée des pays occidentaux qui sont en compétition pour coloniser de nouveaux territoires et agrandir leurs marchés. La Conférence de Berlin en 1884 trace les limites géographiques de la division et du partage de l'Afrique. Parmi les quatorze états européens qui y participent, l'Allemagne, la Belgique, la France et la Grande-Bretagne sont les grands gagnants. Pourtant, il est difficile de gouverner de vastes territoires à distance, surtout à cause des tensions raciales. Il paraît donc nécessaire aux puissances impérialistes d'introduire aux colonies un système bureaucratique qui assure la supériorité de la race blanche pour le plus grand bien du continent noir.

Terence Ranger (historien anglais, 1929-2015) montre que la stratégie d'intégration sociale et politique mise en place par les colonisateurs dépend de l'introduction en Afrique de traditions falsifiées¹. Par exemple, avant d'introduire les souverains européens aux colonies, il faut y promouvoir la «théologie» du monarque absolu. On rappelle aux Africains leurs propres rois tribaux des temps anciens pour justifier le roi des Anglais, l'empereur des Français et le Kaiser des Allemands comme symboles nationalistes régnant sur des états centralisés.

Les colonisateurs vont réorganiser la société des territoires pour y assurer la présence blanche en construisant un fort édifice administratif. Ils introduisent la coutume des honoraires dans la systématisation des fonctions sociales, telles l'éducation, l'organisation des métiers, le commerce et l'armée. Cette nouvelle structure hiérarchisée intègre les indigènes tout en empêchant ceux-ci de contester la supériorité européenne. La société africaine s'adapte aux nouvelles «traditions» étrangères, déguisées en véritable histoire africaine, qui s'infiltrent peu à peu dans le souvenir collectif:

¹ Voir Ranger (1983), «The Invention of Tradition in North Africa».

«La tradition inventée» fait référence à un ensemble de pratiques régies en général par des règles de nature rituelle ou symbolique, officiellement ou tacitement acceptées, qui visent à inculquer certaines valeurs et attitudes par la répétition, ce qui implique automatiquement de la continuité avec le passé. En fait, ces pratiques cherchent autant que possible à établir de la continuité avec un passé historiquement valable. (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1)²

Dans la période coloniale et bien après, des traditions importées et inventées renforcent l'idée d'un asservissement culturel endémique à la race africaine. Le résultat est la création d'une communauté artificielle enracinée dans une fausse histoire de pouvoir hiérarchisé rendant possible la consolidation de nouveaux régimes impériaux.

La domination bureaucratique se nourrit de l'activité intellectuelle et littéraire. Ainsi la recherche scientifique, comme les œuvres littéraires, constituent une sorte de propagande pour l'historicisation de l'Eurafrique. Dans sa thèse de 1925, Roland Lebel (français, 1893-1964) revient sur le rôle de la littérature dans l'entité franco-africaine: «L'histoire de l'Afrique, c'est d'abord l'histoire des livres qui ont relaté la lente ‘pénétration’ française dans cette partie du monde: l'Afrique occidentale telle qu'elle a été dite dans la *littérature française*» (Lebel, 1925/2014, p. xix). Lebel décrit l'apparition des ouvrages techniques, savants et pratiques qui font découvrir l'Afrique au lecteur français. Pour lui, la «francisation» de l'Afrique ne devrait pas encourager l'assimilation mais préserver les différences culturelles. Tout en valorisant l'intégrité de la culture africaine, son argument manifeste de forts partis pris colonialistes: «La domination française a soulevé la ‘mystérieuse Afrique’ du chaos. L'œuvre coloniale est exemplaire de la gloire de la France républicaine» (p. 282). Comme la plupart des africanistes de l'époque, Lebel interprète la colonisation comme un geste moral en faveur des Africains.

² “‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish a continuity with a suitable historic past”.

L'analyse de Lebel reprend le travail antérieur de l'archéologue et ethnologue allemand Leo Frobenius (1873-1938). Un des premiers intellectuels à s'intéresser à l'Afrique, Frobenius affirme que son étude contribue au développement des sciences, de l'histoire et de la culture de l'humanité³:

Le passé africain est intimement lié aux monuments préhistoriques des hommes des cavernes du sud de la France et de l'Espagne, au problème étrusque et à la naissance de la culture égyptienne, et cela indique une nouvelle méthodologie pour l'étude des questions fondamentales de l'histoire humaine. Ce que nous pouvons apprendre aujourd'hui des religions et des institutions sociales de l'Afrique, des formes de l'art et de la poésie, est énormément important pour notre connaissance de l'humanité et peut transformer radicalement notre compréhension du passé⁴ (1921/2007, p. 54).

Frobenius parcourt le continent pour observer et transcrire les données culturelles de plusieurs civilisations africaines. Ses conclusions ne sont pas toujours correctes, et ses interprétations sont parfois un peu fantaisistes. L'histoire qu'il propose est un mélange de faits et de fiction. Elle réussit néanmoins à mettre en lumière les cultures indigènes et le passé de celles-ci qui constituent le «géant massif et rude» partagé entre les empires européens (1940, p. 12).

Selon Frobenius, la culture est un organisme social. Chacune est caractérisée par son propre *paideuma*, l'essence spirituelle et mystique d'un peuple qui s'exprime dans son style artistique et son esprit commun. Pour lui, le fait que Blancs et Noirs aient des *paideumae* différents explique les tensions raciales. La partialité de Frobenius se révèle

³ Lebel confirme cette position sur l'importance intellectuelle de l'Afrique: «La connaissance de l'Afrique noire est un fait important qui augmente le patrimoine humain» (1925/2014, p. 283).

⁴ “The African past is intimately related to the prehistoric monuments of the cave-dwellers of southern France and Spain, to the Etruscan problem and the dawn of Egyptian culture, and this points a new way to the study of the more fundamental questions of human history. Whatever we can learn today of African religions and social institutions, art forms and poetry, is of immense importance for our knowledge of mankind and may radically alter our understanding of the past”.

dans cette analyse: «Évidemment l'Africain méprisé est plus proche à l'appréhension démoniaque intuitive au cœur de sa civilisation que nous les occidentaux intellectualisés auxquelles le *paideuma* reste caché d'une accumulation des faits objectifs et sans âme»⁵ (1921/2007, p. 27). Pourtant, le *paideuma* ne résume pas l'ensemble d'une race, dit-il, en établissant la multiplicité des civilisations africaines caractérisées par des *paideumae* distincts. Ses recherches archéologiques révèlent l'évolution des *paideumae* des sociétés anciennes et leur influence sur les sociétés contemporaines.

Au travers d'une comparaison des *paideumae* d'une région sur un axe temporel, Frobenius propose l'idée d'une morphologie culturelle qui implique le progrès constant des sociétés africaines à travers les âges. En outre, il élabore une généalogie culturelle africaine qu'il rattache aux précurseurs des civilisations européennes. En l'absence d'écriture, Frobenius étudie des artéfacts paléolithiques pour proposer l'existence d'une civilisation ancienne sophistiquée à la manière occidentale. Il prétend que les peintures rupestres révèlent une parenté – “kinship” – entre les anciennes sociétés méditerranéennes du nord-ouest de l'Afrique et celles du sud-est de l'Europe⁶. Son étude archéologique aboutit à des conclusions sociologiques:

La philosophie du nord exprimée en peintures d'animaux était d'équivalent de la sensibilité du sud au monde des plantes. L'expérience frénétique du nord et l'oscillation entre la tension élevée et la détente profonde ont pour équivalent une existence crépusculaire, un état de rêve; ici la soumission à la vie, là une vie soumise à la volonté⁷ (1930/2007, p. 70).

⁵ “Clearly the despised African is closer to a daemonic intuitive apprehension of the core of his civilisation than are we intellectualized Westerners, from whom the *paideuma* is hidden by an accumulation of soulless, objective facts”.

⁶ Frobenius se consacre à la découverte de formes originelles de la culture humaine pour préciser les correspondances interculturelles. Ses recherches en Afrique, en Europe, en Indonésie et en Australie reflètent son désir de jeter un pont entre l'Occident et ses nouveaux territoires colonisés. Voir Frobenius, 1930/2007, p. 63.

⁷ “The northern philosophy expressed in animal pictures was matched by the southern sensitivity to the plant world. The northern experience of frenzy and the oscillation

Cette analyse suggère qu'il admire davantage le mode de vie africain (du sud) que celui de sa propre culture (du nord). La tension entre le besoin de documentation scientifique/objective et le désir d'interprétation artistique/subjective est évidente dans son style littéraire. Cela implique un effort pour humaniser le sujet africain tout en flattant la sensibilité du lecteur européen. En revanche, il suggère chez l'Africain l'existence d'un esprit d'asservissement volontaire, lequel rend possible la subordination impériale. Par comparaison avec la culture entreprenante du nord, celle du sud apparaît comme quelque peu paresseuse et rêveuse, prête à se soumettre à une volonté extérieure.

Frobenius se sert des recherches géologiques pour corroborer son interprétation. Il déclare qu'un important changement climatique a influencé le développement des cultures africaines. À l'époque paléolithique, le Sahara et les déserts de Nubie et de Libye étaient des territoires fertiles où prospéraient des civilisations puissantes et organisées. Cet «Âge d'Or» africain est contemporain de l'Âge de Glace en Eurasie. Frobenius affirme que la désertification physique de cette région a son pendant dans sa morphologie culturelle. Des transformations écologiques ont entravé le développement des civilisations africaines qui, dépourvues d'écriture, ont disparu et sombré dans l'oubli. Frobenius considère avec optimisme la modernisation européanisée du vingtième siècle. Il y voit le renouvellement de la civilisation paléolithique méditerranéenne.

Frobenius prétend que les héritiers de l'Eurafrigue paléolithique se sont installés dans la région du Togo, colonie allemande jusqu'à la Première Guerre Mondiale, ensuite rachetée par les Anglais et les Français. Par ailleurs, il déclare que cette région est le site du continent mythique de l'Atlantide, lequel nourrit l'imagination européenne depuis Platon. L'Atlantide est non seulement le sujet de contes mais aussi le but de plusieurs expéditions archéologiques qui resteront vaines. Frobenius prétend avoir trouvé quelques objets attestant de cette civilisation éteinte en Afrique. Il mentionne en particulier une sculpture en bronze d'une tête masculine. Datant de plus de dix mille

tion between high tension and deep relaxation is matched here by a twilight existence, a dream state; here a surrender to life, there a life subservient to the will".

ans, l'objet porte l'insigne de Poséidon, dieu grec de la mer. De plus, la physionomie du visage ne présente pas les caractéristiques typiques de la race nègre. Frobenius y voit la preuve de l'invasion athénienne de l'Atlantide, décrite par Platon. Il existait, propose-t-il, une civilisation blanche sur la terre africaine bien avant l'arrivée des colonisateurs. Les traces de cette Atlantide blanche africaine se manifestent dans les aspects culturels les plus sophistiqués des sociétés africaines, tels que l'art, l'architecture, la technologie, certaines structures sociales et le pouvoir militaire.

Frobenius renforce cette théorie avec des remarques sur le *paideuma* des peuples africains:

Les peuples de l'Afrique sont joyeux, volubiles, exubérants. Pourtant le style de leur expression spirituelle est grave et austère aujourd'hui, comme il l'était auparavant. Ce style doit être né à un moment, puis doit s'être cristallisé dans son caractère propre. Il est dépositaire de l'enchantement de cette naissance mystérieusement lointaine⁸ (1930/2007, p. 61).

Ce passage suggère que le caractère spirituel africain reflète son héritage hellénique. Au contact des Grecs, les Africains seraient devenus pensifs et sombres. Pourtant, cette histoire improbable (et bien fictive) ennoblit la race méprisée et du coup inverse la signification de l'Autre: c'est l'Europe, héritière de l'ancien empire gréco-romain qui est ici rendue exotique, et l'Afrique est alors digne d'en partager la généalogie culturelle.

La théorie de l'Atlantide africaine déplaît à l'administration impérialiste et aux collègues de Frobenius. Son projet de valorisation africaine brouille le projet colonisateur de subjugation. Il est allé trop loin. L'article du 30 janvier 1911 paru dans le *New York Times* exprime la réaction contemporaine:

⁸ "The peoples of Africa are merry, voluble, vivacious. But the style of their spiritual expressiveness is grave and austere now, as it was in ages past. This style must have originated somewhere, come to birth at some time, and then crystallized into its particular character. It contains the enchantment of an enigmatically far-off birth".

Les archéologues et des spécialistes de la Grèce classique ici à New York étaient peu disposés hier à débattre de l'histoire Frobenius. Pour eux il était impossible de juger ou d'exprimer une opinion sur les minces données exposées dans ce travail, et ils ont souligné que la question était tellement obscurcie par des mythes et des légendes qu'il était presque impossible de prouver quoique ce soit sur ce sujet⁹ (Source tiré du *New York Times* Archive).

Le rejet ferme de cette théorie révèle les préjugés qui influencent les études scientifiques de l'époque. L'intérêt pour l'Afrique dépend toujours des rapports de pouvoir. On est peu disposé à concéder une liaison – ancienne ou moderne – entre la culture la plus respectée et celle qui est la plus méprisée, ou à incorporer l'Afrique, dépourvue de documents primaires, dans l'histoire du monde¹⁰. Puisque les sociétés indigènes dépendent de la tradition orale, elles ne peuvent pas s'expliquer aux yeux des autorités impérialistes. En l'absence de preuves écrites, les archéologues rejettent l'hypothèse de l'Atlantide africaine.

Frobenius poursuit un autre projet pour dépeindre l'Afrique. Il travaille sur les cartes géographiques pour restituer l'intégrité culturelle du territoire. En 1929 il publie *Atlas Africanus*, une collection de cartes qui représentent les phénomènes culturels du continent. Frobenius affirme que ses cartes sont une forme de communication visuelle et symbolique: «C'est la culture qui s'exprime à travers ses plans»¹¹ (p. 7). Avec son entreprise cartographique, Frobenius dessine le cadre d'une histoire culturelle qui n'a pas de documentation originelle.

De plus, Frobenius tente de ramener l'Afrique dans la tradition philologique. Il se met à solliciter et cataloguer des contes folkloriques

⁹ “Archaeologists and Greek scholars in this city were unwilling yesterday to discuss Frobenius' story. They said that it was impossible to judge or express an opinion on the small data that had been received here, and pointed out that the matter was so obscured by myth and legend that it would be almost impossible to prove anything about it”.

¹⁰ À cette époque, on s'appuie sur la doctrine de Leopold von Ranke (allemand, 1795-1886). Fondateur de la méthode moderne de la science historique, Ranke affirme que seuls les témoignages directs et les documents primaires peuvent authentifier les événements et les personnages de l'histoire.

¹¹ “Culture itself speaks through these maps”.

de diverses civilisations indigènes. La narration orale africaine est incapable de renforcer un héritage commun susceptible d'unifier les sociétés du continent et de lier les générations d'une société. Dans son œuvre *Paideuma* (1921), Frobenius constate la difficulté de découvrir des légendes ancestrales, et en particulier de trouver des griots. En général, les contes sont assez ésotériques et peu séduisants pour le public européen. Pourtant, Frobenius admire l'effet esthétique de l'art narratif où les gestes et l'intonation sont aussi importants que la parole. Il avoue que la traduction écrite serait incapable d'en reproduire l'âme vive – “reproduce its living soul” (p. 25) – mais il ressent néanmoins le besoin de transcrire ces histoires pour le lectorat européen.

En tout, il publie douze volumes de contes africains. Son catalogue consiste aussi en représentations visuelles des mythes en objets et en peintures. Quant à l'écriture de Frobenius, son style est vivant et direct. Il s'efforce de représenter le *paideuma* panafricain: «Tout suinte la même odeur des feux des huttes enfumées, des peaux en sueur et trempées de graisse et des glandes animales. Tout est pratique, austère, sombre, tectonique»¹² (1930/2007, p. 61). Pourtant, dans son désir de valoriser la narration originelle, le projet de Frobenius semble plutôt impérialiste. Il impose une tradition littéraire européenne à des cultures qui s'attachent à l'oralité; en les rendant lisibles il efface leur intégrité. Le «don» de la littérature n'est qu'une invitation au conformisme colonialiste.

À côté de l'œuvre ethnologique se développe une littérature coloniale. Au dix-neuvième siècle, elle consiste en récits de voyage qui traitent plus de l'expérience touristique que de l'actualité de la contrée, et de romans sentimentaux exotiques qui reposent sur des préjugés racistes. En 1925, Roland Lebel déplore que le «vrai» et «utile» roman colonial soit encore à écrire. Il encourage la contiguïté entre l'ethnographie et la fiction et prône l'abandon des anciennes formules exotiques et pittoresques. Selon Lebel, le nouveau roman colonial devrait rendre objectivement l'expérience d'une Afrique désormais française. Plusieurs romanciers s'attachent à cette mission; il s'agit d'occidentaux

¹² “Everything exudes the same odour of smoking hut fires, sweating, grease-soaked skins and animal glands. Everything is practical, austere, stern, tectonic”.

qui se sont «assimilés» dans la culture locale et d'indigènes désireux de faire connaître leur patrimoine. Ce genre de littérature représente un danger pour les colonisateurs qui veulent profiter des colonies mais qui craignent le discours anticolonial qui s'y développe. Pourtant, la plupart de ces ouvrages africains raniment le sentiment patriotique en soulignant l'héroïsme de l'action colonisatrice. Lebel conclut que l'auteur colonial poursuit «une enquête savante et une conquête morale; il sert la science africaine et la politique coloniale» (p. 238).

En 1937 Paul Hazoumé (béninois, 1890-1980) écrit *Doguicimi*, le premier roman historique africain, qui reçoit un grand succès et est couronné de prix littéraires. Défenseur du colonialisme français, Hazoumé représente les usages et les traditions du royaume précolonial du Dahomey. Le texte s'approche du reportage en s'intéressant aux éléments historiques et ethnologiques, récoltés après vingt-cinq ans de recherche par l'auteur, pour créer un portrait social. Dans son «Avertissement», Hazoumé renforce certains stéréotypes bons et mauvais du Nègre (la cupidité, la fidélité, la magnanimité et la tyrannie) tout en affirmant que «l'humanité est partout la même». En outre, il demande qu'on apprécie davantage le côté documentaire de son œuvre que le romanesque de celle-ci. Quant au style, Hazoumé s'inspire de la tradition européenne littéraire, particulièrement du romantisme et de la littérature courtoise. Son «roman historique» est donc une expression occidentale de l'esprit africain. Surtout *Doguicimi* est un discours sur la colonisation qui traite des différences entre les races, de la conscience de la domination, de la mission civilisatrice et de l'humanisation de l'Africain.

Dans les années 1930, des intellectuels, des écrivains et des politiciens nègres francophones continuent à travailler sur l'image historique et culturelle de leur patrie. À travers la diaspora africaine ils fondent la Négritude, un mouvement anticolonial qui s'appuie sur l'idée de l'identité commune nègre. En général, le mouvement pâtit des disputes opposant ses participants qui n'ont pas tous la même vision de cette identité. Néanmoins la littérature de la Négritude profite des contributions ethnographiques qui anoblissent les cultures indigènes. À cette époque l'ethnologie améliore son statut dans le monde intellectuel et dans le système universitaire. Ce n'est plus un genre littéraire contraint à la prise de parole mais un discours constitué à analyser.

La Négritude est pourtant redévable à la francophonie qui permet sa circulation littéraire et politique. Ses critiques dénoncent une attitude conciliante à l'égard de l'ancienne puissance coloniale française. D'un autre côté, Jean-Louis Joubert (écrivain et professeur à l'université de Paris XIII, né en 1938) voit la francophonie comme une victoire à la Pyrrhus. La langue du colonisateur est imposée pour dominer, mais les colonisés s'y sont si bien accoutumés qu'ils s'en emparent. Cette assimilation linguistique indique à la fois une affirmation et un déplacement de l'identité: «Cette conquête de la langue des dominants vise d'abord à obtenir un certificat d'existence: je parle et j'écris leur langue donc je suis» (2006, p. 8). Joubert affirme que la rupture avec la langue maternelle produit une sorte d'exil intérieur qui peut néanmoins fortifier la position sociopolitique des Africains et la création d'une nouvelle littérature francophone. Il ajoute que «voler la langue» implique la transmutation des mots. Le français des colonisés acquiert un nouveau sens qu'il ne pourrait pas avoir chez les usagers originels. À travers l'histoire, la langue française s'est toujours nourrie des textes et de la parole de tous ses usagers qui fabriquent de nouveaux mots et qui ajoutent de nouveaux sens aux mots anciens. Cette évolution linguistique désigne une nouvelle circulation littéraire: «Elle invite aussi à faire l'effort de sortir de son point de vue français (si on est un lecteur français) pour tenter de saisir celui des autres» (pp. 125-126). La Négritude démontre cette maîtrise de la langue française pour l'identité africaine.

L'œuvre de Fily Dabo Sissoko (politicien malien, 1900-1964) renforce la francisation littéraire et linguistique de la race qui veut entrer dans le monde eurocentriste. Dans son article *Les Noirs et la Culture* (1937), il considère l'évolution de l'ensemble des ethnicités africaines et établit une ancestralité intellectuelle pour toute la race noire qui commence avec le célèbre fabuliste Esopo (620-564 avant J.C.). D'origine contestable (la plupart des sources le croient phrygien), Esopo est un esclave grec dont l'apparence extrêmement laide et les traits caricaturaux suffisaient à certains pour supposer sa négritude. Sissoko promeut cette légende pour souligner les parallèles entre son histoire et celle du continent africain. Il compare l'esclavage d'Esopo avec la subjugation des Africains en soulignant qu'une position d'infériorité rend visible à celui qui l'occupe toute la palette du caractère humain.

Sissoko déclare qu’Esope est un homme «sans culture» (p. 116) qui devient le patriarche d’une grande tradition littéraire occidentale. Cette théorie d’Esope est encore plus audacieuse que celle de l’Atlantide africaine. Ici ce sont les Blancs qui profitent de l’échange interracial. D’ailleurs elle ose suggérer que la race «sans papiers» fournit une tradition d’écriture à la race supérieure, critique qui n’est pas bien reçue.

Après le génie d’Esope, l’histoire culturelle des Nègres devient plus difficile à retracer. Sissoko explique la raison de cette obscurité: «Qu’a-t-il donc manqué aux Nègres? – L’Écriture, tout simplement» (p. 117). Il affirme que les langues «idéographiques» des civilisations africaines sont difficiles à transcrire. Il faut attendre l’arrivée des Arabes en Afrique pour voir le retour d’une culture littéraire. Sissoko projette sa généalogie dans l’avenir:

La Culture, si elle se caractérisait seulement par l’acquisition des par-chemins, est relativement accessible aux Noirs... Le jour où on le voudra, et comme on le voudra, les Noirs prendront d’assaut sans exception toutes les écoles de «France et de Navarre». Le jour où on le voudra, comme on le voudra, nous fournirons des docteurs, des agrégés et des licenciés dans toutes les branches de savoir. (p. 122)

Tout en reconnaissant l’insuffisance de cette chronologie, cette conclusion est assez optimiste. Sissoko prétend que la Culture (unification de toutes les ethnicités africaines) jaillit de l’éducation. Une intelligentsia nègre moderne serait capable de compenser le manque d’histoire africaine. L’écriture pourrait rendre visible l’héritage de ce vaste continent.

Le message de Sissoko porte ses fruits. Léopold Sédar Senghor (politicien et président sénégalais, 1906-2001) est un des fondateurs de la Négritude qui reconnaît la nécessité d’une nouvelle élite nègre scolarisée. Il encourage l’étude ethnographique du patrimoine: des langues indigènes, de l’histoire, de la géographie et du folklore¹³. Dans

¹³ De plus, Senghor encourage les écrivains nègres à employer des langues africaines dans la création d’une nouvelle littérature, recommandation peu suivie parce qu’elle limite le lectorat. Senghor lui-même préfère écrire en français.

ses mémoires et aussi dans sa poésie, Senghor tente de transmettre un héritage à sa race et une histoire à sa patrie.

Senghor s'attache à la mission de Frobenius pour faire avancer la Négritude. Dans son article *Les Leçons de Leo Frobenius* (1979), il rend hommage à ce dernier pour son travail ethnologique qui soutient ses propres idées sur la culture nègre: «Ma surprise, c'était de trouver confirmation de mes intuitions, comme de mes certitudes, chez un philosophe, doublé d'un savant, qui représentait une civilisation étrangère à la mienne» (p. 142). Senghor reconnaît certaines affinités entre les Allemands et les Africains: «Idées, sentiments, vision en profondeur des choses, que de points communs entre le mode d'appréhension du monde par le Germain romantique et celui du Négro-Africain, sensuel et sensible, émotif» (p. 145). De plus, il compare la défaite de l'Allemagne en 1918 avec l'oppression coloniale de l'Afrique nègre, les rapprochant dans leurs souffrances historiques. Des *paideumae* complémentaires aboutissent à cette thèse: «L'âme nègre et l'âme allemande sont sœurs» (p. 145).

Senghor affirme l'influence profonde de l'ethnologue africaniste et de l'esprit romantique allemand sur le mouvement de la Négritude:

En tout cas, ce premier contact avec Frobenius nous avait conféré un orgueil qui nous engagea dans une espèce de *Sturm und Drang*, marquant le concept de négritude d'un élément de force. Frobenius fut véritablement le moteur spirituel de l'émancipation de l'Afrique noire: sa vision idéaliste d'une Afrique encore pure, non contaminée par les influences extérieures, était pour nous, jeunes militants de la Négritude, un aliment qui attisait notre faveur. (pp. 148-149)

Pour Senghor, Frobenius est le «maître à penser» qui, en construisant l'histoire du continent, restitue de la dignité à l'Africain et de l'humanisme au monde entier (p. 148).

Comme Frobenius et Sissoko, Senghor veut établir un patrimoine culturel. Il s'intéresse aux mythes africains qui révèlent la source psychologique de la Négritude actuelle. Tandis que Frobenius rassemble des contes dans un but de documentation ethnologique, Senghor s'attelle à une écriture plus artistique. Ainsi introduit-il en Afrique une nouvelle tradition: la poésie. Dans ses vers Senghor évoque la musique qui joue un grand rôle dans la société africaine et qui est essentielle,

dit-il, à l'âme nègre: «Les poètes nègres, ceux de *l'Anthologie* comme ceux de la tradition orale, sont, avant tout, des ‘auditifs’, des *chantres*» (1956, p. 159). Senghor pense à transcrire cette musique intégrale en poèmes ou chants écrits. Selon Senghor, ce travail artistique sert de document historique pour éclairer et valider la culture nègre devant le public européen. Écrire en français aide à la circulation de son œuvre et à l'expansion du mouvement de la Négritude.

Les poèmes de Senghor donnent l'impression d'une continuité historique entre l'Afrique contemporaine et celle d'autrefois. Il évoque son histoire précoloniale pour appeler à l'action politique chez ses collègues nègres. Parfois il s'appuie sur des événements actuels pour fabriquer des épopées littéraires. *Éthiopiques*, publié en 1956, est une collection de poèmes qui manifeste l'effort de l'ethnologue et de l'historien chez le poète. Ici Senghor évoque un dieu mythique (*Le Kaya-Magan*) et un roi ancien (*Chaka*, empereur des Zoulous des années 1820) pour faire allusion à l'héritage spirituel et politique des cultures africaines. De plus, il encourage le renouvellement de la communauté nègre fondée sur des modèles de spiritualité et de gouvernement tirés de l'histoire précoloniale. Idéalisés et glorifiés par le récit poétique, les protagonistes de ces poèmes semblent des allégories de l'autorité noble et juste. Selon Senghor, ces figures anciennes devraient nourrir la culture eurafricaine qui permettrait au Nègre indépendant de réussir parmi les anciens colonisateurs dans le monde moderne.

Le Kaya-Magan et *Chaka* évoquent la tradition musicale en Afrique. Senghor indique les instruments qui devraient accompagner la récitation de ses poèmes. *Le Kaya-Magan* est pour la *kôra*, un instrument aux vingt-et-une cordes typique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. La représentation de *Chaka* exige plusieurs voix et un tam-tam. La forme dramaturgique indique la fusion de la tradition musicale de l'Afrique avec la tradition littéraire de l'Occident. La mise en spectacle de cette poésie impose une ritualité pour inaugurer la «nouvelle» culture idéologique de l'Eurafricain.

Le Kaya-Magan rappelle la spiritualité des peuples africains. Il consiste en un monologue chanté du dieu tout-puissant qui est toujours raisonnable et sensible comme un homme. L'ouverture du poème suggère l'autorité suprême de ce personnage: «Kaya-Magan je suis! la personne première...». Sa voix confiante encourage la fierté

patriotique et l'élan de l'âme. Maître de tout l'univers, son physique est anthropomorphe et bisexuel. Le personnage masculin possède les attributs d'une femme (des «mamelles d'abondance» et des «seins forts d'homme») pour incarner les qualités maternelles. Il nourrit la terre et les animaux tandis que l'humanité s'enrichit de son caractère chimérique et universel. Le Kaya-Magan est aussi une force unificatrice. Il aligne les éléments de la nature: «Je dis Kaya-Magan je suis! Roi de la lune, j'unis la nuit et le jour / Je suis Prince du Nord du Sud, du Soleil-levant Prince et du Soleil-couchant». Le chiasme du deuxième vers évoque l'étendue géographique de son royaume. L'esprit du Kaya-Magan enveloppe toute l'Afrique; il ne connaît pas de bornes.

La deuxième partie parle explicitement d'unification sociale, non seulement pour «mes sujets» ou «les résidents de ma maison et leurs clients» mais aussi entre les races du monde: blanc, noir et rouge. Ce dieu qui peut réunir les oppositions dans la nature peut aussi réconcilier l'Afrique avec l'Europe. Il encourage tous les «enfants de ma sève» à profiter de la nature et à vivre en paix. Il déclare que son empire comprend la raison et l'émotion: «Mon empire est celui de César, des grands bannis de la raison ou de l'instinct / Mon empire est celui d'Amour»¹⁴.

De plus, le Kaya-Magan est un personnage intemporel. Il n'est pas historique, et il prévoit un avenir inachevé et idéaliste. Il constate l'absence d'histoire écrite sur le continent africain: «Solemnelle de mes peuples patients! leurs pas se perdent dans les sables de l'Histoire». À la fin du poème, le dieu s'oriente dans l'espace temporel, pénétrant dans le «troisième temps... force de l'Afrique future». Cette déclaration nie l'existence réelle du dieu et aussi de sa souveraineté immense. Son chant n'est qu'une vision; son être n'est qu'un symbole.

La poésie de Senghor reflète l'investissement de l'ethnologue, mais elle se sert de l'allégorie pour conjurer une civilisation par ses attributs culturels. Le Kaya-Magan représente l'autorité divine qui règne sur les circonstances politiques de la «nation». L'emploi du langage

¹⁴ Pour Senghor, l'unification de la raison et de l'émotion est empreinte de symbolisme politique. S'appuyant sur des stéréotypes culturels, elle représente l'alliance eu-africaine.

symbolique contribue au nimbe mystique autour du Kaya-Magan et à l'essence de l'esprit nègre¹⁵. Sa vie s'exprime en métaphores qui décrivent l'étendue de son pouvoir. Le schéma narratif suit des images qui constituent l'idée abstraite de la culture au lieu d'une réalité historique. Le royaume du Kaya-Magan est pourtant une communauté imaginée. L'objectif de Senghor est semblable à celui de Frobenius et de Sissoko: la promotion de l'Eurafricaine moderne à travers la représentation d'un héritage culturel proprement africain.

Chaka est un autre poème qui reflète le projet politique de Senghor. C'est un récit épique en deux chants qui s'inspire d'un personnage réel. Chaka est un chef de la tribu zouloue qui a vécu de 1787 à 1828. Le protagoniste est pris dans un conflit cornélien¹⁶: choisir entre les devoirs de la couronne et les exigences de son cœur. Finalement, il se dévoue à la vie politique et devient un grand monarque responsable de l'unification de son peuple. Senghor établit des parallèles entre l'histoire de Chaka et la situation de l'Afrique au vingtième siècle. En outre, Senghor s'identifie avec le chef zoulou qui se sent déchiré entre l'esprit poétique et l'urgence politique. Comme le roi de jadis et aussi comme le dieu Kaye-Magan, Senghor aspire à l'unification de son peuple.

L'influence politique de ces poèmes dépend d'une manipulation de l'histoire. *Chaka* donne l'impression d'une continuité chronologique entre l'empire zoulou du début du dix-neuvième siècle, la guerre anglo-zouloue de 1878 et la fin de l'Apartheid en 1948. Plusieurs événements historiques apparaissent dans la narration. Par exemple, au début du poème Chaka a un songe qui prévoit la colonisation européenne des décennies plus tard: «Oui me voilà entre deux frères, deux traîtres... Me voilà rendu à la terre». Le débat de la voix blanche à l'intérieur de son corps noir évoque l'antagonisme entre les deux races.

¹⁵ Senghor emploie le terme *Negerheit* pour décrire la qualité d'être Nègre. Ce terme rappelle la définition de *paideuma* chez Frobenius. On pourrait assimiler le *paideuma* de la Culture nègre (comme ensemble des sociétés) au *Negerheit*.

¹⁶ Invention de Pierre Corneille (dramaturge français, 1606-1684), le conflit cornélien implique le choix impossible entre l'amour et le devoir qui donne toujours des conséquences négatives. C'est un thème souvent repris dans la littérature, le drame et le cinéma.

Dans le personnage de Chaka se manifeste un mélange de stéréotypes africains et européens. Chaka est à la fois tyran sauvage d'un peuple primitif qui extermine des millions d'hommes et qui tue sa femme bien aimée, et le poète qui réfléchit sur ses émotions, qui est conscient des dilemmes moraux et qui s'exprime avec lyrisme. Ce héros-guerrier possède aussi des caractéristiques christiques. Le premier chant raconte la mort de Chaka qui fait allusion à la Passion du Christ. Le langage et les motifs renforcent ce parallélisme. Le deuxième chant, une réflexion sur son amour, fait allusion au Cantique des Cantiques de Salomon, roi de l'Ancien Testament. De cette façon, l'histoire du chef africain évoque la tradition religieuse de l'Occident. L'intertextualité fortifie le personnage du protagoniste. Chaka est une figure interculturelle et intergénérationnelle. Son histoire imaginaire évoque des traditions des Blancs et des Noirs. Elle représente la littérature authentique des ethnologues africanistes et des écrivains de la Négritude qui sert à remplacer les sources primaires inexistantes. En confirmant un contexte historique, Chaka accorde à l'Africain moderne une certaine sophistication intellectuelle particulière à sa propre culture.

Pourtant, Senghor a ses critiques. On accuse son idée de la Négritude d'être une forme d'essentialisme culturel à la limite du racisme. Il attribue des qualités inhérentes aux races, qui font penser à la théorie de *paideuma* chez Frobenius. Par exemple, Senghor doit pendant sa carrière âprement défendre son assertion «L'émotion est nègre comme la raison est hellène», parue pour la première fois dans un chapitre intitulé *Ce que l'homme noir apporte* (1939, p. 291). De plus, on dénonce l'hypocrisie de sa promotion de la culture africaine et de son idéal d'une fraternité universelle. D'autres auteurs coloniaux subissent ce genre de critique. On dit que leur rôle d'intermédiaire entre les deux cultures précipite le déracinement psychologique, de sorte que leur œuvre ne représente pas vraiment l'esprit africain. L'intérêt pour l'ethnologie ne garantit pas la vérité. Même dans les courants de la Négritude et de l'Africanisme, le développement de la littérature coloniale reflète plutôt l'histoire de l'impérialisme que la véritable histoire des colonisés.

L'identité africaine qui émerge de la littérature postcoloniale demeure marquée par les enjeux politiques à visée eurocentriste. Ré-

cupérant les idées du courant africaniste, la Négritude est également incertaine quant à la représentation de l'Afrique convenant à leur but commun. Pourtant, ce bouillonnement intellectuel réussit à définir une problématique qui continue à joindre le savoir académique et la littérature populaire. Issus d'une diaspora africaine encore plus vaste, les écrivains d'aujourd'hui se confrontent à une histoire littéraire récente pleine d'incohérences et de falsifications. Alliant vigueur et clarté, ils continuent à écrire la biographie de l'Afrique.

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Part III

IDENTITY NAVIGATION: FRAMEWORKS, DILEMMAS, IMAGERY AND PERCEPTION

Annie Hawes's Ligurian memoirs: navigating identity and place in transnational relocation

Lynn Mastellotto

Abstract: At the intersection of life writing and travel writing, “relocation narratives” form a distinct subgenre of travel memoirs concerned with the everyday experiences of travellers who become settlers abroad through a process of voluntary migration and long-term foreign residency. This article examines the nonfiction accounts of life abroad by transplanted Londoner Annie Hawes whose Ligurian trilogy recounts a bilingual and intercultural education acquired through transnational relocation. More than chronicling the mere lifestyle makeover of an Anglo expat in Italy, Hawes’s multipart memoirs map out a prolonged period of foreign residency and protracted process of identity reformation, revealing that learning the language, interacting with locals, and engaging in everyday cultural practices over time are forms of deep immersion in place that lead to the development of a dialogical identity through ethical engagement with cultural differences.

Keywords: relocation memoirs, expatriate literature, life writing, travel writing, dialogical identity.

Introduction

The global flow of people, capital, goods, services, and ideas helped characterise the twentieth century as a ‘century of migrations’ (Clifford, 1988), with the emphasis on the plural noun signalling how the defining experience of flux is embedded in a wide range of material and aesthetic practices, which have continued in the twenty-first century. The centrality of the exilic experience in the development of Western literature is aptly summed up in Edward Said’s well-known

claim that “modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles”; furthermore, by calling the past century “the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration”, Said identifies displacement as *the* existential and cultural condition of the twentieth century (2000, p. 173-4).

Although expatriate writers are often labelled as ‘self-imposed exiles’ or ‘voluntary exiles’ and their works studied through the exilic lens of a metaphorical loss of origins and its aesthetic implications for modernist narration (Nicholls, 1995), this article takes a different perspective by surveying expatriation from a wider perspective, one which looks beyond literary modernism and the central role of the exile/émigré writer in experimentations with language, perspective and form to consider the affective and ethical dimensions of the transnational experience at the turn of the 21st century. This approach invites a rethinking of Anglo travel writing as a genre capable of critiquing its own motives and forms, and of expatriate writers as not necessarily implicated in colonialist/neo-colonialist discourse. Occupying an in-between space as cultural insiders-outsiders, transnational writers are, in fact, able to produce more nuanced readings of others and more complex representations of identity in the discourse of displacement than postcolonial criticism generally acknowledges¹.

Drawing on Papayanis’s study of the literature of expatriation (2005), I argue that the defining choice to live elsewhere can be read as a deliberate act of displacement guided by an ethical impulse to remake one’s life in accordance with a particular vision of “the good life”, one that sets in motion a long-term process of self-transformation centred on the question “How should I live?” Unlike interwar expatriate writers who fled to European cultural capitals seeking

¹ For example, Caren Kaplan’s (1996) investigation of the politics of travel discourse considers various historicized forms of displacement – nomadism, exile, expatriation, migrancy – and their attendant formal and rhetorical features. However, she does not address transnational relocation as a distinct form of mobility nor consider how the *topos* of everyday life among the locals, a characteristic of relocation writing, expresses a different kind of cultural engagement with others, one which moves away from colonialist/neo-colonialist discursive forms.

decadent bohemian lifestyles in light of post-WWI disenchantment, late-twentieth century expatriates search for the good life far from fashionable urban centres, rejecting modern society in pursuit of a better quality of life based on a rural idyll – a retreat to the countryside, living in harmony with nature and the human senses, labouring on the land, and seeking belonging in traditional communities. As these metropolitans seek to escape the malaise of postmodern living through slow living practices in rural settings, they follow a quest pattern in Youngs's sense of “travelling in search of meaning, purpose and belonging” (2013, p. 90). Their relocation experiences are more about interior journeys toward greater self-knowledge and identity reformation than journeys involving outward exploration of foreign place.

In light of these considerations, this article examines the relocation memoirs of Annie Hawes, an English author living in Liguria since the mid-1980s, whose trilogy of texts map out a process of acculturation over several decades. At first glance, her accommodation to life in Italy seems to follow a familiar narrative trajectory: she moves from London to Liguria in search of sun and a better quality of life; next, there is a house to restore, a garden to tend, Do-It-Yourself skills to hone, fascinating locals and local customs to decipher, and local delicacies to consume. Her memoirs seem to fit the pattern of “great escape” narratives which describe escaping to a place in the sun and finding personal fulfilment amongst olives, lemons and sun-drenched Mediterranean views, a narrative formula which achieved popular success in the 1990s with global readers eager to vicariously taste “the good life” abroad².

Yet, though Hawes's *rustico* comes with fifty olive trees, goats in the garden, sweeping views of the Mediterranean, and wild fennel and asparagus to forage on her patch of Ligurian hillside, it is not

² This subgenre of travel writing was popularized by Peter Mayle with a trilogy of books describing the slow life in the Luberon: *A Year in Provence* (1991), *Toujours Provence* (1992) and *Encore Provence* (1999). Other exemplars include Frances Mayes's Tuscan trilogy: *Under the Tuscan Sun* (1996), *Bella Tuscany* (1999) and *Every Day in Tuscany* (2010).

the rural idyll readers might expect. In fact, as a writer Hawes is uncomfortable with the tag ‘Englishwoman in Italy’ and with being seen to promote Italian rural life as a pastoral paradise³. Her house in Liguria is not a holiday hideaway but her primary residence; she is not a tourist but a settler whose tale of transnational relocation is about displacing nationalistic definitions and cultural certainties through a process of identity reformation which unfolds over time as she navigates multiple identifications that criss-cross borders. Focusing on hybridity and complexity, her memoirs undermine a hegemonic, Anglocentric reading of cultural difference, offering instead multifaceted perspectives on the defining relationship between the subjective self and material place as it evolves through long-term foreign residency.

Ross uses the term “settlement literature” (2010, p. 122), Alù refers to “villa books” (2010, p. 285), Parkins to “Tuscan farmhouse literature” (2004, p. 259) and George and Sattin to “home-abroad books” (2002, p. ix) in identifying this form of travel writing that is not about travel per se but about staying put. I prefer the terms “relocation narrative” or “relocation memoir”, which shift the focus away from a specific destination or particular abode to the process of dwelling-in-displacement and the central role narrative plays in producing new textualities of self and place that represent the experience of ‘arrival’, an overlooked aspect of the mobility cycle. Relocation memoirs straddle the cusp between travel writing and life writing; an act of physical displacement simultaneously “places” or “locates” the self in a new horizon of experience, one which displaces conventional self/other paradigms narrowly defined by nationality, giving rise to dialogical identities.

³ In an interview with Clare Rudebeck (2003), Hawes claims feeling misidentified as a hawker of dreams rather than a chronicler of real life: “I find the British notion that Italy is this perfect paradise place quite alarming. I don’t like being turned into part of it”.

Deep immersion in foreign place

The seemingly oppositional notions of routes and roots converge in the expatriate experience, revealing that transnational relocation contains both an impulse to move (flux) and an impulse to stay put (fixity). This is a form of “dwelling-in-traveling” (Clifford, 1992, p. 108) that fulfils the axiomatic imperative of broadening the mind conventionally associated with material travel, fostering an expanded sense of the world through the experience of long-term foreign residency. Hulme refers to this practice as “deep immersion”, noting that as travel writers immerse themselves in foreign cultures and languages for extended periods they acquire “the sort of intimate knowledge which gives them access to people and places unknown to short-stay travellers, let alone tourists” (2002, p. 97).

Ross (2010, p. 122) notes how the “*topos* of life among the locals”, the narrative terrain of recent expatriate writing, shifts the focus away from an account of movement to an account of settled life in a new land, revealing how place-based epistemologies evolve through sustained engagement with cultural differences over time. Similarly, Besmeres (2015, p. 28) observes that “immersion narratives represent an attempt to communicate with people of another culture on those others’ own terms” and, consequently, “focus on the experience of learning another language as a foreigner and cultural outsider – and translating the self in the process”.

While some expatriates are short-stay travellers, moving mainly in compatriot enclaves and never learning the local language or seeking to become cultural insiders in the host country, others like Annie Hawes engage more deeply with locals and local practices through sustained foreign residency. Her Ligurian trilogy offers a “thick description” of place through her encounters with locals and the knowledge of place-based practices she accrues over time⁴. In fact, her memoirs chart a twenty-year period of monumental change in the life of Diano

⁴ The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) coined the term to indicate an ethnographic approach wherein human behaviour is described in specific embedded contexts and thus becomes more intelligible to non-experts.

San Pietro, her adopted hillside home in the province of Imperia, two miles inland from the Mediterranean coastal resort of Diano Marina. Beginning with her arrival there in the mid-1980s, she chronicles a series of economic and social upheavals as this hill town, distant enough from the sea to have remained insulated for decades from the economic prosperity and social fashions associated with coastal tourism, undergoes a belated modernisation: shifting from a nearly-defunct agriculture-based economy, to economic revitalisation through tourism and foreign holiday-home ownership, and finally through the “renaissance of the olive” brought on by EU farming subsidies and back-to-the-land tourist tastes.

The first two of Hawes’s travel memoirs, *Extra Virgin* (2001) and *Ripe for the Picking* (2003), trace her own process of accommodating to life in Liguria within the context of the aforementioned economic transformation of the area, whereas the third book, *Journey to the South* (2005), charts her visit to Calabria and broader reflections on Italy’s regional differences and internal divisions. These shifting landscapes provide Hawes with scope to reflect on the interplay of global and local cultures in different external settings, yet her narrative is primarily driven by a series of more personal transformations which mark her individual experience of migration. Read together, her three texts map out a migrating sensibility as she moves from the position of sojourner to settler, tracing the knowledge of self, others and place gained through a protracted process of acculturation.

Hawes’s re-settlement account maps out an arc of accommodation as she moves through various acculturation phases: first, a *confrontation* with place that focuses on cultural difference and novelty; second, a *negotiation* with place that juxtaposes contrasting cultural paradigms; third, an *accommodation* with place that involves deep and sustained engagement in local community over time⁵. Predictably, set-

⁵ I am drawing here on Edward C. Knox’s use of the term “literature of accommodation” in his study of 20th-century nonfiction by American writers in France who tell the story of their quest to prove themselves worthy or suitable in their new cultural contexts. Knox uses the term “accommodation” instead of adaptation or integration to draw attention to the “nuances of congruence and reconciliation, of allowances made and recognition of a new norm to which to adhere” (2003, p. 95).

tling in an adopted homeland is not a seamless process: deeper and more nuanced epistemologies of place are acquired through a series of upheavals arising from both external change and internal growth as she pursues her quest for “the good life” in rural Italy.

Confronting Italy through touristic eyes

Hawes's initial confrontation with social and cultural differences upon arriving in Liguria is chronicled in her first book, *Extra Virgin* (2001). Beguiled by images of the Italian Riviera, Annie and her sister, Lucy, seek to ‘escape to the sun’ on a working holiday in Liguria:

No more miserly damp horizons stopping twenty feet away at the nearest office block. Here they stretch up into the misty foothills of the Maritime Alps on the one hand, down into the intense blues vastness of the Mediterranean on the other. The sun shines warmly even at this unlikely time of year [February]; the sky is blue, and I am seeing plenty of both. (*EV*, p. 5)

Noting that a dreary London landscape is replaced by views of olive trees, vineyards and blue sea, Hawes summarily states, “Shepherd’s Bush and Diana San Pietro are just incommensurable, that’s all” (*EV*, p. 251). Although refraining from assigning explicit value to either locale through her guarded choice of the word “incommensurable”, her previous use of the adjective “miserly” establishes a negative association with London. Initially, Hawes measures the relative advantages of life in Liguria as a tourist would, mainly along meteorological lines.

Liguria also figures in her memoirs initially as a utopian space where life can be enjoyed along simpler lines through close connection with the traditional practices and everyday pleasures of rural living. In reflecting on whether to buy a *rustico* and build a home in Italy, Hawes speculates: “Attach yourself to a certain shack up a certain hill near a certain village, and then see what you can make of it. It would certainly eliminate vast swathes of the paralyzingly endless possibilities of life” (*EV*, p. 43). Her decision to buy the stone farmhouse and live on the land in San Pietro is presented as a decisive bid to escape contemporary life with its dizzying freedom and uncertainty. A reinvention of

the Arcadia myth, this escape to the countryside posits the rural Italian farmhouse as a *locus amoenus*, or uncorrupted place, which offers refuge from modernity through close connection to the land, to life's natural rhythms, and to genuine social relationships.

This rural retreat loses some of its lustre, however, as Hawes settles into life in her Ligurian outpost and comes to terms with what a 'pre-modern' lifestyle actually means. Preconceived notions of Mediterranean beauty and glamour are, for example, shattered: "Glamour, we soon spotted, was not the outstanding feature of the village of Diano San Pietro. As far as the crusty olive-farming inhabitants of this crumbling backwater were concerned, the Riviera, a mere two miles away, might as well be on another planet" (EV, p. 3). Instead of "Mediterranean fleshpots, sparkling seas, bronzed suitors with unbearably sexy accents, wild nightlife" Hawes finds a severe lack "of bright cosmopolitan life, of frivolity of any kind or, indeed, of anyone under forty" (EV, p. 4). In fact, Hawes must adjust her preconceptions of Italian fashion to accommodate the "hanky-headed" folk of San Pietro whose social behaviour, as signalled by their idiosyncratic dress code, appears to her touristic eyes as acutely anachronistic:

In San Pietro a woman does not wear shorts and a T-shirt. [...] No: she wears an apron, a calf-length tube, ankle socks, and slippers. Her menfolk go for the faded blue trouser held up with a string, aged singlet vest which is not removed in the midday heat [...] but rolled up sausagewise into a stylish underarm sweatband, leaving the nipple area modestly covered while the solid pasta-filled midriff is exposed to the pleasantly cooling effect of any chance bit of *aria* that may waft by. (EV, p. 4)

Hawes's early impressions as a newly transplanted Londoner are characterised by a tone of derision in depicting Ligurian farmers as "backward".

Claiming that her heirloom copy of the *Blue Guide to Northern Italy*, even though "30-odd years out of date", is still useful since "things haven't changed overmuch here since the 1950s" (EV, p. 17), she uses sarcasm deliberately to emphasise the distance between observer and observed thereby deploying an 'us/them' opposition. Her deliberate use of negative stereotyping at the outset of *Extra Virgin* deploys a

self/other logic that relies on the representation of 'primitive others' as exotic. By setting up a binary relation between herself (and her readers) as sophisticated urbanites and Ligurians as uncultured peasants, her early work illustrates the rhetorical mode of "negation" identified by Spurr (1993, p. 76) as a distancing gesture used in colonial and neo-colonial discourse to call into question the civility and/or civilised sophistication of others.

Though geographically proximate, the social distance between her hillside home and the coast is further highlighted through Hawes's use of negative adjectives in characterising Diano San Pietro as "crusty" and "crumbling" whilst deploying expressions such as "not", "instead of" and "lack of" to underscore the apparent absence of any dynamic qualities associated with village life. In stark contrast, Diano Marina is "sparkling", "sexy", "bronzed" and "bright", associations clearly more in line with touristic expectations of the Mediterranean coast. She emphatically notes: "You could easily believe that the level crossing between Diano Marina and the rest of the Diano villages was not a mere level crossing after all, but the gateway to a parallel universe" (*RFP*, p. 153). Her further claim that an "Olive Curtain" (*EV*, p. 267) divides the two places signals a clear-cut distinction between centre (Marina) and margin (San Pietro), between urban (Marina) and rural (San Pietro), distinctions rooted in their different economies of scale and their related social norms.

This cultural cleavage in worldviews comes into sharpest focus in Hawes's account of acquiring a rustic house and beginning the work of renovating it under the watchful eyes of her new neighbours. They simply cannot fathom why anyone, least of all a woman with no farming experience, would *choose* to live alone on an isolated tract of land without running water or other basic amenities instead of lodging in town where life is more sociable not to mention more comfortable. The incomprehension of villagers arises, as Hawes notes, from an engrained cultural perspective: "No local people can see anything at all attractive about such a lifestyle. In the past it was a sign of the most abject poverty to have to live in isolation on your land; you would only do such a thing if you had absolutely no choice left in the matter" (*RFP*, p. 5). Seeing herself finally through their bewildered eyes, Hawes is forced to recognise the ineffably 'English' nature of her rural idyll:

None of them can get their heads around our idea of a country idyll, where you live in a house on your land, your vegetable patch outside the kitchen door, your fields (or, as it were, groves) visible from your windows, nothing but nature all around you. Here in Liguria, you live in a town or village, travel to work on your land as if it is a job. The idea of living alone and isolated up in the country is horrible, and totally foreign to them. English, in fact. On top of this, not a few of them have an alternative idyll where they escape the tedium of small-town Italy and run to London. (EV, p. 43)

Her pastoral dream is not only culturally out-of-place, but actualising it is also highly impractical. Her cavalier plan to “make the place a paradise, turn into old hippies, out-peasant the peasants” (EV, p. 63) comes across as naïve, middle-class, citified posturing given her limited knowledge of rural living. Hawes has no experience of farming, no familiarity even with how to clear her land of decades of overgrowth or how to repair the crumbling terrace walls of the olive groves, no skills either with lighting campfires or cooking over them. Belatedly she comes to value the luxury of indoor plumbing by experiencing how “absurdly and unimaginable heavy” water actually is through the repeated effort involved in hauling it from the well up to the house several times a day; consequently, she learns to appreciate the function of a windlass as something more than a touristic artefact of “ersatz picturesqueness” (EV, p. 106).

In short, as Hawes renovates her *rustico* and settles into life in San Pietro, she embarks on and “intensive hillside course in Great Technological Achievements of the Last Few Centuries and Why We Needed Them” (EV, p. 190), developing hands-on experience with the ordinary and tedious tasks of rural living. She begins to question her dream of an idealised rural retreat as the realities of rural life leave little time for leisure and quiet contemplation. In a humorous, self-deprecating style, she chronicles her lack of know-how and her dawning awareness of how vital technology is in saving both effort and time, finally confessing to a willingness to re-conceptualise her rural idyll with a few labour-saving ‘modcons’ added in.

As Hawes begins to shed her touristic assumptions about traditional rural living, she is also forced to adjust her preconceptions about the so-called backwardness of Ligurian peasants. All of her neighbours are,

in fact, proud owners of strimmers, brush cutters, petrol-driven water pumps, rotovators and mulching machines. Ironically, Hawes cannot afford any of these and her earlier words prove painfully prophetic as she is constrained to “out-peasant the peasants” since she cannot afford the latest high-tech farming equipment and labour-saving devices. She no longer sees her neighbours as “backwards” or “anachronistic”, but instead acknowledges that her own romanticised notions about the picturesqueness of pre-industrial farming and her earlier distaste for new technology were woefully naïve. She also learns to appreciate the closeness of traditional face-to-face interactions in a remote place like San Pietro when her unkempt land causes a wildfire on the hillside and her neighbours come to her rescue.

Negotiating a dialogical identity

Traditional rural life implies a particular form of social and familial organisation which Hawes begins to decipher as she settles into life in San Pietro as a resident. In her second memoir, *Ripe for the Picking* (2003), she grapples with the implications of her new role as Ciccio's *fidanzata*, which presents numerous occasions for intercultural exchanges with her adopted family and the inhabitants of San Pietro. An early lesson teaches Hawes to adjust her preconceptions of pastoral romance when, on their first date, Ciccio takes her to visit the family groves and they spend a few hours repairing an outdoor stone oven using layers of manure and mud. Clearly, this is not the occasion Hawes was expecting in dressing up for her date, yet she intuits that being introduced to his family's, the De Giglios', land holdings represents “the stuff of true intimacy” (*RFP*, p. 71). She also learns the meaning behind the shorthand distinction “father's house” and “mother's house” (*RFP*, p. 72) – the former signifying the significant land holdings owned by a family and the latter the village-based domestic space inhabited by its members – the first of many gendered distinctions which rural family life presents.

As Hawes is taken into the De Giglio family fold, she experiences both the advantages and disadvantages of belonging in a tight-knit clan. On the one hand, her larder is continually replenished by Franc-

esca, Ciccio's mother, with home-made delicacies, and Hawes receives useful advice from her regarding gardening and other household tasks. On the other hand, she is pushed around good-naturedly by Francesca, enduring her repeated compliments for being "such a good simple girl" (*RFP*, p. 145) and is unable to say 'no' to small favours asked of her. She wryly notes that in Italian families, *la mamma*'s "role is bigger than the individual" (*RFP*, p. 193) and lasts a lifetime, with the result that children "go on living at home with their parents into their mid-thirties, or all their lives" (*RFP*, p. 119) and even when they "get jobs, get married, move into homes of their own, they don't seem ever to become a separate unit" (*RFP*, p. 84).

The figure of the Italian father as *padre/padrone* also becomes clearer to Hawes as she gets to know Ciccio's father, Salvatore, noting that his generation was brought up "with the son under his father's thumb, however old he was" (*RFP*, p. 190). She compares Salvatore's parenting approach to agricultural pruning: "His idea of raising a son was like raising a fruit tree or something. Prune it back hard and you'll get a sturdier specimen. And a better harvest" (*RFP*, p. 242). As maternal suffocation and paternal pruning come into clearer cultural focus, Hawes comes to see why living at home and working on the family land may not be Ciccio's notion of a rural idyll, and why he opts, instead, to open his own restaurant and move into his own apartment near the coast, though his parents see this as yet another example of the erosion of traditional life by the forces of modernisation.

Given some latitude as a foreigner, Hawes is held to different social standards and not fully expected to participate in the web of belonging and obligation that local culture imposes on its members. Reflecting on this double-edged dynamic, she states:

Of course we [foreigners] think it's great, all the traditional Italian stuff, piazza life, open bars, multi-generational *festa* nights. It's fine for us, we're not part of it and its social sanctions have no power over us. For our friends these are the loci of oppression, places where the smallest deviation will be noted, commented upon by the entire community, and traditionally, if you've embarrassed your family badly enough, punished with threats of removing your future livelihood. (*EV*, p. 91-92)

The scrutiny that attends being part of a traditional Italian nuclear family and rural community explains why Hawes's Ligurian friends like to escape to the English-style pub (and anonymity) in Diano Marina where the windows are frosted and passers-by cannot see in. Such comments reflect Hawes's understanding of intra- and intercultural behaviours and practices, a dialogical perspective emerging from her deep immersion in place.

She becomes increasingly adept at mediating between divergent social and cultural realities which are place-based. This flexibility is highlighted through her reaction to the apparent inconsistencies in Italian adherence to structures and rules. Whilst she notes Italians' social conservatism and compliance in manners of proper eating and bathing, when it comes to official rules and regulations – planning permission for home renovations, school examinations protocol, reporting of income for taxation purposes – she discovers that they are uniformly nonplussed about breaking the rules.

In the process of putting a new roof on her house, she hears from everyone that it is better to circumvent bureaucracy by doing the job without planning permission and risk paying a fine if caught; the prevailing orthodoxy is to do the 'illegal' work first, then wait for an amnesty to declare it. She reflects that this is "completely alien to my own country's mindset" and sense of probity regarding official rules (*RFP*, p. 318). Through this dialogism of perspectives, Hawes reveals different value systems at play, each coherent within its own cultural context; in so doing, she avoids reproducing simplistic us/them binary depictions that privilege one side at the expense of the other. Her narrative thus moves away from bounded notions of self and other to a recognition of identity as more complex, indeterminate and multi-layered.

Another aspect of normative behaviour in the village is a form of regional chauvinism directed at non-Ligurians. Hawes is warned not to frequent a particular hardware store in town since the shopkeeper "isn't a local, or even a countryman, but a city person from Milan or some such place. A lazy Longobardo from high up on the plains, where no one ever lifts a finger. No one here would ever dream of taking his advice" (*RFP*, p. 156). Ligurians, Hawes learns, have a deep-rooted suspicion of *gente di pianüa* – "people from Milan and Turin, or any of the other cities of the rich high plains of the North"

(EV, p. 38) – whom they consider idle, greedy and arrogant. Given their tendency to think themselves superior to locals, outwitting these northern Italians and watching them make a *brutta figura*, or lose face in public, is considered a local pastime.

Hawes's process of social integration takes a leap forward when she wins a game of one-upmanship with a Barbour-clad Milanese who pulls in at the local olive mill, “in a big fat shiny so-called off-road vehicle [...] complete with cow-rails and rows of spare petrol canisters and all the survival gear”, and addresses Hawes in “a most patronizing ‘my good woman’ manner” (EV, p. 324). Hawes beats him at his own game by responding in fluent English, mortifying him with the realisation that he has mistaken a “superior Northerner” as a lowly Ligurian peasant. Hawes confesses her prejudice against this “new breed of olive-oil tourist” who drive down from the North at weekends and roam the hillsides in their squeaky clean off-road vehicles, trying out country restaurants, grabbing some wild thyme from the roadside, and picking up a selection of olive oils, a touristic “taste from each valley” to take back (EV, p. 324). These urban consumers are tourists who forage the Ligurian countryside for tastes of local authenticity but do not understand the first thing about the locality. They buy Taggiasca olive-oil direct from the *frantoio* for its purity and freshness while remaining ignorant about the olive industry and its impact on local lives.

The longer she spends in Liguria, the better Hawes becomes at interpreting her local environment and producing situated readings of place. She uncovers that “diversity” is not a value which is celebrated in San Pietro since migrant workers, arriving first from southern Italy then from Eastern Europe and Northern Africa, are seen to be taking over the traditional work of olive-harvesting abandoned by young Ligurians. Hawes explains: “the price of olives is so low that most of the harvest is being left to fall off the trees and rot” (EV, p. 8) since it costs more in petrol to get olives to the mill than a farmer can get back in the price of oil. Consequently, San Pietro, like many villages in the region, has undergone a process of de-population as its young people, seeing no economic future in olives, have left to find work in big industrial cities, a ‘brain drain’ which is grudgingly accepted. Not surprisingly, in this context, many of the locals react to the arrival of migrants with an entrenched parochialism, a defensive bulwark against the inevita-

ble forces of economic and social change that are transforming their region.

These intracultural and intercultural episodes in the life of San Pietro serve as illustrative examples of how the transformation of social space through migration and cross-cultural contact does not guarantee the emergence of cosmopolitan attitudes⁶. As revealed in the interactions of locals with migrants, an attitude of openness and tolerance does not necessarily develop from cross-border social interactions; instead, a virulent form of “renationalisation” sometimes emerges⁷. Hawes’s evolving understanding of this dynamic in Liguria encompasses a growing awareness of how ethnocentric prejudice is directed not only toward foreign homeowners but also toward Italians from other regions, even those like the De Giglios who have been settled in Liguria for over a generation.

Accommodating a cosmopolitan orientation

Hawes’s involvement with the De Giglios deepens her understanding of place and subjectivity as she learns about multiple senses of inclusion and exclusion through their experiences as Calabrian migrants in Liguria, which she recounts in *Journey to the South* (2005). Ligurian xenophobia toward Calabrians living in the region, in many cases for several generations, is first brought to her attention when she starts dating Ciccio and realises “the great rift in the Italian worldview” (*JTS*, p. 1) between North and South. Initially unaware of this gulf, she sees everyone as simply “Italian” without noticing any regional demarcations of difference. These differences are revealed to Hawes playfully, at first, during a road-trip in an amusing game of cultural

⁶ Mau, Mewes and Zimmerman state that the extent of one’s *transnationalism* (individual engagement in cross-border mobility, transnational social relations and economic transactions) is a good predictor for the adoption of cosmopolitan attitudes such as openness, tolerance and a mediating worldview (2008, p. 1-2).

⁷ Mau, Mewes and Zimmerman further note, however, that these “processes of transnationalization may be perceived as a threat causing insecurity and nationalistic reflexes” (2008, p. 6).

stereotyping based on car number plates: the “skin-flints” of Imperia, the “tight-fisted” Genovese, the “falsely-courteous” Piedmontese, and so on (*JTS*, p. 43).

The generic bigotry in these regional labels is later personalised for Hawes through a series of encounters, first in Liguria then upon visiting Ciccio’s extended family in Calabria. When she and her friend, Patrizia, run into Umberto in San Pietro, he initially flirts with Patrizia until he finds out that she does not speak Ligurian because her grandparents “came from somewhere else”. As a foreigner, Hawes is unable to decode this phrase but Patrizia explains that Calabria is considered “such a shameful place of origin that you don’t name it” (*JTS*, p. 5). Until this moment, it had not occurred to Hawes that many of her good friends (including Patrizia and Ciccio) are of Calabrian extraction, or that there was a social stigma attached with being even ‘notionally’ Calabrese. Patrizia sums up the local bigotry, stating: “We may have been born and bred here [Liguria] but we’re still outsiders” (*JTS*, p. 6).

As Hawes starts to piece together the tissue of local bigotry that had eluded her grasp, she develops a context for understanding intracultural tensions which had previously eluded her. She realises, for example, why Carlo, Laura’s father, does not accept Marco (a Calabrese) as a suitable husband for his daughter (*RFP*, p. 135). She then hears from Ciccio’s parents how they confronted prejudice when, years earlier, they arrived in Liguria and were not shown any “decent places to live”, only squalid ones without a cooker, or sink, or bathroom (*RFP*, p. 302) because the landlord would not let decent places to *terroni*. Hawes notes the use of this Italian term by bigoted northerners to signify something between ‘peasant’ and ‘bogtrotter’, with the implication that Calabrians are uncouth and “probably keep pigs in the parlour and coal in the bath” (*JTS*, p. 7). She further notes that this is not unlike the English stereotype of Ireland in days gone by: “And like the Irish, the Calabrians, for a good few generations, emigrated *en masse* to escape the desperate conditions in their own land, seeking work and a future for their children” (*JTS*, p. 9).

Despite their success in becoming land owners in Liguria, in earning a living as olive farmers and in building economic security for their children, Calabrians like the De Giglios are denied full social integra-

tion. This is made clear to Hawes when she happens to overhear two San Pietro men one day refer to Ciccio as “one of *them*” (*JTS*, p. 7) and realises the truth in what Patrizia had told her: the *figli d'immigranti* (children of immigrants) are still considered ‘outsiders’ despite being born in Liguria, growing up there, going to school there and settling down there as adults. Whilst being treated as outsiders makes them feel not completely at home in Liguria, the De Giglios are not completely at home in Calabria either, as Hawes notes on their collective trip south. Labelled all their lives as *Calabresi*, Ciccio and his sister Marisa are expecting to fit in immediately when they arrive in Melipodio; instead, their homecoming is temporarily marred as the villagers in the local bar initially mistake them for a Bulgarian pimp and Polish prostitute. Later, once the confusion is cleared up, they are feted, made to feel welcome and anointed “Jewels in the Crown” come back to the fold.

Nevertheless, this episode of mistaken identity sets an ambivalent tone for the remainder of their stay, and Hawes observes that they must continually negotiate “multiple senses of belonging and not-belonging” (*JTS*, p. 25). Marisa initially feels a sense of dislocation returning to a homeland she has never really known, then after a spell claims she is more at home in Melipodio than the “commercialized North” (*JTS*, p. 94) and thinks it would be a better place to raise her son, Alberto, who spends his time in Calabria outdoors with local boys and seems perfectly content without his Game Boy. For his part, Ciccio has a mild identity crisis provoked by a villager from Melipodio calling him a “bloody Northerner” (*JTS*, p. 136) with a disparaging glower at his Ligurian number plate after Ciccio stops to ask for some information using his “pidgin Calabrese”.

A shifting sense of subjectivity is also clearly conveyed in Francesca's experience of returning to her birthplace. Hawes describes the uncontained joy of Ciccio's mother's homecoming as she does “a happy shake of her whole being” and delights in “talking her own language, in her own land” (*JTS*, p. 59). Francesca makes a conscious effort to speak the local Calabrese dialect since using standard Italian would be proof that living in the North has “Tuscanified” her or, in other words, made her “big-headed” (*JTS*, p. 46). In fact, her sense of place becomes telescoped: there she is not a ‘generic’ Calabrian

(as she is perceived in the North) but specifically comes from the province of Reggio and identifies with its regional customs, culinary dishes and dialect as opposed to those of nearby Cosenza or Catanzaro. She also betrays strong localistic loyalty, extolling the virtues of Melipodio over Santa Cristina d'Aspromonte, her husband Salvatore's hometown.

At the outset of her visit, Francesca claims that “the Old Country is what counts” even after a lifetime in Liguria (*JTS*, p. 11), and initiates plans to set Ciccio up in the house she has inherited from her deceased brother. By the end of her visit, though, she recants: “That’s what I would have wanted for my son fifty years ago. Not now... Who wants to tie themselves to Calabria? The place is never going to sort itself out. Not in our lifetime” (*JTS*, p. 328). This pendulum swing from total identification with Calabria to total rejection of it underscores the multiple and shifting nature of her sense of self and her sense of ontological homelessness. Whilst in Liguria, she feels Calabrian and the “Old Country” is her fixed point; whilst in Calabria, Liguria and the life she has built there become the magnetic North of her personal compass. It is clear that the modern experience of migration has left her with a mobile sense of ‘home’, as well as a complex subjectivity in relation to place and time.

A longing for the past, for a return to a previous place and time, forms a powerful sense of nostalgia that pervades the De Giglios’ initial identification of Calabria as their authentic home. As Kaplan explains, *nostalgia* combines the Greek terms *nostos* (a return home) and *algos* (a painful condition), and “is rooted in the notion that it is ‘natural’ to be at ‘home’ and that separation from that location can never be assuaged by anything but return” (1996, p. 33-34). According to Turner, the nostalgic longing for home is most often tied to a utopian vision since “home” is located in a lost place and in a lost time that can never be fully recovered (1987, p. 154).

Indeed, the De Giglios’ sense of painful separation from Calabria and longing to return there contains an idealising impulse which is revealed in the way reality rubs up against the nostalgic cultural myths they have created of the “Old Country”. Francesca remembers Calabria as it was fifty years earlier and dreams of returning to *that* place and *that* time. The projection of Calabria as ‘home’ is thus

destabilised by the material conditions of place in the present and by the attendant feelings of 'not belonging' which challenge the idyll of a happy return. The layers of nostalgia operating in *Journey to the South* are complex: the longing to go back to a time and place that no longer exist is then supplanted by a longing to get "back home" to Liguria.

Locating an idealised home outside the space and time of the present as a way of escaping the pressures and anxieties of the contemporary world is part of a nostalgic paradigm intrinsic to the postmodern condition, a response to the general sense of displacement or homelessness in late modernity. In Turner's words: "The nostalgic mood is of particular importance in contemporary cultures in association with the loss of rural simplicity, traditional stability and cultural integration following the impact of industrial, urban, capitalist culture on feudal social organization" (1987, p. 152). The lament for a way of life that has disappeared, or is in the process of disappearing, and the attraction of returning to a Golden Age, a time when things seemed simpler and the social fabric of life less fragmented, is a discourse of nostalgia that clearly frames Hawes's trilogy of memoirs⁸.

Her relocation to Italy and retreat to the Ligurian countryside is, in fact, motivated by a desire to escape the complexity of modern life in London and set down roots in a place where she hopes to "out-peasant the peasants" by living a pre-modern lifestyle. Initially, Hawes seeks a re-enchantment of the world through close connection to the land and everyday practices in a traditional rural setting, perceiving in the rural retreat a form of primitivism which is more authentic and so more desirable. Yet she revises this idealising impulse over time as she comes to see the "good life" as something linked to a sense of belonging to place and community.

Throughout her trilogy, Hawes demonstrates an openness to revise her preconceptions and correct her readings of place; this mediating perspective can be called a cosmopolitan outlook, an orientation

⁸ Williams (1975) observes that the idealization of the countryside as a symbol of a past golden age is a dominant theme in pastoral writing, a longing which reemerges as the rural idyll in contemporary relocation writing.

of openness to diversity⁹. Although Hawes eschews worldliness and claims to be provincial – “It may sound pretty cosmopolitan, the Englishwoman living in Italy, but to tell the truth, the opposite is the case. I’ve gone thoroughly native: which is to say that, like my neighbours, I am about as provincial as you get” (*JTS*, p. 8) – this monological self-appraisal is not reliable since she occupies a complex standpoint, one that superimposes local, regional, national and global identifications. Her orientation is decidedly dialogical.

Conclusion

Blunt and Varley have shown that a sense of place, measured in terms of belonging or alienation, is intimately tied to sense of self (2004, p. 3). As Hawes’s identification with the customs and values of her adopted home deepens and she begins to feel more Ligurian than Italian, and more Ligurian than English, her standpoint becomes more multi-layered and complex. Like her beloved English rose bush transplanted in Ligurian soil which flowers at its own time of the year – not in season with roses either in England or in Italy – Hawes herself is a peculiar hybrid. Her evolving subjectivity is inextricably linked to place, and the interplay of identifications she embraces provides her with an outlook that is multi-directional and multi-dimensional.

This hybrid perspective is captured in a poignant metaphor of vision that runs throughout Hawes’s relocation trilogy. After taking up residency in her *rustico* in the first memoir, she describes her repeated attempts to spot her hilltop house in Besta de Zago from different locations in the valley, yet she can never locate her patch of hillside from afar. Her obsession with trying to fix the exact location of her house leads her to seek out ordnance survey maps at the local

⁹ ‘Cosmopolitanism’ has been described by Held as “a willingness to engage with the other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity” (1995, p. 103). Studies on migration and globalisation suggest that the more individuals engage in border-crossing activities and transnational social networks, the more likely they are to adopt cosmopolitan attitudes and orientations.

library then to borrow a friend's telescope, but neither help with the discovery: "No sign of the place [...] Not even with the telescope" (*RFP*, p. 132). This obsessive quest, also taken up by Ciccio who is "determined to find me the view I've dreamed of" (*RFP*, p. 132), gradually ebbs as Hawes resigns herself to its inscrutability: "Logic doesn't come into it. [...] You can't see my house from close by; and you can't see it from afar either. I may be used to it, but it's not fair. Mine is a beautiful house, and I'd very much enjoy gloating over it, if only I ever got the chance" (*RFP*, p. 94). Later on in her second memoir, she gains the long-desired view of her house when two century-old olive trees standing in front of it are radically pruned back, but Hawes is horrified at the price paid for her long-desired view; it comes through an act of violence as the landscape is "massacred [...] systematically, clinically" (*RFP*, p. 327).

This desire to fix the location of her house and to obtain a commanding view or controlling prospect that she can "gloat over" betrays a colonialist perspective, what Pratt has termed "the monarch of all I survey" (1992, p. 201). Attempting to see her house from afar, Hawes treats it as the 'organizing centre' from which to define the surrounding landscape, enacting a visual taxonomy of the environment and using the traditional tools of colonialism (cartographic maps and instruments) to this end. Seeking to tame "negative space" (Spurr, 1993, p. 93) through a gesture of surveillance and classification, Hawes's desire for visual authority is only achievable when the surrounding landscape is stripped bare. Yet her profound dismay conveys a critique of colonialism and her own gradual shift in perspective from an *outsider* view that seeks an objective reference point from which to order reality, to an *insider* view occupying a subjective ordering position that looks outward.

This transformation in Hawes's way of seeing landscape signals a deeper shift in her perception of place. As her sensibility migrates towards a settler's perspective, her narrative style shifts from the use of negative stereotyping of Italian cultural differences to a dialogical recognition of the multiple differences at play in social interactions. Across her trilogy, she illustrates that any monological reading of identity is not tenable: "self" (English) and "other" (Ligurian) are not fixed terms in a stable conceptual model, but shifting signifiers – English, Italian, Liguri-

an, Calabrian, urban, rural, coastal, inland – in a social field that is thick with diversities. This narrative dialogism runs counter to the univocal inscriptions of otherness that underpin much travel writing¹⁰.

Through long-term foreign residency, Hawes develops translingual and transcultural competences, occupying a liminal position or in-between space characterised by multiple affinities. Robbins signals how transnationalism is, in fact, a “density of overlapping allegiances” (1999, p. 250) since migrants cultivate multiple identifications between their home and host countries, affinities that are not simply resolved over time but which, instead, accrue in complexity and give rise to hybrid identities. These identities are dialogically constructed through encounters with difference: one defines oneself based on the recognition of what one is not in relation to others; according to Said, “the Other” acts as “a source and resource for a better, more critical understanding of the Self” (2004, p. xi). Through the experience of transnational relocation, Hawes navigates identity in a way that does not reproduce a fixed self/other logic but which, instead, treats these terms as dynamic, contested and contextualised.

Emerging from a global-local matrix, Hawes’s relocation narratives provide a powerful lens through which to examine how postmodern mobilities are transforming identities in late modernity. Her memoirs contribute to a discourse of displacement that destabilises conventional binary categories associated with travel (home/abroad, every day/holiday, local/foreigner) by recognising the possibility for more complex and nuanced conceptualisations. Rejecting the claim that Anglo travel writing is inextricably implicated in forms of colonialism/neo-colonialism, Edwards and Graulund address how its generically hybrid nature allows for a nuanced “critical vocabulary for a politics of contemporary travel practices” (2012, p. 8). Memoirs like Annie Hawes’s in particular offer the potential for a critical cosmopolitan engagement with difference through narrative explorations of migrating sensibilities and identities reconstructed through the experience of transnational relocation.

¹⁰ For a recent critique of the colonial/neo-colonial vision operating in contemporary travel writing, see Lisle (2006).

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(Re)constructing a global identity in Varanasi: an example of contemporary “reverse” migration in Geoff Dyer’s *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi*

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to suggest the existence of an original form of “reverse migration” inspired by the porousness of borders and the unbalanced overturning of the current world-system. This innovative flow of migrants could be compared to the post-war and post-colonial migrations to Britain – except for the destination – since it actually involves the displacement of western people, in particular of British citizens, towards the former colonies, and especially to India, the “pearl of the empire”. This peculiar situation infers also a transformation of the same idea of “identity” which passes from being a stable and fixed definition to an overlapping and fragmented condition.

The complexity of the current balances is affirmed in Geoff Dyer’s *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi* (2009). I firstly suggest analysing the alterations of Jeff’s identity during his stay in Varanasi; his Indian journey will become a cathartic experience which will push him to permanently stay in India and change his perception of himself. The meaning of the same notions of migration and home actually undergoes a significant transformation which implies mechanisms of appropriation and integration. From this perspective, home becomes an ambiguous reality so that, as Ahmed points out, “the question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel” (Ahmed, 1999, p. 89). Reverse migrants like Jeff deserve specific mention in this debate because, although they are first-generation travellers with a strong attachment to their homeland, they ultimately seem to find a fine balance in the host country, maybe due to their inevitable condition of “privileged” migrants.

Keywords: identity, reverse migration, home, India.

1. *Introduction*

The notion of “reverse migration” comes from the idea that relations of power among different countries – the former centre and periphery – and their literary traditions are progressively changing, modifying the balances towards a transnational, multicultural, and cosmopolitan paradigm which privileges the interconnections between Migration studies, Global studies, and Postcolonial literature. Well aware that the centre-periphery model has to be complicated in relation to back-and-forth flows of people (Jay, 2010, p. 3), the aim of the paper is to investigate the connection between postcolonialism and the global social and cultural phenomena of the last years, also considering that globalization has changed and pluralized the concept of “home”, thus creating “reverse migrants” in “reverse homes”.

The porousness of borders and the unbalanced overturning of the current world-system enable to take into consideration an innovative form of migration to the former colonies which involves the displacement of western people, in particular of British citizens, towards India, the former “pearl of the empire”. The present state characterised by the loss of centrality of the so-called “First world” concerns the end of historicism and the strong reaffirmation of space, as it was firstly theorised by Dipesh Chakrabarty’s suggestion of “provincializing Europe”. In this context, what is important is not the place *per se*, but the links among places and spaces created by migrant flows, while the notion of time and its own chronicle of development of the West are losing their supremacy (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 8). The phenomenon of “reverse migration” proposed in this paper is inspired by this logic because the current position of relevance of the former colonies and their inhabitants in the migrant process contributes to shape new paths of analysis. Following this line of investigation,

Many scholars have sought to undo the opposition between the West and the Rest by insisting that the West has never been modern just as the Rest has never been traditional, by producing new disciplinary knowledge that is more sensitive to contingent empirical details and the power relations (Skaria, 2009, p. 54).

In this light, at the beginning of the new millennium, also Edward Said underlined “the eclipse of the old authoritative, Eurocentric models and the new ascendancy of a globalized, postmodern consciousness from which, as Benita Parry and others have argued, the gravity of history has been excised” (Said, 2001, p. 66), although his position reflected a certain pessimism towards the contemporary global phenomena and the actual realization of a pure form of multiculturalism, especially in the western metropolises where the coexistence of different ethnicities is still a problematic matter. As a result, I would rather suggest to focus on the relationship between globalization and the locality (Gupta, 2009, p. 95) of the overseas territories, emergent global spaces which can concretely give rise to the formation of multicultural and transnational environments thanks to increased possibilities of social, cultural, and geographical cross-borders given by their vital and globalised milieu. This condition is leading to the creation of new forms of transnational individualities, a phenomenon which affect also the “stable” British identities as it is shown in Geoff Dyer’s novel. In other words, we are talking about the possible reinvention of the whole British identity, far from the concept of Englishness, but also from that of Britishness.

That said, the same idea of “British” identity has lost its original meaning with the provincialization of Europe. In particular, Chakrabarty points out that,

To provincialise Europe was precisely to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity. It was to ask a question about how thought was related to place. Can thought transcend places of origin? Or do places leave their imprint on thought in such a way as to call into question the idea of purely abstract categories? (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. xiii).

By substituting the “European thought” mentioned by the Indian scholar with “European literature”, and in this case “British literature”, it is possible to affirm that novels can transcend their places of origin, as the new global spatiality leaves its imprint on the literary representation and calls into question the previous forms of national

belonging. So, if in the 1980s the public identity of the British nation was “modified and updated” by the development of literary writings (Arana, 2005, p. 232), nowadays this same identity has undergone another significant change due to the collapse of historicism and of the centre-periphery dichotomy. The overturning of these two concepts has also led to a mutual exchange of cultural elements, according to which the supposed “dominant” cultures tend to import food, films, and also literature from the alleged “inferior” nations. This condition supports the creation of new global citizenships, far from the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion constructed by the cultural elements of reference of the old nation-states. This complex process is obviously still in its starting phase; however, it seems that the future tendency will be to consider space as an including and dynamic element, wherein globalization will not create cultural homogeneity and uniformity, but the construction of solid transnational networks which will allow reversed forms of flows between centres and peripheries. In other words,

the reinvention of the identity of the UK in an international and polycultural frame is revising how all kinds of British identities – Black British and beyond – are conceptualized in ways which supersede received racialised models of subjectivity and selfhood (McLeod, 2010, p. 47).

This means that a radical change in the consideration of the question of identity formation is required in order to understand the implications of the current world-system; and an innovative scenario of investigation of the contemporary migrant flows can be observed in the description of a case of reversed journey embodied in Geoff Dyer's *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi* (2009).

Therefore, the concept of “reverse migration” is an innovative and original notion in the field of migration literature and is here suggested by taking a cue from the notion of “reverse colonization” which characterized the relationship between the first generation of migrants and England after the World War II. According to Looker, reverse colonization, and the consequent migrants' “appropriation” of the English spaces, was a way to respond to the British discrimination in order to feel at home in the UK; the final act of this peculiar process of

integration was a real colonization in reverse which can be compared to European colonialism until World War II (Looker, 2006, p. 66). In this light, reverse colonization is the equivalent and, at the same time, the opposed process to the act of colonialism, as well as reverse migration can be said to be the equivalent issue and the opposite of the migrant phenomenon. Reverse migration implicates a peculiar kind of emotional involvement of the British migrant due to the encounter with a new reality. This condition does not ask for authenticity because the reverse migrant is a sort of first pioneer who moves to the former colonies for the first time. And, even though many English people had travelled from Britain to India during the highest expansion of the British Empire in the XVIII and XIX centuries, the situation of contemporary reverse migrants is totally different because is comparable to that of migrants who move abroad for necessity.

They differ even from “expats”, i.e. people who “live in a foreign country”, since this definition loses the coercive character typical of both the proper and the reverse migrant experience. The expatriate “is more typically pulled to a foreign country than compelled to leave home” (Hart, 2011, p. 557), while the fiction produced by reverse migrants can be described as one in which “residence abroad is matched by a concern with how modern life is shaped by the crossing of national borders and the interactions of diverse cultures” (555). In other words, reverse migrants have to deal with the cultural and geographical twisting caused by the porosity of borders of the contemporary world with consequences on their own identity. Their condition, albeit not fully comparable to that of migrants from the former colonies, is remarkable anyway.

2. *Jeff's transnational community in India*

The complexity of the current balances is expressed in Geoff Dyer's *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi*, a fictional investigation into the multifaceted personality of an English journalist, Jeff Atman, during his wanderings in Italy and India. At first sight, it is interesting to note that the two parts of the novel seem totally detached from each other – the first section dealing with the three-days trip in Venice of the

protagonist for the Biennale in 2003, while the second part is centred on Jeff's experience in Varanasi. In fact, there is no evident linkage between the two journeys, and also between the "two" protagonists of the sections; indeed, the author himself has affirmed that "just as everyone is an avatar of someone else in Hindu myth, so the characters are different incarnations of each other" (Crace, 2009). Actually, a strong link to spirituality and the Indian aptitude to influence human perception and senses is underlined throughout the novel, so that the book has to be considered "as a small part of a larger whole that comprises the unity of the Dyer experience than as separate entities in themselves" (Crace, 2009).

In this light one can follow the evolution of Jeff's identity by spying the alterations in his life and in his way of seeing it: if in the first half of the novel he embodies the character of the shameless art journalist accustomed to the vagaries of art dealers and artists and up to exploit people and situations to achieve his personal success, on the other hand, in the second section, he starts a path of regeneration in Varanasi, in an environment which is totally opposed to the sparkling glamour and pomp of the art world of Venice. Even the title of the novel suggests this reading: the physical "presence" and the fact of "being" Jeff in Venice in the first half is deleted by his journey to Varanasi, where the old self dies to be reborn with a new awareness of *himself*. In this way, Jeff's temporary journey to India is transformed into a permanent resettlement in the former colony, a modern destination for global tourists from all over the world, but still able to show its most genuine face to those who can catch it.

So, the protagonist experiences a veritable identity clash: he is deeply impressed by the contradictions of the Indian environment, where he can assist to the exploitation of the Indian traditions and the deployment of its stereotypes during the shooting of a film by a western director (Dyer, 2009, p. 183), but also to their exaltations and genuine expression in the beautiful temples and in the city's streets. The idea of reincarnation and double-ness which forges Jeff's new "Indian" identity is given also by his assertion that "in another life I could quite happily have worked here" (187). Jeff gradually loses, therefore, the characteristics of a tourist to assume that of his alter ego who is rooting in India. According to Zygmunt Bauman (2001), the line of separation

between tourists and vagabonds, i.e. migrants, is not always clear: in fact, for the Polish philosopher, the vagabond is what the tourist could become, as it happens in the novel through Jeff's attempt of adapting himself to the Indian environment. He gradually ends up accentuating all these elements until mixing himself up with the local traditions and customs:

When I first came to Varanasi, like all the other tourists, I had treated the Ganges with extreme aversion. It may have been a sacred river, but it was a filthy one too, awash with sewage, plastic bags and the ashes of corpses: a sacred, flowing health hazard. Now I felt the urge to take a dip. [...] Dillydallying was just postponing the inevitable. Since there would come a time when I had bathed in the Ganges, not doing so made no sense: like trying to avoid doing something I had already done. Just after sunrise, at Kedar ghat, I took off my shorts and T-shirt and stripped down to my underwear [...] I walked down the steps and entered the water. [...] When they [tourists] saw me, they saw a rebuke to their own timidity. (Dyer, 2009, p. 280-282)

Jeff is a migrant who tries to assimilate himself to the foreign environment, in a journey which is deeply transforming him; this is the intrinsic meaning of his bath in the Ganges.

Affected by an identity crisis which pushes him away from the western world and eager of “keeping one’s options open” (180), Jeff dives into the expat community of those who “in time, would turn into versions of the older guys who were here, guys my age, many of whom looked like they’d done a decade or more in Goa” (200). Gozzini has defined these new transnational identities as the result of genuine “travelling cultures” which cross the frontiers shifting between local and global perspectives. The most interesting characteristic of these new phenomena is the fact that they affect also the so-called “dominant” communities – such as the British one – which thus show dis-placed and relational features (Gozzini, 2006, p. 19). This is exactly what happens in Dyer’s novel, where displaced and relational aspects of Jeff’s personality are embodied by the encounter between the English culture and the Indian territory. In this light, he moves to the *Ganges View Hotel*, where most of the “permanent tourists” reside, spending his time at the *Lotus Lounge*, the terrace of the hotel, when

he is not busy wandering through the city. The atmosphere in the hotel is characterised by a semi-communal spirit that “encouraged interaction among the guests. As different people came and went, bonded and dispersed, so the vibe of the hotel changed. At any time, different combinations and nationalities held sway” (Dyer, 2009, p. 205), thus giving to Jeff the possibility to meet and establish relationships with a number of different European people “migrated” to Varanasi. From this perspective, the hotel guests a veritable international transnational community defined by the presence of western visitors animated by a number of motivations to stay in Varanasi: French, American, German, Scandinavian, and Italian people, “a mixture of people from all over the place [...] Everyone had come from somewhere and was going somewhere else” (205).

They all arrive in India as tourists, but some of them are bound to become diasporic identities and to stay there, sharing their experiences and communal anecdotes and building a sense of belonging which was rare to share in their previously chaotic and impersonal lives in the West. As a result, Jeff “ate dinner in the hotel every night. It was nice meeting people, and sometimes we sat around talking after dessert, but [...] for people used to running their social lives on booze, the lack of wine at dinner meant that once the food was eaten the experience was pretty well finished” (205-206). These first attempts to create a strong transnational community out of Europe fail because Jeff and the other guests are still too anchored to their western life and habits; however, after some months in Varanasi, Jeff’s condition of tourist begins to change, especially when he realises that the “anguishes” and “problems” characterising the western societies are fleeting feelings compared to the real pain that Indians are used to bear without complaining. From this moment, and not by chance, he starts to appreciate the “holy man, sitting by the river, in the shade of a mushroom umbrella”, as well as the “I LOVE MY INDIA’ sign” hanging out of the hotel (233).

His direct eyes-to-eyes encounter with the holy man sat on the street is the eventual element of cohesion with India. They sit in the shade, cross-legged, facing each other, but in their meeting there is nothing of the western stereotyped vision of the Indian spirituality. Jeff is totally aware that “he was in his world and I was in mine. My world-

view would never be his and vice-versa”, but he also adds that “that was what we had in common” (242), thus sponsoring the possibility of having a totally free, unselfish, and not mimic relationship with the inner part of India, and the strength of this kinship is difference. This situation can produce a healthy exchange between cultures, as well as an intense curiosity about foreignness:

What was it like to be him? I wished we could have changed places, for a while at least. If I looked closely, I could see my own face reflected in the dilated pupils of his eyes. It was as if I was there, a little homunculus. And then, after a while, as I concentrated on it, so that little image of me came to fill my vision. I zoomed in on it so that instead of seeing his face, all I could see was my own, staring back at me as from a mirror. That was one way of seeing it. The other was that I was actually seeing what he was seeing and, contrary to what I'd originally thought, there was no real difference between the way I saw him and the way he saw me. (242)

Hence, in this context, difference is similarity without hierarchy, and it actually produces cultural and spiritual enrichment, as well as a deep closeness among people. In this way, Jeff can recognise himself in the eyes of the holy man “as from a mirror”, as if he saw himself for the first time, “a man in his mid-forties, grey-haired, thin-faced, the mouth set in an attitude of some glumness. The face was not unkind, but there was a rigidity about it, [...] What the face was full of, I could see now, was yearning, desire, in this case a desire for knowledge” (242-243). Through the encounter with the Indian holy man, Jeff finally knows himself, so that the rigidity of his face can eventually be replaced by a smile, the same of his new Indian friend: “Having zoomed in on the pupil of my friend's eye, [...] I saw his nose, his teeth and the gaps where his teeth were missing. He was smiling. I smiled back” (243).

Starting from these premises, it is not by chance that, at the end of the novel, Jeff decides not to go back to London by indefinitely extending his stay in Varanasi, and this is a new beginning for this contemporary British “migrant”. Indeed, as the title of the novel suggests, Jeff actually finds his metaphoric death in Varanasi, so that he claims: “I am in mourning for myself”, I said, reprising the old Chekhov joke. ‘My old self refuses to die. The new is struggling to be reborn’ (278),

thus highlighting a transitional stage between two different identities, and two different countries. He has detached himself from the West by becoming gradually less interested in it, and less involved with the world outside Varanasi. In this way, he can be part of the Indian community without losing his own personality – since, to his mind, he is still recognizably himself (287) – but embracing, at the same time, a contemporary hybrid identity. This in-between condition places Jeff on a level similar that of migrant people in the UK; moreover, the author's intention to give his character a genuine migrant identity can be postulated also from the formal structure of the text. The first Venetian part of the novel is, in fact, narrated in the third person, while the Indian section is in the first person and definitely focuses on the protagonist's standpoint, as if Jeff eventually identified himself with Varanasi more than he had done with the western society, thus displacing the experience narrated in *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi* on a really strong emotional level.

3. Space and the City: the production of a new global spatiality in the contemporary world-system

The protagonist's relationship with the Indian city is the genuine turning point of the novel. The production of an original social and urban space passes through the already mentioned critique to historicism made by Chakrabarty, which is reported also by Edward Soja in his theorization of "Thirdspace" as a "a fully lived space, a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual locus of structured individuality and collective experience and agency" (Soja, 1996, p. 11). In particular, this conceptualization is a way of interpreting socially produced space. The concept of "reverse migration" implies a remarkable combination of spatial choice and coercion which perfectly reflects the ambivalent influences of the Indian world on migrants' identities and their peculiar construction of space, a veritable in-between universe characterised by both desire of integration and colonial privileges. In fact, although nowadays India has become an emerging country which may appeal tourists and migrants from all over the world, contemporary globalization cannot be considered, according to Miguel Mellino,

as the engine for the production of a global, smooth, and homogeneous space (Mellino, 2009, p. 6). This is because the current global processes are redefining not only the concept of border, but also the hierarchies among countries from a political and a cultural standpoint.

The challenge represented by this idea of space is at the core of Jeff's journeys in Dyer's novel. During his personal path in the sub-continent which ferries him from the condition of worker/tourist to that of inhabitant, he passes from a substantial ignorance of the Indian geographical space to a deep spiritual consciousness and connection with it. So, if at the beginning of this process he admits, "I'm not sure exactly where it [the Indo-Gangetic Plain] is. It's so big, it's difficult to say where it ends. [...] It's everywhere" (Dyer, 2009, p. 178), thus demonstrating the general British indifference about the nature and history of what is Other, he eventually manages to detach himself from these spatial and cultural limits, as shown, for example, by the already mentioned bath in the Ganges.

At the beginning of his journey, Jeff looks for what is British in the Indian landscape and he is shocked by the traffic, the smell, and wandering animals. After a few weeks, however, these feelings of repulsion are replaced by the awareness that the country, and in particular the city of Varanasi, can give more than what a simple tourist could expect. From this perspective, the city acquires a fundamental role, since it represents the point of contact between West and East; after all, the "new Indian city" is the result of the nation's kinship with its history and the world (Srinivasan, 2015, p. 315), so that it embodies a perfect balance between the inheritance of the rich Indian cultural past and the current global networks with the world outside India.

This awareness is given by a careful observation of Varanasi, "probably the most colourful city in the world" (Dyer, 2009, p. 185). The fact that Jeff is able to recognise its colours means that he is gradually disconnecting himself from the western stereotyped vision which, instead, closes it in a black and white photographic book:

One of them [books about the city] was called *End Time City*, a book of photos by Michael Ackerman. It took some adjusting to: the buildings looked familiar, but the pictures were in black and white, [...] To get rid of the colour was to create a place that, in some ways, was not

a place at all but a stunned reaction to it. They were like pictures of the inside of the photographer's head while he was here, or later, while he was remembering it, or while he was asleep, sweat-drenched and dreaming about it. (185)

The photographer's representation of Varanasi is clearly influenced by his biased vision; what is interesting, instead, is Jeff's ability to go beyond these assumptions, so that he can understand the new Indian sense of space: "in India there was always room. Even when there was no room, there was room" (186). It is like a puzzle box, where the absence of a concrete space leads to the ingenious creation of spatiality which carries the tourist-in-progress to a different lane, a temple, or simply a different place and a different situation: "I found myself outside a temple – I didn't know which one, only that it was not the big one, Vishwanath, [...] I took off my sandals and stepped inside the temple" (188). It is during these peregrinations from a city's lane to another, that the protagonist's consciousness begins to change.

By realising that in Hinduism "there is always room for another god" (189) such as in the Indian cities there is always room for a different landscape and a different perspective, Jeff starts to appreciate the Indian spirit, in particular his sense of ridiculous, which thus becomes a sense of sublime. From this perspective, Varanasi is a "crossing place, between this world and the next" (204), where the same idea of world can be interpreted through a global viewpoint: the Indian city is the crossing place between the western assumptions and the emerging East, and its contradictions are the symbol of this condition. Basically, Varanasi does not belong to "this world" because it is the incarnation of a future reality, in which the distances between the West and the Rest will probably be eliminated. In this light Varanasi is the point zero which "made going anywhere else seem nonsensical" because "all of time was here, and probably all of space too. The city was a mandala, a cosmogram. It contained the cosmos" (204). Thus, the unhinged balances among places denounced by some theorists of postmodernity, such as Bauman, are subverted thanks to the recognition of the wholeness of places such as India, where it is possible to observe the entire range of humankind.

The heterogenous character of the New Indian cities is the distinguishing feature of the new Indian space, where the idea of chaos typical of the former colonies' cities acquires a positive connotation; this happens when Jeff begins to "drift free of the usual demands of time and dates" (275), and this is the final recognition of the overcoming of the time's slavery in favour of a space's exaltation. So, it is not by chance that Jeff loses his British passport – thus abandoning himself to his new Indian identity – when he realises this new condition: this is the definitive integration of the ex-Englishman into the Indian environment, and a final affirmation of the superiority of space – embodied by the Indian subcontinent – over time – represented by the West. The phenomenon of reverse migration here suggested is still in its embryonic stage; however, its characteristics are already quite well defined, especially in relation to ideas of home and homeland.

4. *A new perspective for the study of contemporary migrant flows: reverse migration and the concept of "home"*

The challenge to the concept of "home" is given by contemporary British migrants' redefinition of their relationship to the former colonies. In other words, they are trying to redefine their perception of home by setting it up on their countries of adoption, just like the migrants of the first waves of migration did in the past. This means that the current notion of "home" is a borderless term also for western people, who are increasingly willing to transform and adapt it to the inevitable changes of their muddled lives. Also western countries have had, in fact, to deal with globalization and the turn upside down of the world-system: the pluralization of the concepts of centre and periphery as well as the recent increasing instability of the migrant process are leading to a disappearance of these notions as we know them, so that nowadays it is possible to observe English displacements to the former empire.

In the reverse migrant experience of Jeff Atman in Dyer's novel, the *Ganges View Hotel* is adopted by Jeff as his new home, also considering that the hotel's staff forgot to record what Jeff had consumed:

In the course of my stay at the Ganges View I'd eaten dozens of lunches, breakfasts and dinners, had ordered endless juices, teas and dozens of bottles of water. Wondering what all this might be costing, I asked Kamal – one of the smiling, gentle Nepalis who worked here – if they were keeping some kind of record of what I'd consumed. No, I was supposed to have kept a record, but they had forgotten to give me the piece of paper on which this record was kept. (204-205)

The hotel managers' inattention transforms Jeff's stay at the *Ganges View* into a veritable permanent condition, as if he was rooted in the Indian subcontinent. His process of inclusion, however, is not totally unproblematic with reference to the Indian lifestyle. An initial phase of "irritation and annoyance" (227) for India and all its contradictions comes to a head when he decides to piss in the Ganges as a sign of protest, thus "highlighting the ludicrousness of [the Indian habit of] worshipping a river while simultaneously polluting it" (225). Jeff's behaviour is, however, a response to his preliminary sense of frustration for his ineptitude in penetrating the real Indian scene; at the beginning of his experience, he feels that he cannot gain access to the most cultural and intellectual portions of the Indian society, so he is forced to play the part of the British outsider in the vastness of the Indian scenario. Nonetheless, the process of reverse migration is already in progress, especially when he realises that there is

something strangely familiar, almost reassuring, about the irritation that had been assailing me for the previous weeks: it was how I felt all the time in London, the default setting for a life in which a constant drizzle of frustration, annoyance and rush-hour Tube travel was the unremarked-on norm. (230)

However, he soon realises that the irritation for the small annoyances that he has to face in India are counterbalanced by a spirituality and sense of duty which is far from being weird. The first signals of Jeff's approaching to India are evident in his new comprehension of the South-Asian context, where "I'd begun to take as normal things that once made me feel like a package tourist" (240). As a result, he gradually adapts himself to the new environment, so that

nothing was so urgent that it could not wait, and if you waited long enough then that which had been urgent became – by virtue of its urgency – irrelevant. [...] I'd come to Varanasi because there was nothing to keep me in London, and I stayed on for the same reason: because there was nothing to go home for. (241)

This last consideration is particularly relevant as it underlines Jeff's point of view on the idea of home: he still considers London and the UK as his "home", but his relationship with them is gradually dimming, so that he also stops to check or answer to e-mails from London (240). As a result, while Indian people like Jeff's friend Anand look like "a banker in a heatwave" in their Paul Smith shirts and Prada slacks (277), the English expat looks like a backpacker who is looking for a new home in India. As Jeff asserts, it is like "I've been here for ages. [...] I've sort of taken root here" (277). Anand as well underlines his reversal by describing him as a "castaway" (277), as it was a displaced migrant. In this light it is not by chance that Jeff decides to shave his hair, beard and eyebrows and leave a little pigtail at the back of the head, as he saw on mourners; this new aspect is a symbolic and cathartic act, an attempt of integration into the Indian community, but without aping its culture or rites. Indeed, Jeff has not obviously renounced to his British identity, nor to "the world; I just became gradually less interested in certain aspects of it [...]. I really don't want to come on like someone who has gone through rehab or undergone a conversion or awakening. All I'm saying is that in Varanasi I no longer felt like I was waiting" (279-280), and this condition makes him feel at home eventually.

Hence the fact that Jeff manages to feel at ease in India does not mean that reverse British migrants forget their homeland when they arrive in the subcontinent. Like migrants in the UK, they try to come to terms with their new home by implementing both mechanisms of appropriation and integration, which imply adapting the host country to their cultural practices, and trying to learn and accept the host customs, such as Jeff's gradual incorporation into the Indian spirit. After all, in the migrant process, a number of complex factors have to be solved before the "new place" may be sincerely embraced as home (Kain, 1997, p. 1), such as the demolition of the inevitable racial

barriers and of the reciprocal reluctance to accept the Other's culture. From this perspective, home becomes a "highly ambiguous reality", and as Kain observes, "it is both/and while it is neither/nor" (10), so that it can be an extremely equivocal term.

This situation could mean that the current world-system is progressively going towards a new form of transnationalism characterised by a more genuine integration and a greater migrants' propensity to live in the host country stably thus creating new ideas of home. After all, as Ahmed points out, "the question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 89), so that it is an authentic personal and emotional process which cannot follow a unique interpretation. Reverse migrants deserve specific mention in this debate because, although they are first-generation travellers with a strong attachment to their homeland, they ultimately seem to find a fine balance in the host country, maybe due to their inevitable condition of "privileged" migrants. The literature of the new world-system can indicate, therefore, an innovative relationship also to the concepts of homeland and home, which thus become the point of departure to imagine new post-national identities.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of Geoff Dyer's novel aims at demonstrating how the new balances among different areas of the world and the subsequent new "world order" have influenced the literary production and its analysis, especially considering the broadening of the meaning of the concepts of "home" and "migration". The literary representation of these global mechanisms allows to rethink migrants' movements, by wondering if migrants can transcend places of origin, or if these places leave such a considerable impression that they manage to call into question also purely abstract categories, such as those of place, identity, and home.

If on the one hand, the question of location in postcolonial literature is mainly addressed to the identification of the centres of production of the literary power, on the other hand I wish to suggest another

literary perspective on the centre/periphery dichotomy far from the typical opposition which sees the centre as the emblem of order, while the periphery is the chaotic place par excellence. So, even if Zygmunt Bauman claims that order and chaos are modern twins (Bauman, 2001, p. 321) since they are two inseparable aspects of the same modern global-system, I took into consideration another position according to which centre and periphery might be reversed in relation to the back-and-forth flows of people which characterize the current global situation. In this context, the concept of location becomes a matter of actual and mental production and negotiation of space, that is a place where people shape their multiple identities. This situation also leads to the centre/periphery's mutual exchange of their cultural elements, thus creating a new kind of kinship in which not only the migrant communities try to integrate into Britain, but also the former mother-country sends its citizens abroad. From this perspective, it is therefore possible to talk about the creation of new global citizens far from the old concept of citizenship based on mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion constructed by the nation-state.

Jeff "in Varanasi" is definitely entangled in this conceptualization. He lives a genuine relationship with the subcontinent. His stay is characterised by a totally free, unselfish, and not mimic or orientalist relationship with the inner part of India, and the focal strength of this kinship is difference. Indeed, in Dyer's view, difference embodies similarity without hierarchy, and it actually produces cultural and spiritual enrichment, as well as a deep closeness among people. Jeff's constructive situation unfortunately does not reflect migrants' condition in the UK, but it can be an encouraging perspective for the future.

Therefore, the concept of home is not dead, but it has changed its perspective thanks to the individual's ability of finding home in movement, thus giving rise to a sort of homeless mind which moves away from any notion of fixity (Bender, Winer, 2001, p. 334). Actually, according to Bauman, we are "off balance" nomads, and we live in a sort of circle in which there is no centre (Bauman, 1998, p. 88), while also globalization has helped to change the concept of home towards this pluralization: migrants have no more one home, but many, and they aspire to write about them as much as to come to terms with their fragmented situation.

As a result, generally speaking and considering all due variations, it is possible to spot some affinities between past and present migrants' behaviours: in both cases they initially seek refuge in communities constituted by compatriots because they feel uncomfortable in an alien country, although they gradually try to integrate into it. In addition, if episodes of racism are still very common in Britain against diasporic identities of both first and second generation, thus rendering their inclusion almost impossible, for British migrants in India as well the assimilation is not an easy matter. That said, it is still noteworthy to underline that discriminations suffered by British migrants overseas are certainly less ferocious and vehement than those which hurt the postcolonial diasporic people in Britain; however, they embody a new migrant condition which cannot be ignored. The expectations and dreams of the diasporic post-war migrants can, in some respects, be compared to those of the current unsettled British migrants. They have subordinating characteristic which makes them vulnerable in the subcontinent, in the same way post-war migrants were defenceless in Britain. In this context, we can talk about a veritable shift of the traditional concept of "migration" towards the notion of "reverse migration", as it has been proved by literature, so that the latter can be considered as an indispensable tool for understanding the current global alterations. These considerations demonstrate how the new balances among different areas of the world and the subsequent new "world order" have influenced the literary production and its analysis; the adamant presence of home(s) and homeland(s) definitely forges migrants' identities, and literature is charged with the investigation and clarification of these same phenomena, aware that this new global revolution – along with the redefinition of the ideas of space, identity, and home – is just at the beginning.

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Stitching together broken geographies: Meena Alexander's Transnational Writing

Grazia Micheli

Abstract: Before reaching America, the Indian American writer Meena Alexander (1951-2018) lived in Asia, Africa and Europe. In this paper, I will show how Alexander's work constitutes a "poetics of dislocation", to use her own phrase, responding to her experiences of border crossing. Through the act of writing, Alexander was able to reconcile her many geographies and identities, and she was able to find a home, that is, a place where she could reach her own self and where the various homes that she had inhabited converged. Alexander thus forged transnational connections to her host land and her homeland, actually expanding the transnational model as she embraced other nations as well. Yet her links to Europe have been neglected by critics who have acknowledged and examined the transnationality of her life and work. Therefore, I will address this aspect, especially focusing on her fascination with Italy and its literature. Moreover, I will discuss how Alexander's multiplicity and transnationality can be seen in the intertextuality of her *oeuvre* and in her subversive use of English, which she allows to merge with other languages.

Keywords: Meena Alexander, Transnational Writing, Migration, Identity

Introduction

In this paper, I will focus on how the Indian American writer Meena Alexander used writing to express her transnationality. Social scientists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc have defined transnationalism as "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (1995, p. 48). Therefore, I employ the term "transnationalism" to indicate

the *process* of creating links to more than one nation and “transnationality” to refer to the condition or *quality* of being transnational. As I will discuss later, Alexander’s transnationality is strictly related to the concept of postcolonialism. On the one hand, Alexander was born in a postcolonial era and lived in newly independent countries such as India and Sudan; on the other hand, Alexander’s use of a hybrid English should be read as an act of postcolonial resistance against the legacy of white colonialism. The term “hybridity” “as used in horticulture... refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, ‘hybrid’ species. Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial, etc.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007, p. 108). In postcolonial discourse, the term indicates “the creation of new transcultural forms” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007, p. 108), and it disrupts notions of homogeneity and purity. Homi K. Bhabha (1994), for instance, especially focuses on how hybridity challenges the idea of a cultural hierarchy by revealing the mutuality and interdependence of cultures. Yet Alexander’s life and work go beyond notions of hybridity and transnationalism that highlight the conjunction of two elements. Indeed, Alexander embraced more than two geographies, languages and literatures.

A “poetics of dislocation”

This is the harmony that underwrites a poetics of dislocation, where multiple places are jointed together, and the whole is lit by desire that recuperates the past, figures forth the future, thread of gold at the rim of a black horizon.

Meena Alexander, *Poetics of Dislocation*

Born in 1951 in Allahabad, India, Alexander moved to the United States in 1979 and lived there until her death in 2018. Before reaching America, however, she lived in Asia, Africa and Europe, thus becoming “the epitome of mobility in an age of migrant flows” (Sabo, 2016, p. 68). Her first relocation occurred when she was only five as her father

obtained a job in Sudan. Yet Alexander used to spend six months of each year in Kerala, India. Alexander was very precocious and earned a BA in French and English in 1969 from the University of Khartoum. In 1973, she obtained a PhD from the University of Nottingham, England, with a thesis on Romantic poetry. Then, she returned to India where she worked as a lecturer. In 1979, after marrying the Jewish American historian David Lelyveld, she moved to New York where she became Distinguished Professor of English and Women's Studies at the City University of New York (CUNY). Her first publication is the collection of poems *The Bird's Bright Ring* (1976). Her eight volumes of poetry include *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988), *Quickly Changing River* (2008) and *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2018). Although Alexander is mostly known as a poet, her work spans various literary genres. She wrote two novels, *Nampally Road* (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997); an autobiography, *Fault Lines* (1993; revised and expanded in 2003); two collections of essays and poems, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (1996) and *Poetics of Dislocation* (2009); and two academic studies, *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979) and *Women in Romanticism* (1989).

Alexander spoke of herself as “a woman cracked by multiple migrations” (2003, p. 2), and her relocations across four continents gave shape to what she called “a broken geography” (2003, p. 1). The title of her memoir, *Fault Lines*, refers precisely to this sense of being fractured – in geology, the fault line is a break in the earth’s surface – and imperfect, “a mass of faults, a fault mass” (p. 2). When she was young, she thought that her relocations would prevent her from being a writer (Alexander, Iwanaga & Srikanth, 2001, p. 8). In particular, she thought that all the great writers lived in just one place all their life and that they belonged to a certain tradition (Alexander, Ali & Rasiah, 2000, p. 80). Some of the writers that influenced her certainly fit this description – for instance, Wordsworth, Woolf, Dickinson and Whitman (see Alexander & Shankar, 2008). Yet, as the Black British novelist Caryl Phillips affirms, the “migratory condition, and the subsequent sense of displacement, can be a gift to a creative mind” (as cited in Friedman, 2004, p. 206). Indeed, Alexander’s work is built upon the multiple worlds in which she lived. Hence, the geography is not broken but

recomposed through and in her writing. When she was in India, she “did not need to write. [She] could just be” (as cited in Duncan, 1999, p. 26). In contrast, her many migrations posed the question of who she was, where she came from and to which tradition she belonged (2003, p. 2). It is precisely this existential question that drove her need to write. In addition, as soon as she reached the United States, Alexander became aware of her race and ethnicity, which was a shock for her, “the shock of arrival” that gives the title to her 1996 collection of poems and essays. She declares in one of these essays: “there is always one’s own body, which is marked as Other in this country [the United States]. Ethnicity can draw violence” (1996, p. 7), a violence that is physical as well as psychological since the Other’s look can generate alienation and existential anguish.

It was thanks to writing that Alexander was able to “evade the names they [had] given [her]” (2003, p. 73)¹ and so define herself, as attested to by these lines: “I have to write myself into being” (p. 73). Alexander wrote in order to understand who she was, and so her work is mostly – and almost obsessively – autobiographical. Recuperating the past through memory is central to Alexander’s work as her sense of self is constructed through a stratification of all her previous selves: “I think of myself as most like a landscape I’m making a palette out of, layering. A palimpsest of self” (Alexander, Ali & Rasiah, 2000, p. 71). In this act of “layering”, there is a willingness to embrace every single shade of one’s own existence, accepting and cherishing life *here* and *there*, in an effort to link them. Indeed, not only Asia and America but also Africa and Europe coexist in Alexander’s life and work. Alexander “gives equal weight to the past and to the present, and accommodates disparate selves and fractured subjectivity” (Naidu, 2010, p. 92). Since transnationalism has been defined as the process by which immigrants create links to both their homeland and host land (Glick Schiller et al., 1995, p. 48), by connecting her past with her present, Alexander

¹ Here Alexander also refers to the names that she was given by her parents, “Mary Elizabeth”, which revealed her Christian and colonial background. Alexander chose to name herself “Meena”, a Hindu name, at age 15. This was also the name under which she started to write poems (2003, p. 73).

adopted an approach that is neither diasporic nor assimilationist but transnational.

To Alexander, writing was also a means to find a home (2009, p. 198). Displacement denied her a physical home, and so she envisioned home as being located inside herself: “the sea cast me loose. / The sea tore from me all that I had. In doing so, it gave me an interior life” (2009, p. 178)². Home was thus “a sheltering space for the mind” (1996, p. 3) where Alexander could reach her own self and where the multiple homes that she had inhabited converged. However, this would not have been possible without the act of writing: “a poem can travel; the imagination does in fact move over boundaries. I’m an Indian writer; I’m also an American writer” (Alexander, Ali & Rasiah, 2000, p. 79). Therefore, for Alexander, reaching home did not entail a physical journey but rather a spiritual and imaginative one. Through writing, Alexander was able to draw together her multiple affiliations to distant geographical and cultural realities and be both Indian *and* American.

Multiple and Infinite

Alexander’s complex geographical and cultural positioning actually challenges notions of hybridity based on binarisms such as Asian/American. Indeed, she thought of herself as composed of “*multiple* beings locked into the journey of one body” (2003, p. 1; emphasis added) and expanded W.E.B. Du Bois’s idea of “double consciousness” by hinting at a multiple consciousness: “but now, at the tail end of the century, perhaps there are *many* souls, many voices in one dark body” (1996, p. 2; emphasis added). Alexander seems to anticipate Donald C. Goellnicht, one of the first proponents of a transnational turn in Asian American Studies and of a reassessment of the concept of “double consciousness”, which “we might expand to ‘multiple consciousness’. … [W]e should perhaps think of hybrid positions as a web of multiply intersecting and shifting strands in which the precise location

² Here Alexander recalls the beginning of her relocations when she crossed the Indian Ocean to get to Sudan.

of the subject is extremely difficult to map" (1997, p. 340). Alexander's "precise location" is, indeed, "difficult to map": although she lived in the United States for most of her life, many other locations marked her "broken geography". Thus, Alexander's life and work demonstrate that the concept of transnationalism has to be broadened to include affiliations with more than two countries or continents.

Alexander's fascination with Italy and its literature is especially significant for how transnational links can be established with countries other than the homeland and host land. Transnationalism must include but does not have to be limited to two countries and, in the case of Asian Americans, to just an Asian country and the United States. Yet, so far, the transnational turn in Asian American studies has focused on the links between Asia and the United States, thus overlooking Asian Americans' connections to Canada, South America or Europe, for example. The critical neglect of Alexander's links to Italy might be read as part of this trend. However, Europe plays a significant role in the life and works of writers such as Alexander or the Indian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri.

A noteworthy example of Alexander's connections to Italy is her interest in Venice, which positions her within a tradition of writers fascinated by the city, including Shakespeare, Goethe, Wordsworth, Stendhal, Byron, Balzac, Ruskin, James, Wharton, Proust, Mann, Pound, Hemingway and Calvino. This tradition is conspicuously European and North American (and mostly male). Hence, Alexander constitutes an exception, and she is the sign of a changing world where postcolonial relations and transnational links have made it possible to reach once faraway locations and literatures. In an essay titled "Why Venice?" (2009), Alexander explains her attraction to the city and describes it as "a third place, as the mouth of the east and the lips of the west" (p. 149). Indeed, Venice has a long history of transnational economic and cultural links with other countries, especially in the East. Moreover, with its canals and boats, Venice reminded Alexander of Kerala and its backwaters – a network of lagoons, lakes, rivers and canals located parallel to the Arabian Sea coast (p. 150; Alexander & Rustomji-Kerns, 2009, p. 93). Thus, Venice became the source of inspiration for some of the poems in the collection *Quickly Changing River*, such as "House of the Red Canoe", "Dog Days of Summer",

“Sun Colored”, “Self-Portrait in a Floating Mirror”, “Acqua Alta” [High Tide], “Venetian Pigeons” and “No Ceremony”.

With regard to “Acqua Alta”, Alexander stated: “like so many of my poems ‘Acqua Alta’ makes a symbolic space where sometimes discordant worlds can hang together in harmony” (“Alexander poem set to music”, 2013). As in “Why Venice?”, Alexander sets up as the joining link between India and Venice the element of water – which often recurs in her *oeuvre* (see Joseph, 2009): “as a child, half a world away / I floated in a black canoe” (p. 80). The two worlds are then merged: the *acqua alta*, or high tide, in Venice is caused by the Indian monsoon, and Kālidāsa, the Classical Sanskrit poet, dreams by the Accademia Bridge (p. 80). Thus, water dissolves borders and with them any sense of belonging to a specific, bounded place. Alexander wonders: “what might it mean to belong, anyway, when the streets are filled with water? / Venice makes me ask this question” (2009, p. 50). Alexander’s question might actually be a realisation that, when borders become fluid like water, they can touch and overlap. Hence, it does not make sense to refer to a single origin or identity anymore.

Alexander visited Venice several times, and, in 2016, she was Poet-in-Residence as part of the celebrations for the 500th anniversary of the Venetian ghetto. There, she wrote a cycle of poems about Sara Coppio Sullam, a Jewish woman poet who lived in Venice in the 17th century. Alexander’s poems, together with other poems by Rita Dove and Esther Schor, were published in 2018 under the title *Poems for Sarra/Poesie per Sara* by the Venetian publishing house Damocle. The poems appear both in English and in the Italian translation by Federico Mazzocchi and Anita Pinzi. In addition, a collection of selected poems was published in Italy with the title *Otto poesie [Eight Poems]* (2011): on the left side of the page the poems are in the original English and on the right side in the Italian translation by Marco Fazzini. Therefore, Alexander’s work spans borders not only in terms of content but also reception³. In 2011, Alexander also visited Vicenza where she was in-

³ Her poems have also been translated into Swedish, Urdu, Malayalam and German (Alexander, Bahri & Vasudeva, 1996, pp. 43-44; Alexander & Green, 2016, p. 80). It is worth noticing that when her poems were first published, it was in an

vited to the poetry festival *Dire poesia [Saying Poetry]. Birthplace with Buried Stones* (2013) includes a poem that she composed in Italy after her visit to the city, and the title, “Teatro Olimpico” [Olympic Theatre], refers to one of the best-known historic buildings of Vicenza. With this poem, Alexander makes an unexpected connection between East and West as it is part of a cycle of poems about Jerusalem.

Alexander’s appreciation of Italy extended to its literature: in a poem titled “Reading Leopardi” (2008), Alexander muses on “L’infinito” [The Infinite] (written in 1819; first published in 1825), one of the most famous poems by the Romantic Italian writer Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837). Alexander thinks of her many origins and identities – Arabic, Hindi, Malayalam – and, as in Leopardi’s poem, the rustling wind raises the poet’s awareness of the infinite. Hence, she is “stripped of the names that were given to [her]” (p. 65). In other words, her anxieties regarding her identity/ies vanish as she identifies with Leopardi’s longing for the infinite, his desire to sink “in this immensity”: “così tra questa / immensità s’annega il pensier mio: / e il naufragar m’è dolce in questo mare” [thus my mind drowns into this immensity, and how sweet it is to sink into this sea]. Leopardi’s poem evokes the bliss of losing one’s identity as it fuses with the infinite. Thus, as argued earlier, it is no longer necessary to define oneself in relation to a single point of reference: instead, it is possible to expand one’s consciousness to make it ever more inclusive.

“A special sort of English”

It is this tendency to expansion and connection with multiple parts of the world that marks Alexander’s work as transnational. The concept of transnationalism, however, should not overshadow that of postcolonialism as the world Alexander came from is also a postcolonial one. To Alexander, the notion of a “geography of displacement” was inseparable from that of “a postcolonial geography” (Alexander, Ali & Rasiah,

Arabic translation, hence marking her work as part of world or transnational literature from the very beginning.

2000, p. 72). Indeed, Alexander was born four years after the Partition of India and its independence, and she arrived in Sudan in the year of its independence. Moreover, her father obtained a job in Sudan because of postcolonial relationships between India and other newly independent and formerly colonised nations. In any case, postcolonialism and transnationalism do not exclude each other: Alexander came from a postcolonial background, but she was also transnational.

As a postcolonial writer, Alexander's choice of writing in English was vexed by the fact that it is part of a legacy of British imperialism in India, and so it "exert[ed] on her] an intimate violence" (2009, p. 117). For a year, when she was a child, Alexander had a Scottish home tutor who taught her English. Mrs McDermott would insist on the "correct" pronunciation of words, which Alexander found exasperating: "over and over she made me repeat the words... till their sharpness overwhelmed me, made my mouth hurt. ... I knew the words already but in a different way. And she tried her level best to polish out my Indian English and replace it with the right model" (2003, pp. 111-112). The process of learning "good" English is violent as it tears Alexander's bond with India by imposing a "pure" linguistic form that is alien to her. Considering that English is just one of several languages that Alexander knew – including Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic and French – why did she choose it as her literary language?

The main reason why she did not write in Malayalam – her mother tongue – or Arabic is that she never learnt how to read and write in these languages. She wrote her very first poems in French because she had read some poetry by Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé at school in Khartoum. She eventually chose English as she was inspired by Indian poets who wrote in English such as Toru Dutt (1856-1877) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), both women writers. In addition, she read Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore's poems translated into English. British and North American literary influences also played an important role in bringing her close to the English language. Alexander recalled that, as a teenager, she was especially fascinated by the British Romantic poets: reading their works would encourage "liberating thoughts", which came to her in English (2003, p. 118).

Yet English "had to be pierced and punctured lest the thickness of the white skin cover[ed] over [her] atmosphere, [her] very self"

(p. 118). Here, Alexander voices her need to shape English in such a way that it does not suffocate her ethnic and cultural identity. Thus, she used “a special sort of English... [that] bends and sways to the shores of other territories, other tongues” (1996, p. 11). Like other postcolonial writers, Alexander employed English in a subversive way, allowing it to merge with other languages and using it to express her own individual, transnational world. In doing so, she challenged the repressiveness, “pureness” and “whiteness” of the English language and canon. Alexander declared, for instance, that Malayalam “ha[d] always been there... alongside any other language [she had] used” (1996, p. 11). Indeed, since poetry has a “sonic body” (as cited in Green, 2016, p. 81), and her mother tongue existed for her as orality (Alexander & Maxey, 2009, p. 193), and so as sound, Malayalam had a significant influence on her writing.

Another example of Alexander’s subversive use of English can be found precisely in her “Italian” poems, which are scattered with Italian words and phrases: toponyms, such as “Calle del Cristo” [Christ Street] (p. 82); names of historic buildings, such as “Palazzo Ducale” [Doge’s Palace] (p. 70), or professional venues, such as “Studio Dentistico” [dental office] (p. 83); Saint names; terms like “lire” [liras] (p. 71), “palazzo” [palace] (p. 79) and “canzone” [song] (p. 83); linguistic collocations, such as “Acqua Alta”; literary quotes, such as the one taken from Leopardi’s “The Infinite” (p. 64); quotes taken from songs, such as “O sole mio” (p. 68); and graffiti writings (p. 69). Yet her poetry is not the only receptacle for Alexander’s transnational and syncretic literary tradition: in her novel *Manhattan Music*, she inserts numerous Hindi terms, such as *ayah* (p. 14), *salwar* (p. 17), *dhurri* (p. 87), *gulmohar* (p. 101), *bhajans* (p. 111), *dupatta* (p. 135), *vidu* (p. 214) and *methi* (p. 221). Both the Italian and Hindi words are not translated into English, which suggests that Alexander did not have any particular didactic aim towards the Anglophone reader: quite on the contrary, it represents a defiant choice that potentially excludes a presumed monolingual, Anglophone reader from her work. Moreover, in this way, Alexander reproduces closely the thoughts of a hybrid mind, crossed by multiple cultural references.

It was in America that Alexander felt liberated as a writer since the United States does not have as long a literary tradition as Britain

(Alexander & Maxey, 2009, p. 194). According to Alexander – and other South Asian North American writers such as Bharati Mukherjee and Michael Ondaatje (see Maxey, 2012) – North American English allows for more creativity (Alexander & Maxey, 2009, p. 194) whereas British English is linked with a colonial past where hybridity is considered a threat to white purity. Furthermore, in the United States, her ethnicity provided her with “multiple anchorages” that enabled her to learn from other ethnic-minority writers (2003, p. 202). Alexander was inspired, among others, by the Indian diasporic writers Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie; the Chinese American writer Maxine Hong Kingston; the aforementioned Indian American writer Mukherjee and Sri Lankan Canadian poet and novelist Ondaatje; and the African American novelist Toni Morrison (see Alexander & Rustomji-Kerns, 1998; Ling, 1999; Alexander & Maxey, 2006; Sabo, 2016). Their influence and that of American, Indian and European writers – such as Leopardi – determines the intertextuality of Alexander’s *oeuvre*, and it contributes to its transnationality.

Conclusion

Alexander’s wish to “draw together India and America” (Alexander & Rustomji-Kerns, 1998) turned into a larger project that saw Alexander building affiliations with multiple geographic and cultural locations in the world, including Italy. The title of her last collection of poems, *Atmospheric Embroidery*, refers precisely to this aspiration of “stitching together” different places through the act of writing (Alexander & Green, 2016, p. 87). It is important to remember that transnational does not mean postnational – while the term seems to suggest an overcoming of national interests, it actually entails a multiplication of them as “transmigrants” (Glick Schiller et al., 1995) are attached to more than one nation-state. Alexander did not celebrate a “postnational, passportless ideal” (Dayal, 1998, p. 237) but rather aimed to make a synthesis of her multiple national affiliations. Hence, the “fragments of [her] broken geography” (2003, p. 2), like the mosaic tiles in Saint Mark’s Basilica, are recomposed to form a rich, exceptional body of work.

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Code-switching and code-mixing by Italian migrants speaking ESL: language attitude and “fluid identity”

Paola Leotta

Abstract: It is a widely shared understanding across all the language sciences that bilingualism is a resource for communities and speakers, in a number of different ways (Ruiz, 2010).

Following on Portes and Rumbaut (2001) who have researched widely on English-speaking countries, this paper will focus on the case of three Italian families, all belonging to the same region (Sicily, Italy) who emigrated to three English-speaking countries (England, Malta, Australia) for work-related reasons.

Through a sociolinguistic analysis of interviews, emphasis will be placed both on the concept of “language attitude” or the role of English(es) in family members’ daily routine, and that of ethnic-cultural identity (Mancini, 2006).

The aim is to explore the representational framework that these three families have on bilingualism and biculturalism and to reach a better understanding of the choices that are at the basis of their educational and identity processes.

Research questions refer also to the use of linguistic phenomena of code-switching and code-mixing. These three Italian families frequently switch between Italian and English, and their language choice is related both to the ease of lexical access and to the rates of adaptation to the new host environments (both for adult members and children).

Results revealed an interesting orientation in the harmonization of the different cultures. In fact, all three families are characterized by a “fluid identity” based on complex acculturation processes (Liebkind, 2001).

Keywords: code-switching, code-mixing, ESL, language attitude.

Introduction

The present paper aims at expanding the linguistic research on the phenomenon of the so-called “brain drain”, i.e. compatriots who have high qualifications, who can speak Italian well and have studied English, who often leave their country for the same reasons as the emigrants of 50-100 years ago, although the former have already found a better job, and hope for more opportunities in their career.

This phenomenon is, inevitably, the result of contact between (at least) two languages and two cultures, which implies very complex dynamics that can be defined in terms of “bilingualism” and “biculturalism”.

After introducing the main linguistic theories about languages in general and the contact between Italian and English in particular, our case study will be articulated essentially on two levels: theoretical and purely sociolinguistic, in order to identify three phenomena of “linguistic contact”:

- code switching;
- lexical interferences (code mixing);
- particular types of such interferences, such as discourse markers.

If bilingualism is defined as the condition for which the simple “presence” of multiple codes is recorded in the expressive repertoire of the speakers, the concept of “interference” (i.e. the set of phenomena that appear in the speech of bilinguals) leads us to question those (conscious and unconscious) norms that regulate the production of utterances by those who have more than one expressive code at their disposal.

In fact, all the examples of deviation from the norms of one or the other language that appear in the productions of bilinguals can be defined as “interference phenomena”, and are therefore the result of the contact between the two systems at their disposal. Such deviations are usually classified as phonological, morphological, syntactic or lexical.

Nowadays, linguistics openly recognizes that the phenomena of interference between languages depend both on purely linguistic

(hence structural) and on extra-linguistic (non-structural) factors, such as the prestige attributed to one of the languages at disposal, the ease of expression typical of each speaker, the relationship between the bilingual minority and the community in which it is inserted; in essence, all those factors that make up the socio-cultural framework of contact.

In those cases where the contact between languages is due to migratory circumstances, the importance of the context assumes even greater proportions. De Mauro (1986) reports the need to overcome a mechanical vision of the principle of interference (the mere deviation from one norm to another, from one code to another, from one language to another).

In fact, when bilingual or multilingual speakers, within their complex expressive repertoire, search for the possible activations of those linguistic structures necessary for them to understand and be understood, they practise an implementation of functions, through which they do not choose a direction, but transfer, from time to time and according to the requests of the communicative situation, structures and materials from one code to another.

Among the concepts and principles deriving from the development of “linguistic contact” studies, code switching is one of the most interesting.

Hymes (1974, p. 168) defines code-switching as a “common term for alternative use of two or more languages, varieties of a language or even speech styles”.

We use the term *code-switching* broadly in this paper to encompass the many kinds of language alternations that have often been subsumed under or discussed in tandem with code-switching, among them borrowing, code-mixing, interference, diglossia, style-shifting, crossing, mock language, bivalence and hybridity.

The study of code-switching is a vast field and the use of the term is rather heterogeneous. In the words of Gumperz – one of the pioneers in the field – “conversational code switching can be defined as the juxtaposition, within the same speech exchange, of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (Gumperz, 1982, p. 59).

Over the last few decades, sociolinguistics has focused on functions of code-switching, mainly studying how identity, cultural and situation-specific beliefs, values and norms, or linguistic ideologies affect speakers' choices and their "language attitude". (Gumperz, J.J., 1982, Gumperz, J.J. & Cook-Gumperz, J., 2005, Lasagabaster, D. & Huguet, A., 2007).

As code-switching is the use of two different languages in one speech exchange by proficient bilinguals, we propose *lexical borrowing* or *code-mixing* as a category distinct from code-switching, the former being the insertion, into the grammatical frame of a language, of lexical items from another language.

The last theoretical point on which we have researched is the one concerning discourse markers, such as "well", "you know", "so" and so on. According to Matras (1998), they constitute a phenomenon of interference in itself, thanks to the precocity with which they are employed in the linguistic repertoire of the speakers as "automated operations", so the speakers no longer feel the difference between the linguistic choices made for such productive acts.

On a theoretical level, one of the dimensions of bilingualism considered here is that of the *identity* that the two languages involve. Crystal (1997) identifies eight types of identity: physical, psychological, ethnic, national, social, contextual and stylistic, but more generally we will identify two types: an individual, personal identity, and a collective one, shared by a group (ethnic identity), as proposed by Milazzo (2015).

Following on Phinney et al (2001), ethnic identity is that aspect of *acculturation* that focuses on the subjective sense of belonging to a group or culture. Immigrant groups, as well as individual immigrants, arrive in a new country with differing attitudes towards retaining their culture of origin and/or becoming part of the new society.

Thus, being bilingual inevitably involves being bicultural. This biculturalism can also lead to a mixture of values belonging to both cultures, choosing which one to abandon and which one to assume, giving rise to a sort of third culture, the one that Paulston (2005) calls "bicultural eclecticism", and that Mancini (2006) and Milazzo (2015) have defined "fluid identity".

The hypothesis we want to test is that it is highly probable and even desirable that the use of two languages alternatively activates different linguistic attitudes and different identities, both cultural and personal.

This research will focus on the “linguistic debate”, little investigated in Italy, which instead, in our opinion, is pivotal for the integration of immigrants in society and, at the same time, for the maintenance of ethnic-cultural identity. (Liebkind, 2001). Some studies on the psychological aspects of bilingualism (Wilson, 2005) have shown that the majority of bilingual individuals feel better when they switch between their languages. The analysis of their “language attitude” (Lasagabaster, 2007) has shown that the use of the second language makes them feel more audacious, competent, intelligent, and more self-confident.

Method

Our sociolinguistic study does not claim to be representative or exhaustive. As it is a reduced-scale qualitative research, a special instrument has been created, following the model of three other important instruments that are commonly used to assess bilingualism:

- The language experience and proficiency questionnaire (LEAPQ; Marian, Blumenfeld, & Kaushankaya, 2007);
- The language history questionnaire developed by Li et al., which is notable for its ease of use, accessibility, and large sampling. (LHQ 2.0; Li, Sepanski, & Zhao, 2006; Li, Zhang, Tsai, & Puls, 2014)
- The language and social background questionnaire (LSBQ; Luk and Bialistok, 2013)¹.

¹ References to these questionnaires can be found in Anderson, J, A.E., Mak L., Kevyani C.A., & Bialystock E. (2018). The language and social background questionnaire: assessing degree of bilingualism in a diverse population. *Behavior Research Methods*, 50 (1), 250-263.

The choice of our methodology was dictated by the number of subjects making up our survey, by their spatial distance, and by the information needed. A sample of 13 bilingual subjects was collected with a varied linguistic and communicative competence in English. These are individuals of Italian nationality (Sicilians), members of three families made up of adults, adolescents, and children, with a high level of education among adults (the male figures are two engineers and an architect), who emigrated to three English-speaking countries (Malta, England, Australia) following the brain drain phenomenon. All migrated to their respective countries less than 5 years ago. Except for one of them (male adult), native bilingual, everyone else has learned English as a foreign language at school. The family members living in Australia are: Francesco and Caterina (husband and wife, an architect and a housewife, respectively) and Silvestro, Luisa and Leonardo (all teenagers, attending secondary school).

The family living in England is made up of Giuseppe and Antonella (husband and wife, an engineer and a housewife, respectively) and their two children, Orazio and Lucrezia, both attending primary school.

The family living in Malta is made up of Giuseppe (a native bilingual Maltese/Italian engineer), his wife Valentina (a sports trainer) and their two children, Giulio and Cecilia, both attending primary school.

Each interviewee answered the questions on a questionnaire (Table 1), whose purpose was to provide a sort of individual presentation combined with a general outline of the language skills of each person related to English and Italian. The questionnaire was also composed of open questions, so as to be able to obtain the greatest degree of spontaneity from each answer. The open questions also allowed us to discover information that had not been foreseen, as the interviewees were able to answer in a more personal way, including facts and episodes from their lives.

Table 1. Questionnaire on attitudes towards languages in contact.

I would like to ask you to help me by answering the following questions. This is not a test, so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. I'm interested in your personal opinion. Please, give your answers sincerely, as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation.

Name:

Gender:

Age:

Nationality:

Languages spoken:

Years of residence in Malta/England/Australia:

1. – Compared to your mother tongue, when you speak English do you think your personality changes? In other words, do you feel like a different person?

2. – When you speak English, what are your moods, emotions, feelings about this language? Why?

3. – When you talk to other people in English, is your behaviour different to when you speak Italian?

4. – Are there any aspects of the English language or typically English behaviours and attitudes that you reproduce when you speak Italian, perhaps with your compatriots?

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

This spontaneity was also requested during the collection of the audio material (second step), which was subsequently transcribed (and which, given the limits of this paper, we will not report here). In fact, the subjects were asked to participate in an interview during the course of an investigation on the brain drain phenomenon and the use of language by Italian emigrants living in English-speaking countries. We conducted the interviews according to a very free line-up, which would transform the interviewer-interviewee situation into a simple dialogue, where those who were registered did not limit themselves to synthetically answering questions, but were allowed to express themselves freely, without constraints.

The interviews were used to investigate the sense of identity that Italian emigrants to English-speaking countries have, and to check if their condition of bilingualism makes them feel different from others.

Here, some examples of these questions are listed:

Table 2. Model of interview.

- *What language (s) do you speak at home?*
 - *In which language do you prefer to speak? (at home, at school, at work, for example)*
 - *Do you get confused speaking the two languages? (yes, no, sometimes, often)
If so, on what occasions (with parents, friends, teachers)?*
 - *Do you feel you have a (Maltese, English, Australian) speech community identity?*²
 - *In what language do you dream?*
 - *Does being bilingual make you feel different?*
 - *In which language do you watch TV programmes?*
 - *In which language do you write / read?*
-

Because of the highly diverse experiences of the families in the three countries, their identification with Italian culture and with the larger society was expected to be quite variable, and the data obtained uphold this.

The information obtained, which we will analyze in the following paragraph, cannot at all be considered representative of all Italians who live in English-speaking countries, speaking English as a second language. However, it is very interesting to notice that the majority of subjects recognized a certain change both in their language attitude and in their sense of identity.

² The concept of the “speech community” is foundational to the understanding of code-switching as an identity-based phenomenon. (Hall, K., & Nilep, C., 2015).

Results

The participants showed readiness and willingness and answered copiously the questions asked. From the analysis of the answers obtained, a certain heterogeneity of information emerged.

However, since the research aimed at investigating if and how the use of English could change personality (in terms of identity, emotional states, attitudes and behaviours), attention was focused exclusively on the effects of the English language on bilingual subjects, both in relation to their personal or inner dimension, and to the interpersonal interactive one.

From the analysed answers, it was found that out of 13 subjects constituting the research sample, 2 of them, wives/mothers who did not integrate in a workplace, denied any change in their way of being and of relating. Moreover, the scientific literature confirms that often, over the years, adult females have typically been seen as carriers of the original culture; in a new society, they are more likely to remain at home and maintain traditional practices. The only diversity they feel is linked to a different experience or “cultural distance”.

Caterina (Australia, housewife, speaking Italian): Mi sento una persona diversa solo perché non sono un'australiana nata o che ha mai applicato³ per un lavoro, o con un business a Perth. Il mio vissuto è diverso, la mia cultura è distante, il modo di relazionarmi con gli altri è diverso. Penso che non sia la lingua inglese a farmi sentire diversa, ma tutto quanto elencato precedentemente. La mia personalità non cambia quando parlo inglese!⁴

The remaining 11 subjects, on the contrary, claimed to be aware of changes in their personality, especially regarding attitudes and behav-

³ It is a semantic calque, from the English “to apply” (for).

⁴ I feel different only because I'm not a native Australian, or one who has applied for a job, or who runs a business in Perth. My past is different, my culture is distant, the way I interact with others is different. I don't think it is the English language that makes me feel different, but all those factors I have just listed. My personality doesn't change when I speak English! (My translation)

iours in interpersonal relationships. When they use English, they feel they are different people. This second language activates in them some behaviours exclusively related to the language.

Even when they speak Italian, at home, they make extensive use of discourse markers typical of the English variety of the country in which they live.

Giuseppe (England, engineer): When I speak English, for example, I can use the verb “love” without being misunderstood. In Italian there are many words and expressions to refer to it and you have to be careful when using one connotation or another. When I speak English, my mood is that of a free man, free to say that I love chocolate, I love my family, travelling, I love my job... Love is love, just one feeling!!!

Giulio (Malta, school child): “Mela”⁵, when I talk to my classmates I behave as they do, I am one of them, “ok”?

Some questions deserve reflection, as the results are interesting.

When asked “In which language do you prefer to speak?” almost half of the participants answered that they prefer English and the other half both languages.

An interesting datum emerges to the question “Do you get confused speaking the two languages?” Almost all the participants answered “yes” (with parents/children, friends, teachers). This feeling of confusion when switching between languages was very common among our participants. Nonetheless, the supposition that speakers would rely on code-switching due to gaps in knowledge has changed. As Myers-Scotton (1997, p. 224) have shown, speakers using code-switching are proficient bilinguals, although they may show more ability in one language than the other.

The question “Do you feel you have a (Maltese, English, Australian) speech community identity?” has given rise to different answers: the adult participants said they feel Italian, all the teenagers and children answered “I do not know”.

⁵ Maltese English marker, corresponding to British English “so”.

As far as the sense of identity is concerned, children often wonder what it is, as this awareness evolves with age, national experiences and feelings.

Some studies show that the decisive factors for identity formation and psychological adaptation are not national policies, but more local circumstances (for example, dispersal versus high local concentration of a particular group), personal relationships (family, peers), and activity settings such as school and neighbourhood.

The question “Does being bilingual make you feel different?” divided the participants. Often, the language, values and traditions of the family are devalued and the values and culture of the new country are idealized as winning and rewarding.

Antonella (England, housewife): I'm not sure whether being bilingual makes me feel different. I certainly feel a little angry with the English language. Even if I have lived in England for almost 5 years, I feel English is an elusive language, especially when it comes to phrasal verbs and their many prepositions and meanings! English baffles me. It seems easy and then... it isn't!

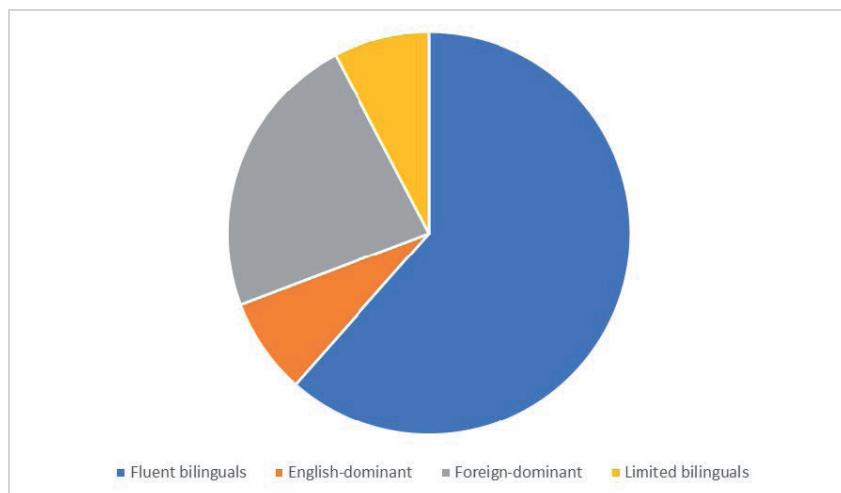
An aspect of the setting that may interact with identity choices is the immigrant policy of the host country, in particular, the extent to which a country supports the process of integration by respecting cultural diversity. The countries in our study differ substantially in their policies toward immigrants.

As Portes and Rumbaut (2001) wrote in relation to the US, our results show similarity, as the two adult members of our survey living in Australia typically combine instrumental learning of English with efforts to maintain their culture and language, such as attending Italian clubs and making friends with Italian migrants. They also seek to pass this heritage to their children. As we know, of all the distinct legacies transmitted across generations, language is arguably the most important, but it is also the most difficult to transmit because of strong opposing forces, such as education. At school, language attitudes are learnt and, therefore, educators play a paramount role in students' formation, to such an extent that attitudes formed under educator influence may be extremely difficult to change. Students who face a situation in which different languages are in contact realise in early

schooling that society, family and school all place importance on the languages spoken in each setting. The students' own assessment, together with the information and the knowledge they gain, will lead to the establishment of their attitudes towards the different languages, the speakers of these languages and to the learning process itself.

This situation was revealed in the course of our qualitative interviews where questions addressed to children were commonly responded to in English. Children use both the Internet and mobile devices in English and often speak English with parents, as well as with friends and teachers.

All things considered, our sample can be categorized into four mutually exclusive categories (Table 3).



Fluent bilinguals (Silvestro, Luisa, Leonardo, Giuseppe, Giulio, Giuseppe, Orazio and Lucrezia) are defined as respondents who know English very well and who are competent in Italian too. In addition, achieving fluent bilingualism is a demanding feat and can be associated with higher educational achievement and more ambitious plans for the future. The only English-dominant child (Cecilia) has fluency in English but much weaker knowledge of Italian, probably because of her

very young age at the time of emigrating; Foreign-dominant members (Francesco, Valentina, Antonella) are in the opposite situation – they speak Italian well, but are less fluent in English. Finally, Limited bilinguals is the category of those who have lost fluency in their home language (Italian), but have not yet acquired full command of English (this is the case of Caterina, housewife now living in Australia).

In addition, the analysis of interviews shows that the family living in Australia code-mix Italian and English very often, much more than the two other families who migrated to England and Malta.

The 13 bilingual subjects considered have the opportunity to alternate the languages they speak, using the L1 with relatives or to keep in touch with the country of origin, thus preserving their values and culture. Last but not least, all the three families return to Sicily at least once a year.

Discussion

The literature on acculturation has clearly shown that language alternation, ranging from single words to longer chunks, has been recognized since at least the mid-twentieth century as an aspect of human language whose importance should be further investigated.

As Berruto (1998, p. 16) claims, in a bilingual context, codeswitching and codemixing are always present, whether to a greater or a lesser extent, and as “language is a resource” (Ruiz, R., 2010), bilingualism can be considered as an added value when it comes to obtaining a job abroad. It also helps to promote tolerance and to equip citizens for participation in public life, and strengthens social cohesion and solidarity, while at the same time mitigating the spread of xenophobia and parochialism among present and future generations.

Everything taken into consideration, this study results in the same argument as Cogo’s (2009) study: code-switching is an intrinsic element of ESL, and the ESL speakers use code-switching as a pragmatic strategy drawing skilfully and creatively from the linguistic repertoires at hand. Although we agree with Cogo that speakers use code-switching skilfully in ESL interaction, our findings imply that the speakers sometimes resort to code-switching due to linguistic deficiency, i.e. as

strategies to enhance the listeners' comprehension, as an extra tool for communication that gives the opportunity to express greater nuances, to signal solidarity with a group and to reach greater efficiency in conversation.

Some migrants in our survey, those living in Australia, are the most bicultural, that is, they have retained their culture of origin while adapting to the new culture. With reference to identity, the equivalent concept is having an integrated or "fluid" identity, which probably contributes to their psychological well-being.

As Erri De Luca (2011, p. 23) writes: "La lingua è l'ultima proprietà di chi parte per sempre"⁶.

This is probably the main reason why these ESL speakers resort to the two languages (Italian and English) in a most creative way to fulfil different discourse functions, to apply certain communication strategies, and to communicate their bilingual identity. They even signal their culture in two distinct ways. They use emblematic switches first for a range of purposes, that is for exclamations, pause fillers, function words or discourse markers in general, to implicitly give a linguistic emblem of their culture, and secondly in order to explicitly refer to concepts associated with Italian culture and humour. (Jenkins J. et al., 2011, p. 296).

Bilingual speakers' language control, therefore, is *dynamic* and fluctuates according to contexts (Micheli, 2001). Their language attitude is instrumental and integrative at the same time, that is, speakers have the motivation to learn their second language for useful and utilitarian purposes, and, on the other hand, they desire to identify with their second culture or language group.

The sensation of feeling powerful and resourceful can be traced back to the intrinsic richness of those who can master more than one language, who can communicate with people of different cultures, who have a greater open-mindedness thanks to their speaking skills, whose identity is fluid and whose language attitude leads to a sort of third culture, or "bicultural eclecticism", which is probably the best acculturation outcome.

⁶ Language is the last ownership of those who leave for good. (My translation).

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Diaries of Otherness: between identity and identification in Children's Books about Migration

Sara de Athouguia Filipe

Abstract: Many books that are considered to be ‘classics’ in the sphere of children’s literature tell stories of a journey; more often than not, a journey that does not necessarily need to be physical, but rather one of self-discovery and personal growth. Nowadays, writers have been further exploring slight variations of this formula in children’s books: a physical journey that shapes the journey of the self. Perhaps for this reason, and also because of humanitarian questions raised by what has been generally called the ‘migrant’ or the ‘refugee’ crisis, books about characters who flee their home countries in fear of war have become increasingly popular in the European literary scene. These books have similar narrative styles, strategies and characteristics: i) the main character is also the narrator, ii) the narrative usually takes the shape of a diary or, at least, of a detailed description of the physical journey, and iii) the identity of the narrator is anonymous or somewhat impersonal. How do children’s books reconcile the model provided by feelings of otherness with the formation and maintenance of a social identity? The argument proposing that this reconciliation is achieved through a personal identification will be based on the analysis of two children’s books about migration: *The Journey*, by Francesca Sanna, and *Diário de um Migrante* [*Diary of a Migrant*], by Maria Inês Almeida and Ana Sofia Gonçalves (illustrator).

Keywords: literature, children, identification, migration

Children’s literature and the process of identification: an introduction

There is something magically universal (or perhaps universally magical) in children’s literature. Storytelling is a powerful communication vehicle that has been proved to be useful in education; and the childlike view of the world offered by children’s books is known

as a means of enhancing self-esteem, developing critical thinking and model behaviours, and teaching cultural sensitivity and communication skills (Davidhizar, 2003). Children's books are, thus, "a source of identification for young readers and of insight for adults who work with children and their literature" (Freeman *et al.*, 1999, p. 864). However, children's literature is, or should be, much more than an 'insight' for adults, because "there are compelling messages about citizenship, tolerance, respect, and integration" deriving from children's books (Hope, 2008, p. 296). This article analyses how migration has changed the approach to the literary theme of the 'journey' in children's books and the implications of these variations to the process of identification of the child reader with the 'migrant' character.

Storytelling is a process that involves the communication and negotiation of an identity. Narrative may be considered to be "an ontological part of social life", and life history narratives have the potential to create and recreate a person's identity: it can, therefore, be said that "people create their social identities through narrative" (Asikainen, 1997, pp. 36-7). Various definitions of identity have been linked to language; an especially useful definition was provided by Kroskrity (1999, p. 111): "identity is defined as the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories". Yet, both *language* and *identity* are complex – and often problematic (see Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Handler, 1994) – concepts, since they are constantly undergoing some kind of transformation and/or revision.

Nevertheless, the communicative process of an identity is the focal point of this article: by communicating who we *are* or who we *think* we are, we are asserting and often negotiating an identity. Identity, in this case, "is a narrative of the self; it's the story we tell about the self in order to know who" we and others are (Hall, 1989, p. 19). It is a story of the 'self' as well as a story of the 'other' to which we impose some kind of structure – and by making the world intelligible, narrative also makes ourselves intelligible (Moore, 1994, p. 119). As a result, *identification* as an ongoing and open-ended process *does* identity.

According to Cohen (2001, pp. 251-2), identification with media characters is defined as 1) a distinctive process of increasing loss of self-awareness and "its temporary replacement with heightened emotional and cognitive connections with a character"; 2) a response to

textual features whose purpose is precisely to provoke identification; and as 3) the internalisation of a point of view communicated by others. In other words, identification allows a reader to interpret a text ‘from the inside’, as if the events lived by the character were happening to the reader too. Identification as a reading mechanism and psychological process is, thus, crucial. The ability to identify with others is developed during early stages of life, and it is fundamental as a social ability, being key to the socialisation of children and “to the development of personal and social identities throughout the life cycle” (Cohen, 2001, p. 248). Although identification is connected to the imagination, it turns out to be essential to the shaping of *real* dynamics in society. As Woodward (2003, pp. 2-5) put it, identification is “both a process and an outcome” because we, as individuals, possess a wide range of “symbolic resources that allow us to consider another person’s experiences and recognize them as our own”. Identification enables us to empathise; and hence its significance as a psychological process and as a reading mechanism.

How do children’s books reconcile the model provided by feelings of otherness with the formation and maintenance of a social identity? I shall argue that the books about this topic reconcile potentially problematic dualities ('the others' and 'us', 'foreigners' and 'natives', 'migrants'/refugees' and 'Europeans') through the attenuation of feelings of 'otherness', by taking the books *The Journey*, by Francesca Sanna (2016), and *Diary of a Migrant*¹, by Maria Inês Almeida and Ana Sofia Gonçalves (2016) as the main analytical examples.

Otherness is as important as selfness, for the perception of difference has been definitional in identity attribution, as argued by Barth (1998). However, the boundaries between belonging and non-belonging, between a social self and an ‘other’, can be negotiable, because the definition of the ‘self’ through the differentiation from an ‘other’ occurs in a context “in which their perception of each other as different is articulated, communicated and enacted” (Reyes, 2015, p. 106). Due to a process of identification motivated by the specific manner through which universal and intelligible feelings are de-

¹ This is my translation of the original title, *Diário de um Migrante*.

scribed in these books, the line between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ becomes blurred, and the child reader is able to understand and relate to the migrant character. As the educational book *Refugees – We Left Because We Had To* (1996) suggests, this ability to relate to, and even to compare with (p. 114), a migrant/refugee character and his/her life has been crucial to the education of children and teenagers on this particular issue.

The words ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ are often used interchangeably in political discourse and in the media. At the official website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a clear distinction is made between a migrant (someone who chooses to move in order to improve his/her life) and a refugee (someone who is fleeing armed conflict or persecution). However, as some authors have argued, “the categories ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ do not simply exist but rather are made” at international and national levels, whereas “underdevelopment, conflict, and, by extension, economic and forced migration are closely linked” (Crawley and Skleparis, 2017, p. 52). The authors of the two children’s books about migration that are analysed in this article have different approaches to this issue of definition. In *The Journey* (2016), the children are never described as ‘refugees’ or as ‘migrants’, nor do they refer to themselves as such. Only at the very end does the narrator say that they are ‘migrating’ in the same way as birds do. In *Diary of a Migrant* (2016), although the title points to the protagonist as a ‘migrant’, the first entry of the diary is more coherent with the definition of a ‘refugee’, since the character is fleeing war. In the personal interview given by the author, Almeida has used the words ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ interchangeably, as if giving the same meaning to them.

I often opt for the word ‘migrant’ in this article because it brings forward some particular elements of these stories (for example, the comparison to the migration of birds), as well as it “refers to human mobility” (La Barbera, 2015, p. 9), thus pointing to the centrality of the literary theme of the ‘journey’ in this kind of books. The ‘journey’ is one of the most prevalent themes of children’s literature and it is often twofold: an outward journey, which usually presents variations of the literary theme of the ‘quest’, and an inner journey of the self.

The literary theme of the 'journey' and its variations

Traditionally, the outward journey is not the central theme of the plot; it is instead an 'unblocking' device that allows the events to unfold, usually prompting an inner journey. For example, *The Secret Garden*, a classic by Frances Hodgson Burnett, tells the story of Mary Lennox, a girl who, after her parents' death in India, is sent to live in England with her uncle. Despite the many physical travels occurring in the book, *The Secret Garden* is really about a journey of the self, almost resembling the demonstration of a therapeutic process through the metaphoric meanings of 'secret gardens' (Almond, 1990). In *Peter Pan*, one of the most famous children's books, by J.M. Barrie, the hero-journey is exemplified by the process through which Wendy learns how to use her imagination to solve problems – Peter Pan is her 'guardian', by giving her the tools to be successful in this particular journey. According to the 'classic' model, the character's inner growth is a result of a process (often an internal one) occurring during the journey (Wadham, 2000, p. 3). The traditional *happy ending* usually means that the hero, in spite of all the internal changes and personal growth prompted by the journey, eventually returns home, even if it is a symbolic return, as in Mary Lennox's case.

Nowadays, writers are focusing instead on a physical journey that alters the character's sense of a coherent self by prompting the adaptation to new realities where he/she is perceived as being 'other'. In this new take on the theme, the focus is on the physical journey, and the *happy ending* does not mean a return home, but it rather presents a solution for a kind of identity crisis caused by a traumatic event. In this context, I mean 'identity crisis' as the internal conflict theorised by Erikson (1968), and also as the absence of a true sense of belonging, which may result in an attempt to make the 'self' more coherent with a social identity. As Erikson (1968) argued, 'crisis' does not suggest a 'catastrophe'; it is, instead, a necessary turning point. According to Marcia (1966), 'crisis' is part of identity formation: in order to achieve maturity, one has to experience a crisis and commit to its resolution.

The situations lived by the characters of the books analysed in this article "overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life... [and] confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and ter-

ror" (Herman, 1992, p. 33). The events described by these two stories have, therefore, the same traumatic potential. In their attempts to cope with traumatic events, the protagonists of these books redefine their identity in novel ways, and, by the end of the story, both of them provide a solution to their identity crisis. Nair *et al.* (2015) analysed how negative experiences contribute to the severity of identity crises in adolescents, and how social support can reduce the crisis, by enabling the individual to overcome it with less stress (p. 173). In both books, social support is crucial to reduce feelings of otherness and a sense of identity crisis.

The Journey

This book by Sanna (2016) tells the story of the journey of a family: a mother and two children, a daughter and a son. The narrator is one of the children, and he/she begins the story with a memory of the place where the family used to live: "a city close to the sea"². The reader knows that this is simply a memory because of temporal expressions. Perhaps more importantly, the reader can foresee, right at the beginning, a traumatic experience that changes the protagonist and his/her family: "last year, our lives changed forever". With the arrival of 'war' and 'chaos' to the family's daily life, the protagonist loses the father, and the mother decides, then, to escape with her children to a "distant country", to a "safe place".

The details about the journey – its phases, means of transportation, and obstacles –, albeit simplified, accurately depict the testimonies of migrants arriving to Europe, with some indications that this journey occurred via the Mediterranean route ("the sea stretches far and wide ahead of us"). The young reader can primarily identify with the characters through the emotions that the protagonist experiences with his/her family, namely the fear of the unknown – e.g. "in the darkness the noises of the forest scare me" – but also the feeling of hope as they ap-

² Since both *The Journey* (2016) and *Diary of a Migrant* (2016) are picture books, the pages are not numbered.

proach the final destination. Along the way, the protagonist finds other children who embarked in the same type of journey and they share stories. At first, stories of terrible and dangerous monsters, but then, there are new stories about the land they are heading to. By telling stories, the children who are migrating try to make sense of the past and the present (as in the stories they share about dangerous monsters hiding in the water, under their boat), but also of an anticipated future (as in those about the forests they will find in the new land, inhabited by kind fairies who give them magic spells to end the war). As argued by McAdams (2018), a story “integrates different psychological elements, brings a certain kind of narrative order and logic to the chaos of experienced life” and it captures important temporal elements; therefore, identity can ‘look like’ a story (p. 361). By sharing stories, the characters are creating a narrative of themselves – of their *selves* –, they are sharing experiences, creating shared connections, and making sense of the world and of their own experiences.

The reader empathises with the need of sharing and belonging, and with the emotions that the character is experiencing. More importantly, the act of telling his/her own story brings the character’s experience closer to the reader; and through this close, albeit fictional, contact with stories of migration, superficial sympathy can become identification. Children’s books play, in this sense, an important part “in the development of children’s understanding of both belonging (being one of us) and differentiation (being other)” (Meek, 2001, p. x). Moreover, children’s books about migration have the potential to integrate the ‘other’ into a common social identity; in other words, to make the ‘other’ one of ‘us’, for “the self as a society is not separate from society at large” (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007, p. 49). By providing a personal account/testimony, these books also stress “to youngsters that refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances” (Hope, 2008, p. 298).

In *The Journey*, the protagonist’s identity crisis is solved in dialogue with those who are in the same situation, but mostly by normalising migration through a parallel with another creature: “From the train I look up to the birds that seem to be following us... They are migrating just like us. And their journey is very long too, but they don’t have to cross any borders”. An event (the migration) that may appear

to be strange to a child is, thus, normalised. Other creatures migrate, so it seems more ‘natural’ that human beings do it too. The protagonist also attempts to solve the crisis by telling his/her criteria to the maintenance of his/her identity: to have a new home “where we can be safe and begin our story again”. Therefore, ‘safety’ and being able ‘to hope’, both at an individual and at a collective level, seem to be the two most prominent requirements presented by Sanna (2016) for the stability of the self and for the maintenance of a social identity. By presenting ‘safety’ and ‘hope’ as requirements for such, the author is also alluding to the importance of imagination and storytelling. On the one hand, the ability of imagining a safer future partially rescues the character, by “providing an escape from or a safe place set off from the painful traumatic scene” (Natov, 2018, p. 58). On the other hand, storytelling may be a step to the healing of the character’s trauma, as a sort of ‘talking cure’ with the potential to “transform pathogenic memories into accessible, articulate renderings” (Visvis, 2004, p. 37), and to offer a relief for the suffering caused by a traumatic event.

Diary of a Migrant

“Day 1: I had to leave. My whole life is packed in this suitcase. War makes us afraid, makes us flee, takes away our freedom” – this is how the book by Almeida and Gonçalves (2016) begins the story of a bird that has to run away from his home due to a war. As in *The Journey*, illustration is a powerful descriptive tool: in *Diary of a Migrant*, the pictures are coherent with the personal sphere of a diary, resembling a collage book. The reader is not given much information about where the bird comes from, but we are able to follow the protagonist’s journey for 89 days. The protagonist, however, does not give a daily account of his emotions; there are chronological gaps in the diary, in which the concepts of the ‘self’ and the ‘journey’ sometimes seem to overlap, since the ‘self’ is clearly presented as a ‘migrant’.

The difficulties introduced by and during the journey are described in detail; feelings of loss and uncertainty are emphasised by the psychological impact that the physical journey has on the character. The bird, who is both the protagonist and the narrator of the

story, does not know where he is heading to, but the final destination does not seem to be a physical place: "Day 12: So many people like me. We are a crowd escaping from fear, seeking peace". The personal identification by the reader is made possible by the manner through which the protagonist stands out from the crowd; through the description of his experience, his feelings and his perceptions. A migrant bird is, thus, humanised, allowing the child reader to find similarities in spite of the different context: his humanity stems from his emotions. The description of an object or personal possession representing an emotion is a concrete way to humanise the character: 'uncertainty', for instance, is conveyed when the protagonist lists the objects that he has in his suitcase, which are very few, "only the essential to survive"; and feelings of 'loss' are expressed through the family's picture that he keeps inside the pocket of his shirt, "near the heart". Yet, the humanisation of the protagonist is performed far beyond his own possessions and emotions. Perhaps more importantly, this humanisation is attained through his social interactions, both the negative (e.g. "there are people who look at me with distrust") and the positive ones, as when people display solicitude and even affection (e.g. "They gave me a hug"). Social support is thus crucial for the solution of the character's identity crisis.

In the book *Diary of a Migrant*, the arrival to the physical destination does not signify the end of the journey: the protagonist needs to build his life, and to establish social and emotional ties/relationships from scratch at an unknown place, where he might be perceived as being 'other'. In this context, and despite the arrival to a peaceful (unspecified) country, 'safety' becomes something that the protagonist achieves as he re-builds his life, in search of stability and of a sense of belonging. The reader is able to accompany the protagonist in each milestone: the new job, the new house, learning a new language, making friends, etc. Although the protagonist recognises that he is seen as having arrived in a new country "with nothing", he claims that his luggage consisted of "a head full of dreams" and a heart "full of hope". The protagonist's self-analysis culminates in the discovery of his potential: in the absence of 'fear', he is able to give his best to the world. This is the end of a journey of the 'self' amidst an identity crisis. A preliminary bridge between the 'self' and the 'other' had been built by social interaction; and

only afterwards would the protagonist be able to place himself *within* a community, as he perceives himself as performing an active role in society. According to his words, he has found love again and “only those who know love know how to give something to the world”.

Identifying with a ‘migrant’/‘refugee’ character

The new literary trends in children’s books can be seen as reflecting a great preoccupation with the inclusion of current social and political issues in the narrative. Specific variations of the literary theme of the ‘journey’ have been explored, particularly after 2015, as a literary mechanism aimed to induce a psychological process in the child reader: a process, I argue, of identification. In the context of children’s literature, such a process is primarily based on empathy and recognition – *empathy* towards the feelings of ‘others’, which are described in ways that children can relate to, and *recognition* of an identity problem, of a sense of ‘otherness’, that, by the end of the journey, is solved in a coherent way with the conditions and principles necessary for the maintenance of a social identity.

From the two books chosen to exemplify this new trend in children’s literature, it is possible to see that the authors wrote about migration either because they were engaged in humanitarian causes, or because they thought it to be one of the most relevant issues nowadays. The idea for the book *The Journey* started when Sanna was visiting a refugee camp in Italy. In an author’s note at the end of the book it is said that, after meeting two young girls at a refugee camp, Sanna saw how ‘powerful’ the personal accounts of migration were, and started interviewing people from many countries – she wanted to write a book about these ‘true stories’. I interviewed Almeida, who considered her background in journalism to be relevant for the stories that she writes:

Although I left journalism aside to dedicate myself to the writing of children’s books, there are things that I still keep [from my professional background]... My goal is to discuss current topics... and I like to discuss them in a way that allows children to understand more of what

life is; especially the life of other children. And those stories, which sometimes are very problematic stories of the present-day, can be told with the true belief that they will have a happy ending... I wanted to write a book about refugees. (M.I. Almeida, personal interview, November 9, 2018)

The fact that these books are written with the clear goal of explaining specific humanitarian issues to children may, indeed, contribute to their similarities with regard to structure and characteristics. It is interesting to note that the protagonists of these books, who are also the narrators of their own stories, have no name and no distinctive traits of personality. The reader ends up knowing more about the journey, about its phases and obstacles from the perspective of its narrator, than about the protagonist. This is a particularly interesting narrative technique, because the protagonist, despite his/her unusual and problematic circumstances, performs as a vessel to the reader's real or imagined experiences/feelings. The child reader is thus able to identify with the protagonist's story and feelings more easily: more than merely having an attitude towards, or an emotion/perception about the character, the absence of a noticeable identity allows the reader to develop a process of identification "that consists of an increasing loss of self-awareness and its temporary replacement with heightened emotional and cognitive connections with a character" (Cohen, 2001, p. 251). Identification can be particularly relevant in the context of children's books about migration, because, in spite of being under the umbrella of the 'journey' theme, these stories intend to explain to children a current, real, and problematic situation lived by people who, in some discourses, are perceived as an 'other'. By having a protagonist who does not have a concrete identity, these books bring the child closer to the subject he or she hears about or watches on TV. The protagonist is no longer an 'other', he/she has feelings that are somewhat known to the child, since children know some degree of fear and loss, and they can at least imagine being away from home and being without the security of their parents' presence, because going to school every day simulates that situation, albeit in a temporary manner.

Through the process of identification, it is the reader who confers an identity to the ‘migrant’ protagonist. The absence of identity can sometimes mean the denial of individuality; it can mean that an individual is “cast outside the social space in which identities are sought, chosen, constructed, evaluated, confirmed or refuted” (Bauman, 2004, p. 39), usually to be described as ‘mob-like’. However, in these two children’s books, all civil recognition of identity is replaced by the child reader’s recognition of an identity problem that is solved – it is the reader’s emotional transfer that transforms a ‘them’ into ‘us’, through a process of individual identification. This identification is enabled by a detailed description of what the character is feeling at each stage of the journey and emphasised by the fact that the narrator and the protagonist whose feelings are described are the same voice, the same ‘self’.

Both books present a personal account of the journey, either in a diary form, as in the case of *Diary of a Migrant*, or as an intimate account in the first person, as reminiscent of a diary. Almeida is particularly aware of the significance of telling the story in the form of a diary for the process of identification:

A diary gives a perception of time... [it] expresses the need to unburden oneself, by writing down secrets and wishes... [the book] is the diary of this bird, but it could be the diary of someone else in the same circumstances, because, although people have different faces, their stories are usually similar. (M.I. Almeida, personal interview, November 9, 2018)

By having a protagonist with an anonymous or somewhat impersonal identity, the authors of these stories intend to convey the personal struggles implied by a journey with the features of migration. Yet, this characteristic also pertains to the process of identification:

[I wrote] this book thinking about refugees, but also about all the people who had to start over. And there are children who also had to make new beginnings in their lives, some earlier than others... It is like any other book; depending on the child’s personal history, life, family and personality, [the child reader] will be more sensitive to the... story of the bird that has to start over... or to other elements of the story. (M.I. Almeida, personal interview, November 9, 2018)

The author wanted, then, to show “how difficult it is to start over” and “how we all should be attentive to others and help” whenever we can; and children have references in their own lives to understand this kind of approach to the issue of migration. Perhaps this is the reason why, in these stories, there are no antagonising housekeepers, as Mrs. Medlock in *The Secret Garden*, nor a Captain Hook, as in *Peter Pan*. As explained in the interview given by Almeida, “the stories are so real” and “the circumstances are already so difficult to overcome” that a villain is not required to shape the character’s stance and identity. The role and nature of villains has clearly changed in children’s literature over time – whereas in traditional fairy tales the villain was always ‘bad’, more recently the concept of villain has shifted either towards the villain who is sometimes ‘good’ and sometimes ‘bad’ or towards a mixed type of hero that can embody both (Spanothymiou *et al.*, 2015, p. 53). In children’s books about migration, the absence of a villain can be seen as a variation of this trend: the challenges are not posed by someone in particular, but rather by traumatic events and/or by the fear of not belonging.

The parallel between the migration of people and the one of birds is common in these books. In *The Journey*, the narrator says that the birds are migrating like he/she and his/her family. In *Diary of a Migrant*, the protagonist is a bird, because both the writer and the illustrator “did not want an obvious illustration”, for they thought that, taking into account the message of ‘hope’ and ‘love’ that they wanted to convey, a symbolic portrayal of the ‘migrant’ might work better than a realistic depiction (M.I. Almeida, personal interview, November 9, 2018). The bird is also present in more recent children’s books about migration, as in *Un Largo Viaje [A Long Journey]* by Daniel H. Chambers and Federico Delicado (2018), a book in which the story is told through a continuous narrative parallel between people and birds during migration. The parallel with the bird can be seen as ‘normalising’ the migration, whereas the identification by the reader with the feelings described by the character as a narrator grant an identity to the protagonist. The migrating birds are perhaps not merely a symbol; they can do more than to ‘signal’ to the reader how normal migration is across species in nature. Although the creation of a narrative about one’s self is indispensable for identity forma-

tion (Eakin, 2008), it is important to consider that trauma may often “refuse integration into a coherent narrative” (Tancke, 2011, p. 11). The parallel with birds – their freedom and fearlessness – can, thus, provide an escape from deeper explanatory narratives, and from the ‘why me?’ questions that could create or intensify variants of the original trauma.

Conclusion

Children’s books that have been written in the last few years about migration introduce a narrative model that can, ultimately, prove to be helpful for the maintenance of a social identity unified by social awareness and humanitarian concerns. The stories of these books integrate an ‘other’ into a community, by making the other and his/her life experiences more intelligible and relatable to children, not only through general feelings of sympathy, but also through a personal identification by the reader with a ‘migrant’ character.

The act of sharing stories about experiences of migration, and the feelings and fears that are part of those stories, can be relevant “to expose stereotypes and media myths” (Hope, 2008, p. 302) about refugees and migrants. Furthermore, these books normalise migration by establishing a parallel with other creatures in nature, and raise awareness to the need of supporting people who undergo such traumatic events, since social support is crucial to overcome a crisis pertaining to identity definition and ascription. According to these books, the child reader can be involved in such social support, since examples of support in these narratives can be as simple (and as powerful) as a hug. The process of identification with a character leads the child to consider the feelings and experiences of the ‘other’. The fact that children’s books about migration usually offer a personal account of feelings and events – even if it is a fictional account – is particularly significant to a sense of truth in the reader’s identification with a migrant character.

By the end of these stories, the migrant is not an ‘other’ anymore. Children’s books about migration reconcile models of ‘otherness’ by providing a solution to the character’s identity crisis at the end; a solu-

tion that is, moreover, coherent with the rules, ideals and principles of the society to which the child reader belongs. The identity crisis is solved by incorporating the migrant character into a broad social identity shared by the child reader. Through the reading of these diaries of ‘otherness’, the ‘other’ becomes one of ‘us’.

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Rereading Modernist texts, shaping women's identities: challenging migrations between Virginia Woolf and Victoria Ocampo

Cristina Carluccio

Abstract: By exploring the writings that Victoria Ocampo published in order to disseminate Virginia Woolf's thought and some of her works in the Spanish-speaking world, this paper intends to shed light on the ways in which Ocampo implemented her plan, with special attention to her distinctive technique of rewriting. In addition to Ocampo's own works on Woolf, which were closely connected to her pioneering activity as the editor of the Argentine journal *Sur [South]*, the analysis will refer to complementary forms of dissemination, such as Vita Sackville-West's significant contribution to Ocampo's project. Discussing the transnational migrations that occurred in the British Woolf's and the Argentine Ocampo's inter-textual dialogues will also help to highlight the intellectual complicity that shaped the two women's cooperation. Given their shared desire to create a global stage for literary modernism, however, the two women's relationship frequently involved an intimate dimension of domesticity, both physically and imaginatively.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, Victoria Ocampo, dissemination, transnational.

Numberless trajectories linking the far-flung corners of the earth were formed in the course of the twentieth century, creating cultural bridges that simultaneously enabled the circulation of texts and ideas, otherwise barely accessible, from one side of the globe to another. These global connections have been long neglected however – sometimes recognized but discredited – due to their preclusion in critical discourse from the assumed vital core of twentieth-century intellectual hegemony.

Andreas Huyssen (2005) and Susan Friedman (2015) are just two of the many scholars who have responded to the call that has recently

animated the academic world for a rereading of the commonly-held view of modernist geography, structured solely into centers and peripheries, in favor of an all-encompassing map. Huyssen (2005) has questioned precisely the validity of what he calls the “geography of classical modernism”, since this cannot but exclude a series of “alternative geographies” that were actually essential to the modernist era (p. 6). Similarly, Friedman’s arguments (2015) aim to throw the paradigm of “Western modernity” itself into disarray (p. x), while drawing on cosmopolitan views within scholarship to provide a more inclusive reading of the transnational ties that have effectively existed in modernist literature.

It is in this hotly debated context that the relationship between the British Virginia Woolf and the Argentine Victoria Ocampo needs to be viewed. Accounts in the scholarship of the inequality between the two women chiefly point to an interpersonal gap that was inevitably created as a result of the distance between their respective countries (i.e. England and Argentina), as if these were lenses through which their interaction was to be observed (see, among others, Beeber, 2005, p. 21; Meyer, 1990, pp. 122-124).

Nevertheless, if Ocampo’s plan for the dissemination of Woolf’s works and thought is explored, a common commitment to writing about women and *as women* strongly emerges in Woolf and Ocampo’s relationship, along with a mutual sympathy and understanding that was capable of overcoming any concomitant difference between them¹. Given this premise, some of the aforementioned observations regarding the abrupt divisions in modernist geography partly collapse to reveal a newer sense of (comm)union in a transnational framework, one which seems to be reflected precisely in Woolf’s and Ocampo’s own friendship and cooperation. This is especially true in the light of the two-way process that Ocampo set in motion with regard to the circulation of Woolf’s image and oeuvre, as this paper also aims to

¹ Alicia Salomone (2006) argues that Ocampo wished to have both a personal and an intellectual relationship with Woolf (p. 73), which was clearly characterized by feminist ideals (p. 71). A “cross-cultural declaration of loyalty to Woolf’s British feminism” is more specifically what Gayle Rogers (2012) sees from Ocampo’s side (p. 141).

show. Indeed, the reciprocal transmission across the Atlantic places Ocampo's approach to Woolf and her writing in an intimate dimension of intellectual sharing rather than a climate of subordination due to Ocampo's inferiority as an Argentine woman intellectual.

Translation represents one of the two prongs of Ocampo's dissemination plan. Thanks to her role as editor of the magazine *Sur* [South], which later evolved into a publishing house, Ocampo worked tirelessly to provide non-English readers with Spanish translations of European works, including those by Woolf. Woolf herself seems to have appreciated the attention she received abroad. Once informed by Ocampo of her intention to translate some of her writings into Spanish, she even provided advice on which works were more suitable for that end. In a letter sent to Victoria in December 1934, Woolf (1979) wrote: "I think the Room is best to begin on: then perhaps, if you want another, Orlando or The Lighthouse" (p. 358). Ocampo must have taken Woolf's tips to heart. Indeed, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) was published in 1936 as *Un cuarto propio*, followed in 1937 by the Spanish version of *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), both translated by the young Argentine Jorge Luis Borges². The very existence of these two translations is confirmation enough of the successful advancement of a plan which was implemented by a woman in South America with the help of a South American magazine. In doing so, however, Ocampo also benefited from the model provided by her friends Waldo Frank and José Ortega y Gasset, whose intellectual activism in North America and Spain respectively had already shown that an ethics of internationalization could be efficaciously spread through a magazine. Overcoming the borders of one's own country was an imperative that drove many intellectuals during the twentieth century, and this need was passionately embraced by Ocampo herself via her editorial activity with *Sur* (Meyer, 1990, pp. 110-120; Rogers, 2012, pp. 469-472).

What appears even more interesting is that Ocampo did not simply exploit the opportunity given by the act of translation. At the same

² It may be useful to stress that whereas such Spanish versions were initially requested in Argentina, they were also available to any Spanish speaker. This factor doubtlessly increased their readership.

time she proposed a personal form of transmission, which foresaw her own *persona* as a channel enabling her to disseminate Woolf's works but also to interrogate them, to inform her readership of Woolf's production but also to respond to it as one of the readers to whom she herself was speaking at the same time. Moreover, Ocampo seems to have put her idea of dissemination into effect in line with a principle of gender division, choosing to deal personally with what could not be expected to emerge in work entrusted to men.

Indeed, it is surprising that despite being proficient in English, Ocampo did not herself act as the translator of Woolf's writings, but rather delegated this task to men (Salmerón & Zamorano, 2006, p. 55). Unlike the translations, her critical writings on Woolf variously emphasize interpersonal and human aspects, and are further framed within a highly discursive narrative. A case in point is precisely dialogue. The practice of translation does certainly avail itself of dialogic movement, but this is primarily aimed at shifting a text into another linguistic world – and it involves its author only obliquely. In contrast, dialogue with both Woolf and her writing became a key recurring motif in Ocampo's works on (and to) her British friend, and was even elevated to the essayistic channel through which Ocampo inaugurated her dissemination plan.

It is no coincidence that this project started with “Carta a Virginia Woolf” [Letter to Virginia Woolf; 1934/1982], instantly manifesting a dialogic bridge between the two women³. Given that the essay's purpose was literary transmission, Ocampo develops dialogue in “Carta” by taking a work by Woolf, i.e. *A Room of One's Own* (1929), as its main discursive subject. By referring to this work, Ocampo manifested her complete agreement with Woolf's vision on women and writing⁴, while describing her time spent with Woolf, be-

³ In this case too, Ocampo moved with calculated equilibrium between two different spheres, i.e. the public and the private. Whereas the public realm was certainly addressed by the publication of her “Carta,” Woolf had received Ocampo's work privately, as she suggests in a letter dated February 1935 (Woolf, 1979, p. 372).

⁴ “Woolf's treatment of the feminine and of women's relationship to literature” is the theme that Ocampo highlights most frequently in her works on Woolf, observes Lojo-Rodríguez (2002, p. 220).

wailing the inadequacy of the tools available to women, not to mention their unfair treatment as victims of an absurd patriarchal system. Ocampo's agreement with Woolf's feminist vision should not be read as a mere replication of the English writer's views however. Acting as a sort of fictionalization of a behind-the-scenes exchange of ideas, "Carta" also reveals some of Ocampo's concerns about Woolf's views as expressed in *A Room*.

As is well known, apart from constituting a great instance of a novel written by a woman, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) enabled Woolf to ponder the effects of gender on writing. Charlotte stands out as an ideal case through which Woolf (1929/1977) sought to clarify a related issue: "Would the fact of her sex in any way interfere with the integrity of a woman novelist – that integrity which I take to be the backbone of the writer?" (p. 80)⁵. Woolf's answer is that Charlotte's extraordinary writing abilities are continually disturbed by her irrepressible feelings, by her "anger" (p. 80)⁶. Here, Ocampo's response diverges from Woolf's. While aligning with her praise for the novel, Ocampo mainly discerns in Charlotte's emotionality a sincere (and justly manifested) response in writing to a condition of repression due to her sex. In the light of her slightly different opinion, she urges Woolf to reflect on what may have motivated those feelings that proliferate throughout Charlotte's writing and in Woolf's view were detrimental to it. Hence, she (1934/1982) asks Woolf: "don't you believe that this suffering, which torments her books, is translated into a moving imperfection? By defending her cause, it is my own that I defend" (p. 105)⁷. As this passage suggests however, Ocampo is not simply focusing on *Jane Eyre*. By discussing Charlotte's role as a talented yet – as a woman living in her own time – *limited* writer, she is indirectly referring to the few possibilities and opportunities that were

⁵ The figure of Charlotte Brontë as an emblem of womanhood in literature appears again in *Virginia Woolf en su diario* [Virginia Woolf in her Diary; 1954/1982], where Ocampo specifically refers to Charlotte's father, the Reverend Patrick, as a starting point for her invective against what she defines a "patriarchal dictatorship" (p. 41).

⁶ See pp. 75-77 and 80-85 for Woolf's discussion (1929/1977) of *Jane Eyre* and her consequential reflection on women and writing.

⁷ All the English translations of "Carta" are mine.

available in the twentieth century to many Argentine women⁸. Ocampo's covert reference is crucial as it encapsulates the interconnection in "Carta" between womanhood and culture, as well as its impact on the relationship between Woolf and Ocampo.

After describing in the essay Woolf and herself as "two women" who "talk about women", Ocampo (1934/1982) focuses on their gaze – "These two women look at one another" – by stressing the diversity intrinsic to that gaze: "the two gazes are different" (p. 101). Gaze thus becomes the medium through which Ocampo can convey those dissimilarities that both perceived, as she looked at Woolf and Woolf looked back at her. As she adds, such divergences between them apparently derived from their respective "environments and climates". Their background was also involved however. Whereas Woolf could boast "a formidable tradition", Ocampo had only "emptiness" behind her (pp. 101-102). Later in the essay, these differences are mentioned again in terms of what each of the two women may have got from their meetings and talks: "the richest is the one who will leave enriched by the encounter" (p. 102). Ocampo seems to be referring to what Woolf in particular could gain from their dialogic sharings, an idea that would have prompted her to identify Woolf as "the richest" among the two⁹. On another level however, by attributing such enrichment to her British friend, Ocampo is more importantly suggesting that her own "poorness" was only apparent; she also had something to offer an extraordinary woman like Woolf. It is worth emphasizing that in a non-figurative sense, Ocampo was not at all poor. Woolf knew that Ocampo's ability to travel around the world extensively derived precisely from her comfortable finan-

⁸ As Rogers (2012) states, "In Woolf's work, Ocampo saw a spirit that could inculcate women's intellectual freedom further in Argentina: the spirit that the defense of one woman's cause is the defense of all women's causes" (p. 142).

⁹ According to many authors, Ocampo had a big impact on Woolf's image of South America and the descriptions of it in her works (Lojo-Rodríguez, 2002; Rogers, 2012, p. 128, p. 142; Salomone, 2006, p. 78). Laura M. Lojo-Rodríguez (2002) for instance focuses on the image of the "butterflies" employed by Woolf (p. 219). In a letter sent to Ocampo in December 1934, Woolf (1979) confessed: "I still have a dream of your America" (p. 356).

cial circumstances¹⁰. Hence, in spite of Ocampo's reference to the differences between her and Woolf, "Carta" stresses the "bridge of words" (p. 102) that intimately connected Woolf and Ocampo one to another, thus hinting at the safe resolution through dialogue of any difference that may have inhibited a sincere relationship between them¹¹. Rather, any dissimilarity in their views could become the starting point of a common exploration of any issues concerning the condition of women which either of the two authors did not readily perceive.

The main technique by which Ocampo manifests her solidarity with Woolf's feminist ideals as a woman writer while affirming her own cultural background is rewriting. In "Carta", first she echoes a famous passage from *A Room of One's Own*: "*Like most uneducated englishwomen [sic], I like reading*" (p. 103)¹². After this quotation, she adds: "*like most uneducated sauthamerican [sic] women, I like writing*" (p. 104). These two quotations exemplify how rewriting enables Ocampo to enlarge Woolf's feminist design by including those women who Woolf may have had no direct knowledge of. This is precisely what Ocampo wishes to show her readers when, as mentioned earlier, she (1934/1982) points out to Woolf that an alternative reading of the "anger" (Woolf, 1929/1977, p. 80) behind Brontë's writing of *Jane Eyre* is highly possible, at least if the novel is read from another perspective (p. 105). Rewriting must have been conceived by Ocampo as an immediate way to convey her closeness to Woolf along with her agreement. It was a technique moreover which would have been instantly noted by Woolf's readers – since she employed it more than once in the works she wrote to popularize Woolf's image in the Spanish-speaking world. It returns briefly, for instance, four years later at the very beginning of *Virginia Woolf, Orlando y Cía* [Virginia Woolf, Orlando and

¹⁰ Such consciousness is foregrounded in a letter that Woolf sent to Vita Sackville-West on January 13, 1939, where she (1980) describes Ocampo as "immensely rich, amorous" (p. 310).

¹¹ For instance, for an exploration of the "hunger" that Ocampo (1934/1982, p. 102) shared with Woolf, see my essay (currently in press).

¹² Both English and italics appear in the original essay unless otherwise indicated. Ocampo writes the Spanish translation in a note.

Co.; 1938] to clarify the purpose of this short book: “I am going to talk to you as a ‘common reader’ of Virginia Woolf’s work. I am going to talk to you about the image that I keep of her. Do not expect to hear pure literary criticism; you would be disappointed” (p. 7)¹³. Then, she explains: “It is out of modesty – absurd in her [Woolf] and justified in me – that Virginia chose this title, recalling a phrase by Dr. Johnson” (p. 46). According to this explicative passage, the figure of the “‘common reader’” (Ocampo, 1938, p. 7) – which again, would have been easily recognized by most readers – needs to be read in terms of a trope, namely a discursive figure through which Ocampo not only gave proof of her understanding of Woolf’s thought, but could verbally express her own inheritance of a role notoriously played by Woolf herself. Indeed, Ocampo’s appropriation of this role, to which she is surely better suited than the critic Woolf, recalls her rewriting in “Carta” of the phrase in *A Room*, which lacks the irony of the original (Ocampo, 1934/1982, p. 104). In spite of the nuances between the two instances of rewriting, however, in both “Carta” and *Virginia Woolf, Orlando y Cía* this technique analogously creates a strong link between Ocampo’s act of writing texts about Woolf on one hand, and the wish she expressed in them to connect her own person to Woolf on the other. Specifically, it was womanhood that Ocampo wished to stress as an important catalyst and glue between her and Woolf.

After Woolf’s death, Ocampo’s approach to her plan for the transmission of Woolf’s thought and writings obviously acquired a new light. In “Virginia Woolf in My Memory” (1941/1990)¹⁴, she confessed her annoyance at such requests as “Speak today about the work of Virginia Woolf” (p. 237). After all, when she knew of Woolf’s death, she “didn’t think of the work. [...] It’s not her work that has ceased to be” (p. 237). What truly mattered to her was that “a little phrase” pronounced by Woolf “or the sight of a walking stick” belonging to her would henceforth be confined to mere memories (p. 236). Her awareness that the image of Virginia Woolf as a writer did not always

¹³ The English translations of this work are mine.

¹⁴ Translated by Doris Meyer from “Virginia Woolf en mi recuerdo” (1941). Quotations hereafter are from this English version.

correspond to her image as a woman, the friend that Ocampo was so proud to have, just made things worse.

This is why, when in 1953 she read *A Writer's Diary*, the collection of Woolf's diaries edited by her husband Leonard Woolf, Ocampo was so disappointed that she reacted by publishing *Virginia Woolf en su diario* (1954/1982). Here she calls the title *A Writer's Diary* as "a warning"¹⁵, because nothing of Woolf's torments and success as a writer has been omitted (p. 11). The natural implication is that the emphasis Leonard placed on the creative and professional side of his wife's life could not but be detrimental to Woolf as a woman. Choices that were perhaps inevitable in Leonard's editing work are read by Ocampo in the light of their negative effect on Woolf's image as a woman. For instance, on the threats intrinsic to omissions, Ocampo (1954/1982) states: "The omissions were not indicated by suspension points in order to prevent the reading from becoming an obstacle race in case they occupied too much space. This preoccupation is annoying" (p. 13). After all, Ocampo was profoundly aware of Woolf's ideas on diary writing, which, occurring "under the influence of distinct states of mind", could transmit "a deformed image" of the writer (p. 16). Indeed, "suppressing other characteristics" sometimes turns the description of the writer that should emerge from her diaries into a "caricature" (p. 17)¹⁶.

In her own *diario*, Ocampo poses as the protector of Woolf's image. Although, as mentioned above, sometimes she understands Leonard's editing decisions, she sees them as the perpetuation of male power over women's lives or, from a slightly different point of view, men's efforts to filter a precise image of womanhood – and so to control it. That Ocampo was truly concerned about the posthumous image of Woolf that works such as *A Writer's Diary* may have conveyed is also shown by "Virginia Woolf y 'Orlando'" [Virginia Woolf and "Orlando"], which was published in 1957 in *Sur* by Vita Sackville-West. Regardless of the theme suggested by its title, this short essay may be placed directly after Ocampo's *Virginia Woolf en su diario* in terms

¹⁵ All the English versions of Ocampo's *diario* are mine.

¹⁶ Ocampo (1954/1982) also underlines Woolf's reluctance to make her life and person public (esp. pp. 20-21).

of both chronology and purpose. Indeed, it is curious that Sackville-West's essay on Woolf's *Orlando* was published several years after both the English novel and its Spanish translation – respectively appearing in 1928 and 1937. This strangeness is compounded by the essay itself. In contrast to what would have been expected, "Virginia Woolf y 'Orlando'" does not provide a proper commentary to Woolf's novel. Rather, it is mostly made up of a series of letters that Woolf had sent to Vita during various phases of the novel's writing. Posing as literary criticism, it reveals private exchanges proving that Vita herself was the inspiration for *Orlando*. Considering Ocampo's concerns about Woolf's image therefore, "Virginia Woolf y 'Orlando'" can truly be understood as an intentional sequel to Ocampo's *Virginia Woolf en su diario*. Indeed, touched as she was by the recent publication of Woolf's (mutilated) diaries, which was then partly counterbalanced by her own *diario*, Ocampo took advantage of Vita's essay to draw the readers' attention, once again, to Virginia as a private person.

This is particularly evident in "Memories of Virginia Woolf" (1946), an essay in which Ocampo's attention to Virginia's image and their relationship actually shadows Woolf's literary production. The essay is underpinned by Ocampo's skill at intertwining biographical and fictional details, since Ocampo continually employs one or the other as a domain of reference in the pictures she draws of Woolf as both a woman and a writer. Indeed, although Woolf is described as "one of the most gifted of writers" (p. 250), the essay does not function at all as a celebration of her works, but mentions them only as a corollary to her person, shifting them to a secondary level of the discourse that erases any intention of the memorial to merely flatter. Mentioning Woolf's works by means of her person therefore represents a witty strategy enabling Ocampo to focus on her friend's personality and appearance, while obliquely dropping hints about her writing.

This is seen in the essay when Ocampo (1946) humorously recalls her encounters with Woolf in her London house. The two women are accompanied by a noisy listener who is introduced under the name of "Elizabeth Browning's dog" (p. 254). Ocampo describes herself telling him, "Flush, keep quiet", after pointing out: "I have come from far away, I haven't time enough to let you distract me" (p. 254). Any aficionado of Woolf's works would instantly get Ocampo's ref-

erence to *Flush: A Biography* (1933). In spite of this literary allusion, camouflaged in an anecdote concerning a meeting between Ocampo and Woolf, what most emerges is Ocampo's wish to be left free to enjoy her visit to see her friend. Nevertheless, as Ocampo continues to write in the essay (1946), Flush's presence in Woolf's house was pressing. It became even more disturbing when she and Virginia tackled "serious things" such as "the problem of woman, literature, America..." (p. 254), and even though Flush looked quite indifferent to their important human business, "Virginia was perfectly at ease amidst the snoring" (p. 254). Ocampo's memories thus reveal a clear contrast between her irritation on the one hand, and a great tranquility in Woolf's attitude on the other, the latter in line with the psychological significance of her location.

Indeed, Woolf's London house revealed to Ocampo a kind of mystic domesticity as she entered and it is variously emphasized in her writings on the British writer¹⁷. She (1946) confessed: "everything seemed to me both unreal and at the same time of the most substantial reality" (p. 254). In this sense, the passages from "Memories of Virginia Woolf" quoted earlier not only demonstrate the previously mentioned links between personal memories and literary references. They further exemplify how the public realm implied by the circulation of this essay in a magazine merged with the private dimension evoked in this same piece. Indeed, Ocampo intentionally locates certain major themes which may transcend domestic life – i.e. woman, literature, America (p. 254) – in the intimate room animated by the two women's confidential conversation and Flush's unmistakable barking.

By turning to her memories, Ocampo (1946) can also return through them to "that typically English house in Tavistock Square", which looked at the world through a "dark green door with the number 52 on it" (p. 254). There, indoors, she can still "see her [Virginia] sitting beside the fire" (p. 256). Ocampo's nostalgic memo-

¹⁷ For a discussion on the significance of domesticity in the relationship between Woolf and Ocampo, in addition to the links between their writings that it provided, see especially Chikiar's Bauer's essay (2016).

ries go back precisely to this Virginia, so very far from the popular writer who, according to the rumors, was escaping from mundanity (p. 250).

Ocampo's dissemination plan was doubtlessly motivated by her consciousness of Woolf's talent as a writer, as well as by her interest in the condition of women, which she and Woolf discussed on many occasions. But it is precisely the interpersonal side of their relationship that is most stressed in Ocampo's writings on her friend. Translating her works would have been able neither to convey the memories she still treasured of Virginia nor to respond to the image that readers may have formed of her, especially after her death.

Ocampo coped with this risk by acting as a woman ready to share rather than merely translate, to the extent that she made the material *situ* of her confidential encounters with Woolf the meta-textual crux of her dissemination plan.

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The difficult identity formation of women and the parental ties in the English fairy tales. *A Toy Princess and Gold Tree, Silver Tree*

Cesare Pozzuoli

Abstract: This piece of research is aimed at analysing the development of female identity and the process of women's education according to the literary representation of fairy tales in English language and especially in Victorian children's literature. From this perspective, the theme of parental influence on the development of female subjectivity will be surveyed. In particular, the literary representation of the paternal figure in this process will be explored, since the father may be represented as both the epitome of the patriarchal power and of weakness according to the narrative pattern of children literature, as scholars suggest (Tosi, 2003). Furthermore, we will observe the role of parents-daughters relationship in the formation of young women which is, as has been argued, one of the main features of the "women's *bildungsroman*" (Bono, Fortini, 2007). To this purpose we will analyse two English fairy tales: *A Toy Princess* by Mary De Morgan in which many issues related to the education of young women during the Victorian Age emerge and *Gold Tree, Silver Tree*, in which the dysfunctional mother-daughter relation is one of the core themes. Our analysis will be based on a close reading of the texts and will make use of an interdisciplinary approach aimed at exploring the issues mentioned above combining a pedagogical perspective and gender oriented literary criticism.

Keywords: female subjectivity, children literature, gender criticism, parents-daughters relationship.

The Fairy Tale, General Aspects Between Literature and Pedagogy

The fairy tale, as a literary genre, as has been observed by several scholars, can be analysed according to different levels of analysis through a multidisciplinary approach. Firstly, the fairy tale and generally speaking, children's literature, is observed both from a literary

outlook, according to different points of view (gender-oriented literary criticism, anthropology oriented literary studies etc.), and from a pedagogic standpoint.

If we consider the fairy tale as a literary genre, we can identify several features that locate it within the vast area of folkloric literature and that are in common to the vast majority of them. As has been argued by Fabietti and Remotti (1997), the fairy tale can be defined as a narration based on fictional and imaginary events which is characterised by the absence of a determined and clear definition of narrative elements such as characters, time and space (Fabietti, Remotti, 1997 p. 12). From this perspective, we can affirm that the typical *incipit* of the vast majority of fairy tales ("once upon a time") has the primary function to place the reader out of a defined narrative time. Secondly, the characters are not endowed with psychological depth but they represent different "human types": the good mother, the weak father, the evil stepmother, the prince, the endangered beauty etc. that stand as different human qualities. This leads us to approach another aspect of this genre: the issue of the themes and of the narrative structure.

As far as the themes are concerned, it is possible to observe that in fairy tales there is a repetition of the same themes and of the same narrative motives. This narrative aspect is deeply related to the cultural and literary origins of this genre. As Bettelheim (2000) has argued, the fairy tale has its origins within the field of popular/oral narrative; thus, Bettelheim posited a connection between this genre and the myth or, in general, between the fairy tale and the epic genre (Bettelheim, 2000, p. 7). Both in the myth and the fairy tale there is the repetition of archetypal situations. As far as the Epic and the oral narrative are concerned, we can affirm that every story told by the so called "singers of tales", presented the same "narrative motives" that were rooted in the oral tradition of every country as Milman Parry and Albert Lord have pointed out in the Sixties (Loretelli, 2010 p. 24). From this point of view, we should argue that it is possible to observe also several features, from both a narrative and a thematic perspective, that distinguish the myth from the fairy tale. Firstly, in the myth the characters are always presented as heroic and extraordinary figures while in the fairy tale they are showed as ordi-

nary figures; secondly, the fairy tale is never tragic, in so far, despite the presence of violent or tragic elements, is concluded with a happy ending while the myth often ends with a tragic situation. The ending of a fairy tale plays a consolatory function for the reader (Bettelheim, 2000 p. 8). This leads us to the next topic approached in this paper: the pedagogical function of the fairy tale and of children literature.

We can argue, according to Carla Lomi (2004), that fairy tales could be easily compared to dreams in so far their main function is the fulfilment of a desire. As many Jungian scholars have argued, including Von Franz (2007), the characters of fairy tales and the situations narrated manage to reflect different psychological phenomena that belong to the inner nature of the self.

As Lomi (2004) argues, in the mind of a child, to whom the fairy tale as a genre is addressed, the situations told, and the characters, as we have observed above, are the representation of various aspects of the psychological structure of the child. In the minds of children, the archetypal figures of fairy tales: dwarfs, princes, dragons, are reflected in the reality and they are the symbolical embodiment of fears, of desires and stand as an instrument enabling parents to establish a connection with their children. From this point of view, Lomi (2004) argues that there is a connection between the psychic structure of children and the themes approached in fairy tales. In other words, several situations described in fairy tales represent the fears and the traumas children go through along their path toward adulthood (Lomi, 2004, p. 29)

Thus, as we have observed, the fairy tale has a specific pedagogic function that is associated to its narrative features. This aspect leads us to analyse the main theme of this paper, the representation of women formation within the genre of English fairy tales and the role of parental figures in this process. As we have noted, this issue can be observed from a multi-faced perspective since the points of analysis range from the pedagogic stand-point, with particular reference to feminist pedagogy, to gender-oriented literary criticism.

Daughters and Their Parents, an Uneasy Kinship

The issue of the relationship between parents and daughters has been one of the pivotal points of the discourse relating to gender-oriented pedagogy and literary criticism. This issue is related to the multi-disciplinary topic of the formation of women. This concerns disciplines including pedagogy and literary criticism and it finds an outlet in particular in the field of children's literature. This consideration brings us to give a brief explanation about the nature of children's literature, a genre whose definition has changed since its origins during the nineteenth century.

As has been pointed out by Franco Moretti (1999) among others, in the nineteenth century the definition of children's or young adults' literature did not include the fairy tale, which in the beginning of the century was primarily addressed, especially in France, to the adults but it was especially referred to the *bildungsroman* (Moretti, 1999 p. 70). In the beginning of the nineteenth century, within English Literature, the fairy tale that was inspired to a more solid French tradition which recognised in Charles Perrault its pillar. This genre became associated to the *bildungsroman* and came to be considered as an independent genre during the Romantic Age. As we know, English Romanticism has given great importance to the dimension of childhood that was perceived as a sort of *locus amoenus*, a sort of a fairyland. Childhood, according to the English Romantics, has a pedagogical function toward the world of adults, as Wordsworth affirms: "The child is father to man" (Tosi, 2007 p. 120). We can observe that in both the fairy tale and the *bildungsroman*, the principal object of this kind of literature is the formation of masculine personality. As Moretti (1999) has argued, the concept of *bildung* in itself was generally applied to men whose destiny, according to the culture of the rising bourgeois society, was to be active members of a productive society based on a clear distinction of gender roles (Moretti, 1999 p. 75).

Men were doomed to be husbands, fathers and breadwinners while the only outlet for women were family and childbearing. From this perspective, family ties and in particular the gender-divide between children within a family, in the context of bourgeois and Victorian society, managed to mould the contents and the narrative strategies

that characterised this kind of narration. As Gilbert and Gubar (1979) point out, women belonging to the middle class were excluded from the world of men by the rules of patriarchy. In particular, travelling alone was forbidden to them and they were excluded from many domains, including art and writing (Gilbert, Gubar, 1979 p. 60). Furthermore, women during this period were not involved in formal educational process and the only knowledge they were given concerned the housekeeping and “soft-activities” including playing an instrument or drawing. This educational model was the so-called “ornamental pedagogy”, as Simonetta Ulivieri argues (Marone, 2003 p. 95). The issue of women’s education has been a pivotal problem within the feminist discourse during the Nineteenth Century. Several philosophers of the time, including Jhon Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), thought that the only way to enable women to live as independent human beings was to give them a regular education that could allow them to have a live outside the home (Carvarero, Restaino, 2002 p. 55). This situation has moulded the narrative strategies and the contents of the *bildungsroman*. As it has been argued by many critics, there are various and substantial differences between the “masculine *bildung*” and the female one. Firstly, since women were not allowed to live an active life, according to the rules of patriarchy, their educational path was not concluded with the marriage, reaching a solid social status but it continued during their life. As far as women’s *bildungsroman* is concerned, the personal and psychological evolution of the heroine is in constant flux. From this perspective, the concept of female formation, in its narrative representation is related to the emotive and psychic growth of the character rather than to the material aspects of life (Chemello, 2007 p. 30).

Furthermore, a crucial element in this process is the role of parental figures and especially of mothers. Many scholars, including Bono and Fortini (2007), have affirmed that the inner journey of these women is often assisted and guided by the presence of the maternal figure (Bono, Fortini, 2007 p. 125). From an historical point of view, in many domains including pedagogy, psychoanalysis and literary theory, scholars have highlighted the mother-son bond. Consequently, the relationship between mother and daughters has been substantially overlooked by the predominance of the son. The only way for a woman to love

herself, also from a physical point of view is to love her mother's body, since it is the first object that she enters in contact with (Rich, 1977 p. 250). According to Rich, the maternal heritage is the pivotal element in the self-formation for a woman. As far as literature is concerned, she identifies in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* the most accomplished representations of the mother-daughter relation within contemporary literature. This novel is one of the rarest examples of women's narration that makes the maternal figure the real core of the narration. Nevertheless, it is important to remark that the maternal figure can influence the development of daughters not only in a positive way but also through their absence or dysfunctional behaviour or just providing life examples that have lead women belonging to a younger generation to seek for other role mothers. This is what Lynn Suckenick defines as "matrophobia": the fear of a woman to become like her mother (Rich, 1977 p. 54).

As Muraro argues, women could be able to accomplish a real process of self-formation only through the "symbolical murder" of the mother (Muraro, 2006 p. 19). Patriarchal culture does not teach women the love for their mothers (Marone, 2003 p. 45). From this perspective, we could observe that narrative, especially women's narrative, in particular within English-speaking contemporary fiction, has been characterised by the presence of dysfunctional mothers or absentee ones. (Del Sazio Gerbero, 2001 p. 159). Several examples of this tendency are provided by novels including *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Brothers and Sisters* by Ivy Compton-Burnett or *Una donna*, written by Italian author Sibilla Aleramo. All these novels, which have an autobiographical ground, show how the formation of a woman can be determined by the influence of a weak/absentee mother or an evil one. From a narrative point of view, the maternal figure is the lightning rod that activates the narrative process. Often these mothers are replaced by substitute figures that act as the real mother. As Chemello (2007) points out, the female *bildungsroman* is based on the relationship of the heroine with other women who play an educational function on her (Chemello, 2007). This is a typical pedagogical process that has been defined by feminist pedagogy as female magistrality based on the transmission of knowledge between women belonging to different generations (Marone, 2003 p. 115).

The Parental Relationships for Women and the Issue of Women Formation Between Literature and Pedagogy. Gold Tree, Silver Tree and A Toy Princess

In English fiction, the presence of an assertive mother is associated to a weak father or an absentee one or the other way round, as shown by the works we have mentioned above. Frequently, fairy tales are characterised by the presence of inept fathers who feel threatened by a virtually dangerous womanhood and who encourage the stereotype of a subjugated womanhood. The father in *Sleeping Beauty* condemns his daughter to apparent death by his ineptitude, the father of *Cinderella* is dominated by his evil wife while the father of *Porziella* by Basile forces her to marry an ogre (Sapegno, 2018 p. 100). This brings us to reflect again on the thematic dimension of fairy tales. In this literary genre, family dynamics represent one of the main issue and prove to be particularly relevant from both a narrative standpoint and for the analysis of our theme, the formation of daughters, as we shall see.

As we have argued above, the element of family relations is crucial for the narrative development of fairy tales and for the pedagogic elements involved in them. We will focus in particular on the English-speaking fairy tale of the Nineteenth century.

The society described in fairy tales is the reflection of an ordered universe based on a patriarchal system. In particular, the story opens with a description of the family group, the panorama of the relationships between different generational groups. Family is the core of the social structure depicted in fairy tales, a family that proves to be a source of violence, of envy and that is able to generate a sense of fear in the mind of children. *Snowwhite* by the Grimms is a perfect example of how family dynamics can influence the plot. It is in particular the change in the *status quo* of family situation which puts the plot in motion and contextually pushes the hero or the heroine to undertake her educational/formation path. For instance, as Cambi argues, it is the substitution of the good mother with the evil stepmother that produces the narrative “catastrophe” in *Snowwhite*. Love is replaced by hate and the good, loving mother is replaced by a violent stepmother. This is the fact that leads the heroine on her formation path and makes her find a new family. (Cambi, 2008 p. 210).

Therefore, the figure of the evil stepmother plays a vital role in the narrative structure of *Snowwhite* and of its versions. Generally speaking, the stepmother shows an immoderate love for her own children, as *Cinderella* demonstrates, which is balanced by the hate and envy for the her step-daughter. The notable presence of stepmothers in Victorian fairy tales is partially due to a cultural and historical issue: the incidence of death due to childbirth during the Nineteenth Century. As we have noted above, the presence of a strong stepmother is often associated to a weak father which is the representation to some extent of the crisis of the paternal figure and of the patriarchal system which starts during the Nineteenth Century. As Schectman (1993) points out, 'Fathers weakness, in times of poverty and grief, is the shadow of his patriarchal strength, he mirrors the unconscious power of the stepmother by becoming powerless in equally unconscious ways' (Schectman, 1993 p. 100). We can observe that the narrative motive of the absent or dead mother and of the orphan heroine is very common within the canon of Victorian fiction, Dickens' novels or, as far as women's literature is concerned, *Jane Eyre*. This leitmotiv started to be unusual with the improvement of the sanitary conditions of childbirth (Dever, 1998).

In Britain, until the Victorian Age, children's fiction did not belong to the canon of English literature. The vast majority of the fairy tales belonged to French production, Charles Perrault's works were widespread in Britain. Nevertheless, French fairy tales were primarily addressed to aristocratic readers and to the milieu of the French Court. In English culture, the fairy tale was intended to be read by young readers and oppositely to the French tradition in which it was considered as a popular and folkloric literary genre, thus, one of the most widespread models for the Victorian fairy tales are the popular tales by the Brothers Grimm. Several among these tales were collected in miscellanies including the *English Fairy Tales* (1890), edited by Joseph Jacobs which gave a crucial contribution to the creation of a canon of the English Fairy tale. It is vital to remark that the vast majority of the fairy tales written by the Grimms or belonging to different traditions were adapted to the tastes of English readers, thus, the most disturbing details were modified or erased. (Lomi, 2007). These stories were conceived to provide an "angelic" image of childhood. Neverthe-

less, authors frequently portrayed transgressive images of family life and especially of aggressive maternity as in *The New Mother* (1882) by Lucy Clifford, in which the real mother of Blue-Eyes and Turkey leaves them with a surrogate mother who reveals herself to be a monster. (Lomi, 2007 p. 80)

During the Victorian Age, as Caravero and Restaino argue, the woman question and the debate concerning the role of women (and daughters) within patriarchal family became particularly relevant (Cavarero, Restaino, 2002). This issue is particularly relevant for English literature written by women in so far several Victorian heroines strive to achieve their desire for self-determination that is conflict with the traditional roles of mothers and daughters (Hirsh, 1989). As Marianne Hirsh points out, these roles, in Victorian England represent: 'a confinement and a potential destruction impossible to combine with the freedom and expansiveness seen as necessary to artistic creativity' (Hirsh, 1989 p. 45).

Two British Fairy Tales: A Toy Princess and Gold Tree, Silver Tree

This fight of women for self-determination proves to be particularly evident in Mary De Morgan's *A Toy Princess* (1877), in which this theme is intertwined with the issue of family plot. The story opens with the death of the mother, an event that, as we have observed, puts the plot in motion.

We can argue that in this fairy tale the absence of the mother does not mean the substitution with a stepmother but, nevertheless, it is associated with a weak and dysfunctional father. The wife of the king dies because of the stiffness and the iciness of the Court that make her feel depressed and ill as shown by De Morgan (1877)

The king of this country married a princess from a neighbouring land, who was very good and beautiful, but the people in her own home were as unlike her husband's people as it was possible to be. They laughed and talked, and were noisy and merry when they were happy, and cried and lamented if they were sad. In fact, whatever they felt they showed at once, and the Princess was just like them. So when she came to her new home, she could not at all understand her subjects...

Every day she grew thinner and paler... and she believed she was going to die...and soon afterwards a Little Princess was born, and queen died. (p. 98-100)

This passage can be easily interpreted as a metaphor of the social entrapment of women during the Victorian Age. As Fusini (2012) points out, this condition, typical of many women writers, is materially epitomised by symptoms including paleness or anorexia. The Princess is not able to conform to the status of a silent woman and to the restricting rules imposed to women.

The same problem involves the young princess who is not allowed to express herself and to behave as a child. As De Morgan (1877) wrote:

She was a pretty little girl, with a round baby face and big merry blue eyes; but as she grew older, her eyes grew less and less merry and bright, and her fat little face grew thin and pale. She was not allowed to play with any other children, lest she might learn bad manners; and she was taught any games or given any toys (p. 102)

As the story tells us, the court, the society in which the princess lives is a reproduction of the stiff Victorian society and in particular of the royal family, the court. The crying of the baby, which is a natural expression of childhood, is considered to be a disturbing element that has to be censored in so far it is the expression of a rule breaking nature:

The little baby was christened Ursula, and given to some court ladies to be taken charge of. Poor little Princess! *She* cried hard enough, and nothing could stop her. All her ladies were frightened, and said that they had not heard such a dreadful noise for a long time. But, till she was about two years old, nothing could stop her crying when she was cold or hungry, or crowing when she was pleased. After that she began to understand a little what was meant when her nurses told her in cold, polite tones, that she was being naughty, and she grew much quieter (De Morgan, 1887 p. 100)

As Tosi (2003) argues, the condition of loneliness of the young princess stands as an instrument to criticise the educational models for women of Victorian high bourgeois society that tended to restrict chil-

dren and in particular young girls within the nursery. Concealing their feelings and avoiding any contact with fellows, in De Morgan's view is an example of an "educational dystopia" and it is confronted with the pleasures and the pedagogic importance of an open-air life style, as Frances Hodgson Burnett shows us in *The Secret Garden* (Tosi, 2003 p. 268). Furthermore, it is important to remember that several Victorian and late romantic literary heroines strived to escape the claustrophobic domestic environment (Moers, 1977 p. 300).

In De Morgan's tale the fairy godmother plays a crucial role in the development of the personality of the young Princess. She is a perfect example of the female education system we have mentioned in the previous paragraph. The godmother, who was also the late Queen's godmother, replaces the King, who represents the Victorian educational system, in the education of the young protagonist of the story. She replaces the princess with a magic human – like toy, which is only able to say yes and to be polite. The fairy godmother plays a vital role in the process of personal development of the Princess. As Bono and Fortini (2007) have argued, the absence of the mother and the weakness of the father in this kind of narrations, as well as in *bildungsroman*, is balanced by a substitute maternal figure

One day the old fairy Taboret made herself invisible, and flew over to the King's palace to see how things were going on there. She went straight up to the nursery, where she found poor little Ursula sitting by the window, with her head leaning on her hand. It was a very grand room but there were no toys or dolls about, and when the fairy saw this, she frowned to herself and shook her head. [...] At last she rose, and went out to pay visit to the largest shop in Fairyland [...]. Into this shop Taboret flew; and she was well known there as a good customer [...] "I want" said Taboret, "A princess" (De Morgan, 1877 p. 102-104)

The real Princess is adopted by a family of fishermen who, despite their poverty, manage to grant her a serene childhood and a kind of education suitable for her temperament:

The real Ursula grew tall and straight as an alder, and merry and lighthearted as a bird. No one came to claim her, so the good fisherman and his wife kept her and brought her among their little ones.

She played with them on the beach, and learned her lessons with them at school, and her old life had become like a dream she barely remembered (De Morgan, 1877 p. 114)

At the end of the story, young Ursula marries one of the sons of the fisherman and his wife. One of the most interesting points in De Morgan story is the attitude assumed by the King, the father. He does not perceive the difference between his real daughter and the speaking toy that has replaced her. Furthermore, when he is obliged to choose between the real Ursula and the fake one, he finally prefers to keep the toy with him. The behaviour of the king is the epitome of the patriarchal power which tries to silence the daughters. The “father’s daughters” are doomed to be silent and dutiful (Sapegno, 2018 p. 79). Thus, the toy princess is the projection of the inner paternal desire to have an obedient and “decorative” daughter (Tosi, 2003 p. 270). As far as the *bildung* of Ursula is concerned, it is interesting to note that, due to the positive influence of her godmother, she is able to break the rules imposed to her by the establishment marrying a man belonging to an inferior class in order to pursue her interior wellbeing, according to a modern idea of pedagogy.

As we have seen, the thematic core of *The Toy Princess* is the dysfunctional relationship between a father and a daughter, another element is the presence of a positive maternal-like figure. The same elements are the basis of *Gold Tree*, *Silver Tree*, the Scottish version of *Snowwhite* included in *Celtic Fairy Tales* (1892) edited by Joseph Jacobs. There are several elements that distinguish this version from Grimms’ *Snowwhite*. Undoubtedly, the most important one is the fact that in *Gold Tree* the evil character is not the stepmother but the mother herself, who proves to be envious and to desire to destroy the life of her own daughter. As has been pointed out by Bettelheim (2000), the narrative invention of the stepmother is an instrument to avoid to identify the maternal figure with a violent attitude or a dysfunctional behaviour. As Bettelheim argues, children are not able to accept that their own mother could be a “monster” thus they create an alternative figure that embodies all the failures of their mother (Bettelheim, 2000 p. 20). To some extent, this dynamic allows children to convey their “hate” for their parents toward a fictional character, a character conceived by

their psychology. This issue is related to the distinction between the good mother and the bad mother coined by Melanie Klein. The fairy tale as a literary genre, thematises this issue.

In *Gold Tree and Silver Tree* the mother is told by a magic animal (a trout) that her daughter Gold Tree is prettier than her. This fact generates a pathologic jealousy in the queen and a sense illness that, according to her, could be cured only by killing her daughter, the princess, and eating her liver and heart, as we can read in Joseph Jacobs' (1892) miscellany:

Said Silver-tree, "Troutie, bonny little fellow, am not I the most beautiful queen in the world?"

"Oh indeed you are not".

"Who then?"

"Why, Gold-tree, your daughter. Silver-tree went home, blind with rage. She lay down on the bed, and vowed she would never be well until she could get the heart and the liver of Gold-tree, her daughter, to eat.

At nightfall the king came home, and it was told him that Silver-tree, his wife, was very ill. He went where she was, and asked her what was wrong with her.

"Oh! only a thing which you may heal if you like".

"Oh! indeed there is nothing at all which I could do for you that I would not do".

"If I get the heart and the liver of Gold-tree, my daughter, to eat, I shall be well" (p. 89).

As Jacqueline Schectman (1993) points out, if we read the story from the perspective of the mother (the stepmother in *Snowwhite*) it could be analysed as the narration of a mid-life despair and of an obsessive envy in "the face of narcissistic bereavement" (Schectman, 1993 p. 25). The relationship between the young Gold Tree and the middle-aged Silver Tree could be defined, as has been argued by Schectman as an "irony of nature that may seem a poor practical joke to all concerned. Mothers and daughters find themselves caught in a maelstrom of mutual confusion and volatility" (Schectman, 1993 p. 25).

We can argue that, from a narrative point of view, the mother in *Snowwhite* has been editorially murdered by the Brothers Grimm in or-

der to make the tale more palatable to parents and children. Another element of interest is the presence of blood, which is a crucial point in both versions. In *Gold Tree*, the mother not only desires to murder the rival but also to eat her liver and her heart in order to “ingest her strength and vitality, her courage, her spirited lightness” (Schetman, 1993 p. 26). Thus, the mother is a rival of the daughter and she is able to subjugate a silent and weak father who has lost his authority and the ability to protect his offspring. We can observe that at the end of the story, *Gold Tree* is not rescued by a prince but by his wife who, using a stratagem, manages to kill the evil mother. Once again, we can observe a literary example of female “sisterhood” which is typical of women’s formation stories.

Conclusions and further perspectives

In conclusion, we could affirm that the English Fairy tale is a literary conducive genre to investigate issues including the formation of women and gender difference in so far it is able to combine the literary aspect with a psycho-pedagogic outlook. As we have observed, parental figures play a vital role in the development of children’s subjectivity. This proves particularly relevant for female subjectivity, in so far, as the paper shows, women have been subjugated to patriarchal power and to a dysfunctional maternal love which often has been characterised by pathological feelings such as the envy of a mother for her own daughter, as Recalcati (2010) among others has argued.

From this perspective, literature and especially children’s literature provides an outlook on several crucial pedagogic and psychological problems giving its readers important tools to understand reality.

This kind of analysis based on a multidisciplinary perspective could be applied also to other literary genres such as the family novel and the *bildungsroman* and could be an innovative approach both in the field of literary studies and in the field of critical pedagogy, in the framework of gender studies. Literature has the power to portray different phenomena and often it is able to mould social and psychological aspects of human soul. For this reason we wish for a strong development of the critical perspective used in this essay.

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A ‘compendiary’ representation of Marylin Monroe’s Self in *Black Dahlia & White Rose* by Joyce Carol Oates

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Abstract: In 2000, Joyce Carol Oates published the monumental *Blonde*, a novel where she explored widely the figure of Marilyn Monroe. The novel attempted to describe the self of the actress using several devices such as the interior monologue, different genres (historical novel, fairy-tale, poetry etc.) and most of all the multivocality of the narrator. In 2012, the writer published a collection of short stories which took its name from the opening one: *Black Dahlia & White Rose*. The story, which recounts the murder of the aspiring actress Elizabeth Short, better known as “Black Dahlia” (a figure already depicted in James Ellroy’s novel *Black Dahlia* and in the namesake film by Brian De Palma) results in a new exploration of Monroe’s self before she became a famous actress. The continuous comparison between Short and Monroe, symbolized by the flowers of the title, allows Oates to provide a new representation of an actress that, in her opinion, was “an emblematic character of her time and place as Emma Bovary was of hers”. This new and shorter representation, however, uses, as it was done in *Blonde*, what Paul Ricoeur defined as the “acquired identifications” of the character: the set of lasting dispositions that make a character immediately recognizable. With a different aim, though: providing a depiction of the woman behind the myth.

Keywords: Marilyn Monroe, Black Dahlia, Ricoeur, Oates.

1. *Introduction*

In 2000, Joyce Carol Oates published *Blonde*, a novel inspired by the life of Norma Jeane Baker, universally known as Marilyn Monroe. The intention of the author was not to resurrect the icon that keeps on living on the screen, but rather to give a new life to the woman be-

hind the myth, since, as writes Clara Juncker, Marilyn's biographies "gesture through their titles toward essence and myth-making" and "the desire to get to the bottom, so to speak, of Marilyn" (Juncker, 2003, p. 129).

As Oates explained in an interview contained in the book *The Faith of a Writer: Life, Art, Craft* (2003), she had seen a picture of the actress at seventeen, where her hair was darker, curlier and longer, and her facial features had not been surgically modified yet (Leon and Morley, 1990, p. 14). This girl "looked nothing like the iconic Marilyn Monroe" (Oates, 2003, p. 144) and only a few people seemed to remember her. That is why the writer decided to retell her story, not only as an iconic actress, rather as "an emblematic character of her time and place" (Oates, 2003, p. 145), and most of all, an emblematic American figure. Oates, according to Juncker, "through the prism of the actress's life and death "attempted" to make sense of herself, her writing, and the American Century that, like Marilyn, as the millennium turned, had become messy and unreal" (Juncker, 2003, p. 130). Monroe's biography suggests how she is the perfect embodiment of the American dream: she was cast off by her father after her birth, her mother was hospitalized in an asylum when she was a little girl (Leon and Morley, 1990, p. 27), so she spent part of her childhood in an orphanage and the rest of it in several foster families (Guiles, 1969, pp. 22-23). She married Jim Dougherty at sixteen, and when he joined the Army, she started working for Radio Plane Aircraft (Guiles, 1984, pp. 70-73) where she was discovered by a photographer (Shevey, 1987, p. 66). Later, she became the model and the blonde actress (a definition often used by Oates throughout the novel) that everybody knows. But the dream of Marilyn Monroe was obscured by a chronic mental instability, three unfortunate marriages (and many other failed relationships) and the inability to match the two identities of Norma Jeane and Marilyn, the wife and the actress, the girl and the artifact.

Monroe became addicted to drugs (Smith, 2003, p. 4), and her death, beyond any conspiracy, seems to be linked to her dependency: a flight from the body through suicide. She tried to kill, successfully, the "self out of nothingness" (Baty, 1995, p. 101) that she had created

bleaching her hair, dressing provocatively, and fitting in the character of the 'dumb blonde' that made her famous. As writes John David Ebert, Norma Jeane and Marilyn Monroe were the two heads of the same character, "one for the silver screen, and one for the real world that together with its images and ideas, project forth the luminous, flickering puppet plays of the darkened movie cavern. [...] "Marilyn Monroe" then, was a mask put on very deliberately (and ironically) by Norma Jeane Baker, who was conscious all her life of being two women, a real one made of flesh and blood, and an electrically generated construct" (Ebert, 2010, pp. 57-58).

In order to reconstruct the shattered self of Marilyn, Oates used the notion of character elaborated by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. A character, according to Ricoeur, "designates a set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized" (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 121). Among these dispositions there are not only the behavioral aspects of a character, but also its "acquired identifications": the set of features that make a character immediately recognizable. An element that must not be neglected is the set of incidents that make up the biography of the character, since he/she "draws his or her singularity from the unity of a life [...] which is itself singular and distinguished from all others" (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 147). In fact, "characters [...] are themselves plots" (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 143).

Reconstructing Monroe's self, Oates considered all these requirements: she used the elements that made the actress a recognizable character and she followed, even if not derivatively, her biography. The paradox stands in the fact that the writer, through the acquired identifications of the notorious public figure, wanted to give a new version of her, which partly overlaps with those recounted in the numerous biographies written on the subject, and partly is original. Marilyn's life is then "deconstructed and then reconstructed into a new mythical mode" (De Vito and Tropea, 2007, p. 66). The author does not use the whole biography of Marilyn, but only some incidents with a symbolic value. As she writes in the introductory note to *Blonde*, in the whole novel "synecdoche is the principle of appropriation" (Oates, 2000, p. ix): of the many foster families where the actress lived, the author chooses only one, and the same applies to her many lovers (some of

them, like Robert Kennedy, are not even mentioned), to the abortions, the films and the suicide attempts.

Oates's aim was to go beyond the blond of her hair and the movie star halo to provide a complete portrait of the woman behind the icon. She also designed the novel's structure using multiple genres (historical novel, fairy-tale, poetry, etc.) since, as Sarah Churchwell writes, "the 'Marilyn' persona seems especially suited to hybrid works that cross conventional boundaries of genre, compounds of fact, fiction and fantasy" (Churchwell, 2004, p. 83) and multiple points of view, including the first person and the interior monologue, to recount the life of the actress in its entirety, until the day of her death on August 4th, 1962. What results is a posthumous memoir that provides a wider and complete portrait of the woman.

2. "*Black Dahlia & White Rose*"

Twelve years later, Oates published the collection of short stories *Black Dahlia & White Rose*, which opens with the namesake story based on the murder of Elizabeth Short, the twenty-two-year-old aspiring actress who was found dead in Los Angeles on January 15th, 1947 (Gilmore, 2006). The body of the woman, whose nickname was "Black Dahlia" for her habit of wearing mostly black clothes, was found in a field, completely naked and horribly dismembered: her body had been cut in two at the waist, her genitals had been removed and the mouth had been cut from the corners to the ears. The long investigations of the police never brought to a solution of the case, which is still a cold one. Nonetheless, the figure of the "Black Dahlia" has inspired several filmic and literary works in the course of the years, such as James Ellroy's novel *The Black Dahlia* (1987) and Brian De Palma's namesake movie in 2006.

Oates's short story is structured as an unofficial investigation on the murder, and the author credits herself as the one who has assembled the material at the beginning of it. Nonetheless, what might have been an investigation, in the author's intention, becomes a three-voice narration that recounts Elizabeth Short's existence until the night she disappeared in a very limited way. The voices that alternate to provide

multiple points of view on the event are those of the photographer K. Keinhardt (a fictional character), the posthumous voice of Short, and that of Norma Jeane Baker, who is the roommate of the protagonist. Short and Baker, however, never lived together in real life, perhaps they never even met (Datlow, 2006).

The two characters are one the ideal counterpart of the other, and their different personalities and appearances are symbolized by the flowers of the title. In this way, the story becomes an instrument to talk again about Norma Jeane Baker, twelve years after the monumental *Blonde*: a new "resurrection of the dead" (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 180), which features a repetition of well-known events, and not a real investigation on the murder of Short. The space occupied by the actress within the narration is rather wide, since also the victim talks more about her roommate than herself. The multiplicity of the voices is indeed another indispensable feature of the reconstruction of the self, since, according to Ricoeur, it is constituted by the "self" and the "other than self", and this latter is fundamental for an accurate reconstruction (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 3).

Consequently, it might be argued that *Blonde* and "Black dahlia & White Rose" share a relation of intertextuality, where the short story represents a compendiary and condensed version of the first part of the novel, where the author retrieves many elements of the actress' existence before she became Marilyn Monroe in a limited number of pages (25, against the 939 of the novel). Nonetheless, there are some structural features that differentiate the novel from the short story.

In *Blonde*, many names had been changed to give some characters a mythical and archetypal role (Oates, 2003, p. 148). Norma Jeane's first husband, Jim Dougherty, had taken the fictional name of Bucky Glazner, while the other husbands and famous lovers had been named after their roles in society: "The Ex-Athlete" (Joe Di Maggio), "The Playwright" (Arthur Miller) and "The Prince" or "The President" (John Fitzgerald Kennedy). In *Black Dahlia & White Rose*, the only fictional name is the photographer's, because also Norma Jeane's first husband is called by his real name.

Blonde was also characterized by the presence of multiple voices (the author's, the actress', her acquaintances and lovers, the press

etc.) that made it a polyphonic novel¹ where the “single and unified authorial consciousness” disappeared to leave room for a narrator that rather “becomes a plurality of centers of consciousness irreducible to a common denominator” (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 96), while the short story keeps this feature in a more restricted way. The narrating voices are only three, and each is assigned a specific portion of the story, while in the novel the voices were often indistinguishable one from the other.

The short story, as it has already been mentioned, abridges many of the acquired identifications revealed in the novel. The first one regards Norma Jeane’s obsessive quest for a father figure. She had been abandoned by her father, whose identity was probably that of Stanley Gifford, a salesman who had had an affair with Monroe’s mother, Gladys Mortenson, and had later dismissed both her and her daughter (Leon and Morley, 1990, p. 1). Although the girl would later become the most famous actress in the world, her calls to the man were regularly rejected (Halberstam, 1993, p. 566). *Black Dahlia & White Rose* opens with this theme, which explains why Short and Baker had started modeling for the photographer: “K. KEIN-NHARDT – PHOTOGRAPHER: They were lost girls looking for their fathers. So I knew they’d come crawling back to *me*” (Oates, 2012, p. 4). The photographer, eager for pictures of Norma Jeane and Elizabeth, reckons he might be a surrogate father for them while exploiting them as models. As for Short, it is not entirely true that she did not have a father, because Cleo Short had abandoned his family, who resided in Massachusetts, in 1930, to move to Vallejo (California), but his daughter had lived with him there for a certain period. Their cohabitation had turned out to be an impossible arrangement so, after a quarrel, the girl had moved out and decided to live on her

¹ The notion of polyphonic novel was elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin in reference to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s prose, to indicate a novel made up of multiple voices, each for every point of view and “vision of the world”. The various voices are used as limited points of view that counterpose to other literary points of view. The multiple points of view are nothing more than a “refraction” of the author’s, whom in this way is able to express a determined idea “dialogically”, and through the words and the language of his characters.

own in Camp Cooke (Gilmore, 2006). Norma Jeane, on the contrary, in real life relied on the adoration of a surrogate father figure, that of the actor Clarke Gable. Some biographies claim that, as a child, Marilyn used to tell everybody that Gable was her father (Pepitone, 1979, p. 168) and that she used to keep a picture of him on the wall of her bedroom (Hitchens and Riese, 1987, p. 169). They had met for the first time in 1954 at a party, and she had had the opportunity to ask him "the autograph I wanted since I was twelve years old" (Rosten and Shaw, 1987, p. 75). The short story retrieves this detail:

[...] like Norma Jeane whose crazy mother would show her studio publicity photos of Clarke Gable – whispering in the child's ear *Here is your father, Norma Jeane! But no one must know – yet.* Poor Norma Jeane! Some part of her believed this craziness, why she was always looking for *Daddy* (Oates, 2012, p. 4).

The narrating voice is that of Elizabeth, and she sums up in a few lines some of the fundamental elements of Marilyn's future life. The fact that Gladys had made her believe that her father was Clarke Gable, for instance, is something that in *Blonde* gives way to the worship that the actress has for this ideal surrogate father figure, which here is omitted for chronological reasons: in 1947, Norma Jeane Baker had not met Clarke Gable yet. She had not married all the three husbands of her biography either, but Short notices that the woman is always looking for "Daddy", which in *Blonde* is the nickname Marilyn gives to each of them.

Her wish is to become famous to be admired by her father:

[...] Norma Jeane said she had not ever glimpsed her father even from a distance but now that she'd been on the covers of *Swank & Stars & Stripes* maybe he would see her & recognize her as *his*, & if ever she was an actress on-screen he would see & recognize her – she was sure of this (Oates, 2012, p. 7).

The idea of depending on a man, even one's own father, is expressed with the adjective "his": Norma Jeane hopes to be recognized as "his" on the screen, omitting the word "daughter", hence keeping only the idea of possession.

Gladys's nature of "crazy mother", as it is clear from Short's definition, is the same as in *Blonde*. Norma Jeane explains briefly why she lacks a mother figure as well: "[...] even a sick mother like my mother who 'could not keep me' because she had 'mental problems' – but still, I would live with her, if she was discharged from the hospital..." (Oates, 2012, p. 18). Another acquired identification is Norma Jeane's fear of being considered a joke. A very low self-esteem was a distinctive feature of the actress' personality, who was always engaged in convincing the others, and persuading herself, that she was an actress that aimed at playing important roles, and not only that of the eternal "dumb blonde". She also wanted to demonstrate that she had intellectual interests: "I want to read a lot and read a lot [...] I don't want to be just dumb and pretty" she had confessed to her friend Robert F. Slatzer (Slatzer, 1974, p. 72). Her intentions are confirmed by other biographers: she wanted to impress with big books to make up for her poor education (McCreadie, 1973, p. 63; Weatherby, 1976, p. 58; McCann, 1987, p. 45). In the story, this aspect is brought on through Norma Jeane's pleas to the photographer: "He was the one – "K.K." we called him – who took pictures for the girlie mags & calendars – the one I begged *Please don't make me into a joke. Oh please that is all I ask of you*" (Oates, 2012, p. 3).

The task of being considered a serious actress was made even harder by her looks. As Truman Capote reports in his essay "A Beautiful Child", the actress had declared that "I'll never get the right part, anything I really want. My looks are against me. They're too specific" (Capote, 2001, p. 11). As writes Marjorie Rosen, "her constant manic drive to prove conclusively she was an actress, not a sexpot [was] a drive for identity which would finally consume her" (Rosen, 1973, p. 288). To be recognized as a serious actress would have been for her "a source of identity" (Rosen, 1973, p. 289). Oates had mentioned this aspiration in *Blonde*:

[...] she'd hoped, and Mr Shinn had supported her in this hope, that one day soon she'd be cast in a serious role and make a true screen debut. Like Jennifer Jones in *The Song of Bernadette*. Like Olivia de Havilland in *The Snake Pit*. Jane Wyman playing a deaf-mute in *Johnny*

Belinda! Norma Jeane was convinced she could play roles like these. ‘If only they’d give me a chance’” (Oates, 2000, p. 284).

The writer confronts Monroe’s career to those of three divas of her time that were identified as great actresses, and not as sexpots. It is not accidental, perhaps, that none of them was a blonde. The same contrast appears in *Black Dahlia & White Rose*, where the author highlights the most innocent and childish features of her beauty, and confronts them with the mysterious charm of the “Black Dahlia”:

Norma Jeane was very beautiful in a simpering-baby way with a white-rose-petal skin that was softer than my skin even & did not show fatigue in her face as I did, sometimes (Oates, 2012, p. 7).

Betty was the dark-haired beauty – THE BLACK DAHLIA. Norma Jeane was THE WHITE ROSE to me – in secret – her skin like white-rose-petals & face like a china doll’s (Oates, 2012, p. 11).

The little blond girl. That one. SHE is the feminine beauty like an angel in heaven (Oates, 2012, p. 14).

The three pieces record three different opinions on Norma Jeane’s looks. The first belongs to Elizabeth Short, and it highlights the childish and simpering nature of the beauty of her roommate. The second belongs to the photographer, and it shares with the first the comparison between the woman’s skin and rose petals, the reason for her nickname. The third piece is a comment made by the character of the “Bone Doctor”, the man who eventually murders Elizabeth, who visits Keinhardt’s studio quite often. He meets the two girls there, instinctively preferring Norma Jeane. Oates hints that perhaps, if the man had had the chance to do it, he would have killed the future Marilyn. Since Short’s voice is a posthumous one, she can foretell the future of her roommate as Marilyn Monroe: “[...] it was not a decreed thing but mere chance that Norma Jeane would become MARILYN MONROE & Elizabeth Short would become THE BLACK DAHLIA pitied & scorned in death & not ever understood, & the cruellest lies spread about me” (Oates, 2012, p. 9).

In this piece, the names of the actress and the victim are written in capital letters: a technique that reinforces their nature of characters,

the dissociation of the people from the names, and their artifice, since they can be linked to the printed names on the billboards. This brings yet to another acquired identification: the creation of the actress' new identity. Norma Jeane sums up in a few lines how the studio would decide to change her name:

Soon, the name 'Marilyn Monroe' would be given me. For the studio did not like 'Norma Jeane' – this was an Okie name, they said. (It was not an Okie name! No one in my family was Okie or anything near.) & the studio did not like 'Baker' – this was a dull name. But even the new name – 'Marilyn Monroe' – did not seem real but a concoction like meringue, that would melt in the slightest rain (Oates, 2012, p. 19).

The name "Norma Jeane" is defined as "an Okie name", where Okie stands for someone from the State of Oklahoma. The woman can foretell that the name chosen by the studio will not have a long life, referring perhaps to her premature death.

Other two aspects of the character are retrieved in this story in the same mode of the novel. The first is the woman's language. Both here and in the novel, her chronic insecurity makes her stagger: "It was just a n-nightmare. [...] When I came back to the room that night I was kind of m-mad at Betty 'cause she'd stood me up at the Top Hat [...]" (Oates, 2012, p. 16).

The second, and last, regards her hair color, which is artificial as much as the name given her by the studio. The process of change from the natural light brown to the peroxide blond is mentioned briefly by Norma Jeane:

[...] my hair, that was brown, about the color of Betty's natural hair, they made me bleach at the Blue Book Agency saying they could get twice as many shoots for me as with my brown hair & this turned out to be correct though an understatement – more like three times as many shoots (Oates, 2012, p. 17).

Marilyn's hair represents perhaps the most iconic element in her image, so that the novel was named after it. Part of the actress' story had been recounted there as a fairy-tale, due also to the resemblance

between Marilyn and the typical heroines of such tales. Her "fairness" (Warner, 1994, p. 363), which is a synonym for "blond", corresponds not only to the pigmentation of the hair, but is also a symbol of femininity, youth and beauty (Warner, 1994, p. 368). Relatively to peroxide blondes, Marina Warner writes: "Peroxide blondes, like Marilyn Monroe, in her winsome dumb babyish act, recall the fluffy down of some children's heads, or baby chicks or ducklings" (Warner, 1994, p. 372). The contrast between innocence and sensuality, according to Warner, creates "the special effect of the Hollywood blonde, the woman in the picture, the motive in the plot" (Warner, 1994, p. 372).

3. Conclusions

Oates, in this condensed version of Marilyn Monroe's story, seems willing to bring out only the innocence of the character, which is why she neglects the darkest aspects of her life (drug addiction, suicide attempts, abortions etc.). The author uses again the symbolism of colors in the short story, counterposing Norma Jeane's pure white to Elizabeth Short's mysterious black. This operation accomplishes what had been her task in *Blonde*: giving a new life to the normal and ordinary girl, the one she had seen in a picture and whom reminded her of "girls of my childhood, some of them from broken homes" (Oates, 2003, p. 144), eliciting in her "an immediate sense of recognition" (144). *Black Dahlia & White Rose*, the concise account of the life of an ambitious but fundamentally naïve girl, might have brought to life again "this lost, lone girl, whom the iconic consumer product 'Marilyn Monroe' would soon overwhelm and obliterate" (144) and embodied what, in Juncker's words, is the will of writers to "rewrite the tragedy of Marilyn's life and death and cast themselves in the savior part" (Juncker, 2003, 134).

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Edward St. Aubyn's narrative recovery: a journey across time and space to redefine an identity

Giuseppina Di Gregorio

Abstract: *Mother's Milk*, the fourth book of what has been defined as the *Melrose saga*, is one of the most complex novels that Edward St Aubyn has written. The book is characterized by a multi-focus narrative that allows to discover a new sense of belonging, defining the narrator's identity through otherness, thus unveiling the double bond relationship between loss and inheritance. In fact, each character represents an answer to a specific question: are individual existences shaped by the inheritance of the loss or the loss of inheritance? The main theme of the book is mothering and parenting in general, portrayed from a male perspective; consequently, the concept of the lack of the inheritance could be described as financial and emotional at the same time. All of the protagonists are emotionally abandoned by their mothers, thus creating a series of dysfunctional families across time (different generations) and space (in England, USA, and France). The aim of this paper is to investigate the polyphony of voices that contribute to the outline of a fragmented identity, as part of the writer's 'recovery' process, and to provide a new reading of the novel according to Trauma Studies.

Keywords: St Aubyn, identity, inheritance, trauma

1. *Introduction: some considerations on Edward St Aubyn and his approach to writing*

Publishing markets are dominated by strong competition, and the 'war' of best sellers is fought with competitive advertising strategies. This is the main cause of the relative obscurity in which Edward St Aubyn has worked for years, since he has avoided the overuse of pro-

motion based on interviews and public appearances, especially for his first books. The author argues that “we’re self-commodifying and then promoting the self-commodification! What a miserable life! And then ranking ourselves with other people who self-commodify” (qtd. in Freeman, 2015). Therefore, if self-commodification is associated to constant comparison, it turns out to be a real disease that affects contemporary society:

[...] we can basically evacuate our lives of any meaning at all by remaining in this state of anxious comparison [...] it's a disease. It's an acid bath in which people live, perhaps live with less chance of getting out than before because there's such a vacuum of values, and because there is such a relentless advertising culture. Everything is promotional. (qtd in Freeman, 2015)

In order to escape from the cage of commodification, which is created and supported by the same people who are imprisoned, Edward St Aubyn has inhabited a form of in-between space, a liminal status that pertains to both mainstream literature and niche books. Notwithstanding his declaration of intent, over the years, his attitude towards social media has slightly changed, thus transforming an apparent ‘weakness’ into a strength, paving the way for the limelight: once nominated for the Man Booker Prize in 2006, St Aubyn’s reticence has teased the curiosity of journalists and reviewers, which has dramatically increased, especially after the TV adaptations of the Melrose novels in 2018. As the same writer clarifies in an interview granted to Suzi Feay (2006), this was not part of a deliberate strategy to attract attention:

I was almost too extreme at the beginning, because I refused to do any publicity at all with the first two novels, because they were so personal. I didn't even want to hear about the reviews, they were tucked into a bag. [...] I don't want to be haunted by other people's judgements when I'm writing, because it's quite hard enough dealing with my vicious, punitive superego.

Hence, this behaviour can be read as both a consequence of external pressure and a tool of self-defence, which is partially modified

by the nomination for the prestigious literary prize, as stated above, since it represented a recognition for his work and the opportunity to make his books known to the general public. Nonetheless, St Aubyn's literary career seems to be inextricably linked to his biographical data, thus affecting readers' responses: the complex subject matter of his production is frequently 'reduced' to two keywords, abuse and drugs. In fact, his father began to abuse him at the age of five and, as a result of the traumas he suffered, he became a heroin addict, a habit he kept during his studies at Oxford. The unacceptable violence of his father destroyed his childhood, as well as the following years, and determined his relationship with drugs: an encounter that occurred when he studied at Westminster. Several anecdotes about the writer belong to this period, which Hadley Freeman defined as the "Melrose-ian anecdotes": one of the best known is related to the final exam at Oxford, when the then twenty-year-old Edward brought a full biro of heroin with him, but not a pen to write. After years spent squandering his family fortune in drugs and alcohol, felt as a privilege/damnation due to his ancient aristocratic origins, the path of rehabilitation began, or 'redemption' as Freeman argued in his article. Four years after his school performance, he decided to see a therapist. But the real rebirth occurred when St Aubyn found the courage to tell a friend what had happened to him, "finding redemption by telling the truth" (qtd. in Freeman, 2007). In fact, according to the writer, "it's more stressful being the only one knowing about those experiences than thinking that there are lots of readers out there who now think they know everything about you" (qtd in Freeman, 2007)

Nevertheless, these few elements do not properly describe one of the most skilled and acute contemporary writers. St Aubyn interprets his books as a medium to convey a 'troubling autobiographical material', and, even though his attitude towards *Mother's Milk* is substantially different, the first two volumes have been part of a form of therapeutic process. Accordingly, discussing the genesis of his works, he declares with a disarming clarity that "Once I started writing, I decided to stop the analysis. [...] If it does have any therapeutic value, the only way to access to it is to write without any therapeutic intent. You transform experience into, for want a better word, art" (qtd in Cooke, 2006).

St Aubyn considers writing a real work, which has to be carried out with true devotion, and his rigorous methodological approach, where nothing is left to chance, is characterized by the absence of any therapeutic intent. His ‘unconventional’ approach to writing is explained by the same writer, who does not associate it with a form of relief, because, more than an unconstraint expression of thoughts, it is a multifaceted procedure where a strict control over words is needed, with a constant monitoring of the ‘archaeology of thinking’. Consequently, this activity is not related to fun; even if,

it sounds slightly depressing but writing is horrible... and not writing is even more horrible. That's my position! Some people say to me, 'do you enjoy your work?' I really don't know what they mean but, having said that, there are moments of release, and they come from two things. One of them is when I can surprise myself (qtd in Feay, 2006).

As stated by St Aubyn, writing is a key to unlock a system of references, a process to know the truth that lies behind facts, to recreate an order of meaningful events and to investigate their same meanings. As will be discussed in the following section, the writer prefers to avoid the use of literary etiquettes, or references to well defined genres, as that of autobiographical fiction, to describe his works. It is possible to detect a sort of ambivalent attitude towards the biographical material of the Melrose novels: on the one hand, he considers writing as a tool to investigate his life, recalling the psychological benefits of writing that have been described by several scientific researches; on the other, he pretends to write about the Melrose family as they were characters without specific links to the real St Aubyn dysfunctional family. The only certainty is that, due to its importance and complexity, this form of narrative recovery cannot be a solitary achievement: participation is the catalytic of this process, and, for this reason, reading could be defined as

a collaboration between the writer and the reader. Everyone in this room has a different frame of reference – a different experience of life. And anytime they read will land in a different mind – in a different imagination. And they will build a slightly different book for themselves. It's a transaction between the writer and the reader. [...] So books

always had this very powerful effect on me because of some communication, somebody seeming, even in a very symbolic or displaced way, to understand what I was feeling. And I think that's the miracle of literature – is this private communication between one intelligence and another¹.

Despite his conflictual relationship with media, Edward St. Aubyn seeks a direct contact with his audience to understand their responses, as an antidote to the loneliness and depression that may stem from writing. Accordingly, all the forms of mediation are associated to excessive theorization, hence negatively, depriving writings of their spontaneity and vividness.

Focusing on the above considerations, this paper will muse on the transaction between writer and reader, relying on the paratext², in order to determine how St Aubyn's novels, *Mother's Milk* in particular, contributed to his personal recovery process, redefining an identity through otherness, and considering the main features of Trauma Literature related to individual traumas.

2. Mother's Milk: *a polyphony of voices to define an identity*

This novel has been repeatedly defined by critics and journalists as the fourth part of the *Some Hope* trilogy, while the other two novels have been referred to as the *Melrose saga*, but none of the two statements is close to the truth. St Aubyn elucidates that,

Mother's Milk is a completely independent book, there are no back references to *Some Hope*. If you've read *Some Hope* it's probably a richer experience but it is a free-standing novel. But why go to the pseudo-inventiveness of creating a simulacrum with the Melroses in order to tell the story I wanted to tell? It would have been silly (qtb in Feay, 2006).

¹ Retrieved from "Edward St Aubyn: Reading is a collaboration between the writer and the reader", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blMi_3UuBkU.

² Concerning the section related to *Mother's Milk*, this analysis will rely on articles and interviews, due to the lack of academic papers or monographs about this author and his works.

According to these remarks, readers should interpret the trilogy and *Mother's Milk* as distinct works, since there are not “back references” to create a stable bond. Nevertheless, one question may arise: can readers fully understand Patrick’s feelings of guilt and frustration without the clues provided by the first novels? Is the transaction of meaning between writer and readers based on deceit? It is possible to argue that, even if *Mother's Milk* can be read as a standalone book from the point of view of its plot, it is also true that, in order to understand the inner nature of the portrayed dysfunctional families that revolve around a form of loss, it is necessary to know the origins and features of this loss. Consequently, despite the writer’s refusal to recognize this link, there is an extratextual dialogue between young Patrick and the grown-up man: a lack of recognition may threaten interpretation.

The therapeutic value of writing has been proved through scientific evidence in several research studies³, but St Aubyn’s work is not the result of a therapy, since it was written without this kind of intent (see the above cited Cook, 2006). Robinson and Sheils claim that,

[...] the trauma of rape and incest in *Never Mind*, Patrick’s florid dissociations and forced re-associations of drug addiction in *Bad News*, and his recuperative double-act with child-psychiatrist Johnny Hall in *Some Hope*, pave the way to the manifestly psychoanalytic opening to the fourth novel, *Mother's Milk* [...] (2015: 20).

This brief extract corroborates what was claimed above, since the Melrose trilogy shapes *Mother's Milk* from the point of view of matter and manner⁴, and, at the same time, it stresses the importance of the psychological dimension, anticipating some conclusions of the present research about the polyphonic structure of this novel. In fact, the adoption of a psychoanalytic focus, which was partially used

³ As for example in T. Gillam, (2016). The therapeutic value of writing. *The British Journal of Wellbeing*, and K.G. Niederhoffer and J.W. Pennebaker (2009). On the Benefits of Writing or Talking about Emotional Experience. *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*.

⁴ The Melrose novels could be defined as the different chapters of a contemporary Bildungsroman, since they portray a young Patrick and his path to become a man.

in the trilogy, can be read as a direct consequence of the subject matter of the first novels, because young Patrick's reasoning, his voyage through the hell of drugs with its real/unreal experiences, leads to a different kind of analysis. Investigating Patrick's life from the point of view of family relationships, St Aubyn explores his own thoughts thanks to 'different' voices, to create an order for his 'troubling' autobiographical material. Moreover, even if the writer has strongly denied the autobiographical interpretation of his works, father's abuse and mother's detachment are pivotal to understand both Patrick's and Edward's growth.

From the point of view of plot, this fourth book portrays a grown-up Patrick, emotionally and sexually abandoned by his wife, who begins a relationship with Julia, a friend; Mary, his wife, almost loses her identity in taking care of her children; Robert, the first son of the couple, growing up, makes a sense of fatherly frustration; and finally, Patrick's mother Eleanor begins a process of decay with no setbacks. The loss of the family residence of Saint Nazaire, in France, is the symbol of the lack of financial and emotional inheritance, which is handed down from generation to generation. In fact, Eleanor, as a cold and unemotional mother, deprives her son of the house in order to support a new age foundation, thus reinforcing the main idea of the emotional abandonment: her detachment has had devastating effects on her child, as well as his father's violence. For this reason, it could be argued that the title of this work aims at highlighting a 'negative' legacy that affects all the generations of the Melrose family: mother's milk represents the great absence, the object of desire, the emotional bond between mother and child that does not exist. There are no possibilities to invert this downward path that characterizes past and future generations, and the novel closes with a scene far from a happy ending for the future, since the eldest son of the couple has already been infected by the venom of resentment.

Having clarified the role played by financial inheritance, it is worth to analyse the voices that are intertwined in the pages of St Aubyn's book, since each voice aims at representing a distinct perspective, an autonomous sensibility, which is deeply affected by the loss. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "the hero's freedom is an aspect of the author's intention. The hero's word is created by the author, but created in such

a way that it can freely develop its inner logic and independence as the word of another person, as the word of the hero himself" (1973: 51).

This suggests that each character is authorized to tell his/her own story according to his/her idiosyncrasies, thus operating as components of a polyphonic structure. In this case, despite the presence of distinct voices, there is not true heteroglossia, as defined by the same Bakhtin. In *Mother's Milk*, the story is told by three different characters, Patrick, his wife, and his son Robert, but, as claimed by Robinson & Sheils (2015: 21) referring to the first section (Robert's one), "as with all the other narrative beginnings, we attribute this to an unspecified adult narrator". Moreover, the division of sections into chapters is variable in number, and each character has one section at his/her disposal: there are five chapters in the first section, four in the second one, and respectively three and four in the third and fourth ones. This structure could be interpreted according to the role played by single characters: the third section, the shorter one, is the one in which Mary's point of view is adopted. If compared to the other sections, it is not characterized by the same kind of irony, as well as detailed descriptions of events and thoughts. These differences might be attributable to the fact that she is very different from her husband and son, she is not sarcastic and she is reticent about her feelings. On the other hand, another hypothesis refers to her status: since she is a mother, the pivotal role of the all story, it is not necessary to analyse her thoughts. Mary is like a flat character, whose main feature is motherhood, the epitome of self-sacrifice, and the one who, at the same time, poses threats to other personalities with her perfection. Reading the reviews that have been written since the novel's first publication, Patrick's section is considered as the most 'valuable' from the linguistic point of view, because it is one of the funniest sections, due to his witty language, pungent irony, and use of similes. The explanation is simple: as claimed above, and confirmed by Robinson & Sheils (2015) analysis, Patrick can be considered as a sort of St. Aubyn's alter ego, and this is the reason why his feelings are reconstructed accurately; for Robert, the task was quite simple too, given that the writer was able to adopt a child's perspective with no difficulties, recalling his very intense childhood. Concerning Mary, the writer is not able to access her intimate nature, because

she is a woman and a mother, a condition that he is not able to fully understand, since he lacks direct and indirect experiences. For this reason, *Mother's Milk* is characterized by an inter-textual dialogue, as claimed above, and an intra-textual one, where different voices, as grown-up Patrick, Robert, and Mary, represent components of St Aubyn's thoughts and sensibility.

The novel's system of voices and perspectives is inextricably linked to the spatial and temporal dimensions; in particular, the spatial dimension has a greater importance than the temporal one, because it could be used as a tool to understand the role played by the loss of the inheritance, or the inheritance of the loss. Accordingly, even if the narration is based on several temporal levels, they can easily be divided into present and past. On the contrary, the setting of the story is characterized by a juxtaposition of internal and external places, whose positive/negative value is modified according to the perspective that is adopted. The four summers that the family spends on holidays, and that represent the core of St. Aubyn's story, are set in different places: in the first summer, that of 2000, Patrick and his family spend some weeks in the family residence of Saint-Nazaire, as well as in the second and third ones; in the fourth summer, the Melrose family leave for the United States and later move to London (Kensington). Another space must be added to this first reconstruction: it represents one of the dominant spaces, and, at the same time, the most difficult to identify, because it belongs to human beings' state of pre-consciousness, the womb. Everything starts from here: life begins, the exchange of emotions with the mother, the sense of protection. This is what readers know from Robert's words, as a result of memories that are recovered thanks to the birth of his brother Thomas; an event that allows him to rethink the moments that preceded his birth. His words represent the only description of this space in the novel, because the other direct references are more like hints than accurate descriptions: Robert says he has lived "at the heart of things", in a "watery world", but, in the end, he was expelled, catapulted into a "harsh land", where the heavy atmosphere hurts his delicate skin. This change determined a sad feeling, that of separation from his mother, and as he himself says, "The first taste of longing was the saddest thing in the world" (*Mother's Milk*, 5).

The same happens with the Saint Nazaire House: despite being another symbolic place and object of desire, there are not complete descriptions, only details that are useful to support a specific perspective. This might be attributable to the fact a place becomes significant according to the multiple relationships it has with its inhabitants. If compared, these two spaces show an inverse polarity: the first space, the womb, can be described as a positive place against a negative external one, while the House of Saint Nazaire can be considered as negative. This mansion can rightly be considered as the symbol of the entire book, representing both the lack of a financial inheritance and the affective one, and, challenging the positive value that interior spaces can have, the ‘domestic walls’ where characters can seek refuge and feel protected. Consequently, this space represents negativity for at least two reasons. First of all, it is the place where the father abuses his child; secondly, the new enemy, Seamus (the Irish leader of the New Age group) lives there with Patrick’s mother. Having said that, one would expect to detect characters’ ambivalent attitudes towards this object, but this does not occur. On the contrary, Patrick is eager to own it, either because it would change the conditions of his family and because it would be the tangible sign of that emotional legacy that he never had from his mother, as he says in the novel (*Mother’s Milk*, 143): “He could see that his obsession with not having enough money was only the material form of his emotional privation”. Moreover, the house represents an enclosed space in which the characters interact with each other, but not with the rest of the world; consequently, this is not a positive internal space, since, in the small world inhabited by the Melrose family, interpersonal relations are already doomed to failure. When the characters find themselves immersed in the ‘real’ life of the rest of the world, when they have to deal with a larger space, the situation does nothing but worsen. Edward St. Aubyn paints a very vivid portrait of a family that belongs to the English upper class, his native background, focusing on the ‘dark’ side of the gilded world, similar to a golden cage, which is unconsciously envied by other people, who do not know the price that is paid for this comfortable lifestyle. The inability to find a ‘clue to exit’ determines a paradox: although life is negative in Saint-Nazaire, it is preferable to any other place. This ‘forced’ choice could explain Patrick’s attitude, who feels a real loss

when Seamus finally wins the house, another blow to the weak foundations of his family and his own identity.

Concerning the main values of setting, it could be argued that if the story is considered as a logical transformation between two narrative states, according to Algirdas Greimas (1968), it is possible to identify two types of space, topical spaces and heterotopic spaces. The first typology represents spaces of transformation, while the latter refers to spaces of what anticipates or follows the transformation. In this case, France represents the space of transformation, since Patrick's life is marked by the events that took place in St. Nazaire during his childhood; in 2001, during summer holidays, he starts a relationship with his friend Julia, and the following year, in 2002, he lost the House after the death of his mother. On the contrary, all the other events that precede and follow these passages (e.g. from monogamy to infidelity) took place in London, as for example the birth of Robert, which determines a negative change in his marriage.

The story revolves around the concept of emotional abandonment and negative inheritance, two elements that shape the life of all the protagonists, which is characterized by the strong presence of setting, as claimed above. A further theme that deserves attention, and that is inextricably linked to the narrating voices, is the power of language, in terms of acquisition and loss. In an interview granted to Alan Taylor (2006), St Aubyn stated that a purpose of the novel is to describe the disarticulation of language, both at the beginning and the end of human life, taking into account the experiences of a child who discovers language, and an elderly lady who is losing the ability to move her mouth, thus justifying the absence of Eleonor's narrating voice. The acquisition of this powerful mean of expression, spoken language, is not positive, because it determines a series of losses. If it is the language that directs our knowledge of reality, as claimed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Worf (Carassai & Crucianelli, 2017), and what is not defined by words is potentially unknowable, then Robert is right in comparing language to a trap:

Once you got words you thought the world was everything that could be described. In a way things are more perfect when you couldn't describe anything. Once you locked into language, all you could do was

shuffle the greasy pack of a few thousand words that millions of people had used before. (*Mother's Milk*, 12)

In fact, the two characters who at the beginning of the novel do not master language, Eleanor and Thomas, when alone, get closer in a sort of ‘mute’/‘wordless’ solidarity, because “people died of feelings all the time, once they had gone through the formality of materializing them into bottles and tumours” (*Mother's Milk*, 225), namely when these feelings are defined by words. Once the ‘mistake of theorizing’ has been committed, which could be associated with growth, with becoming adults, all the vital spontaneity of childhood (associated to absence of words) disappears. The ‘grown-ups’ are forced to pay the price of growth, but the value of what they buy is infinitely less than what they have lost. Even adults, like children, are entangled in words, always looking for a way to define and be defined.

Every human behaviour can be seen as an attempt to give a meaningful response to a specific situation, and this tends to create a balance between the subject of the action and the object to which the action refers to the surrounding world (Eagleton, 1988). In the following paragraph, the research will muse on the answer that Edward St Aubyn provided to the events of his life, through the relations with the environment in which he lived, and how he translated the asystematic character of human existence into a paradigm for other families, attempting to define and cope with his own experience of trauma.

3. *Writing about trauma as part of a narrative recovery*

In an interview granted to Stephen Moss in 2011, Edward St Aubyn states that in writing his books he doesn’t aim at uncovering the facts of his life,

but to discover the dramatic truth of the situations [...] Something being hidden is a necessity before I can start writing. If I have something to say, it’s much easier for me to just meet up with a friend and say it. If there’s something that I really don’t want to say, as in *Never Mind*, or something that I don’t know how to say, as in *Bad News*, or something that I don’t even know what it is, that’s what makes me

submit to the horrible process of writing a novel. It is very unpleasant. After I've written a novel, I feel a little bit clearer and freer than I did before, but while I'm writing it, it's horrible, it's intensely upsetting. But for some reason I feel obliged to go on doing it. It's the only thing I can do. (Moss, 2011)

These words suggest the existence of a mental and a physical commitment that determines an extremely accurate work, which is not part of a simple medical treatment as said above, it goes beyond and implies a peculiar definition of truth, facts and fiction. In order to understand the role played by fiction in analysing the facts of an individual life, to reach some form of truth, Trauma Studies can provide useful insights to interpret St Aubyn's novels, since they revolve around a loss that is determined by the trauma he⁵ suffered when he was a child.

The introductory chapter of Michelle Balaev's book, *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, focuses on the theories that have underpinned Trauma Studies during the last forty years, in order to provide a framework for researchers. As she highlights, the main difficulty of this kind of research is the definition of trauma itself, which has undergone several reformulations according to the scholars who have attempted to define and categorize it. In fact, if early scholarship contributed to the popularization of trauma as an unrepresentable event, Cathy Caruth's deconstructive criticism emphasised linguistic indeterminacy, ambiguous referentiality and aporia. Consequently, "the unspeakable void became the dominant concept in criticism for imaging trauma's function in literature" (Balaev, 2014: 1). Moreover, according to Caruth, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it is precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (1996: 4).

Underlining the temporal dimension and, at the same time, the inability to talk about the traumatic event, Balaev points out the importance of what follows trauma in terms of subsequent individual experi-

⁵ In this section, the protagonist Patrick Melrose and Edward St Aubyn are considered as the same person.

ences. Considering Patrick's story, the Melrose books represent phases of a recovery path and an attempt to define a traumatic event: each episode/book implies a new level of consciousness and is determinant for the writer in order to cope with his own trauma, trying to restore a linear order of events, accommodating the disruption generated by the abuse. The extent to which his father's violence had determined the course of his life can be inferred from the words that are used to describe him in *Never Mind* and *Bad News*: in these two books, St Aubyn deals with his traumatic childhood and the subsequent death of his father, to find a compromise to live with his legacy. In *Some Hope*, on the contrary, David Melrose becomes a presence in absence, and it could represent a turning point for Patrick/Edward, preparing him for the next chapter of his life, that of adulthood in *Mother's Milk*, where his mother's role has to be analysed. According to Robinson and Sheils, who have centred their analysis on narrative style as a vehicle for St Aubyn's subject matter,

though clearly directing anger at the characters of David and Eleanor Melrose, St Aubyn does not labour the pathos of 'abuse' narratology. This suggests [...] that he is suspicious of the sacralising of the traumatic event, the way in which the event gains protection from direct representation [...]. (2015: 12)

In fact, the writer avoids direct descriptions of his ordeal, 'what he doesn't want to say' in *Never Mind*, preferring to focus his attention on the effects of this event on family dynamics. Due to limited space, in the present article, it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of elements that make *Mother's Milk* an example of trauma novels, because it would imply an accurate analysis of all the Melrose novels. For this reason, considering the main features of this novel that were discussed in the previous section, narrating voices and setting are chosen as the focus of this analysis in the light of trauma theories.

As anticipated above, trauma becomes unrepresentable due to the inability of the brain to properly recognise the event; consequently, it is possible to understand what occurred thanks to recurrent flashbacks that re-enact the traumatic event. For this reason, the construction of the past may include new details with each telling, and the

presence of different perspectives demonstrates that memories of the traumatic experience are revised and actively rearranged according to the needs of the individual of a particular moment. Nevertheless, until recently, researchers have focused on collective traumas and the related effects on individuals, and not on single individual traumas. As Michelle Balaev (2008) claims, in what could be considered the first attempt to change the focus of Trauma Studies, trauma novels represent a disruption between an individual and other individuals, and, in order to understand this process, it is important to describe both temporal and spatial dimensions, because the place in which the trauma occurred offers the opportunity to examine personal and cultural stories/histories, shaping identities and trauma's meanings. In *Mother's Milk*, the relativism of perspective and the presence of multiple narrating voices refers to both the fragmentary nature of human experience and the effects that the traumatic effects had on the protagonist, preventing him from providing a complete and coherent account of his own life.

The significance of places, which were studied for the first time by Geoffrey Hartman, resides in the fact that

place is not only a location of experience, but, significantly, a facet of perception that organizes memories, feelings, and meaning at the level of the physical environment. [...] Place therefore becomes central to representations of trauma in the novel because the physical place of suffering and remembrance of loss becomes an identifiable source for the author to explicate the multiple meanings of the event. The physical landscape is a referent for the individual's sense of self or identity [...] (Balaev, 2008: 160).

Referring to *Mother's Milk*, the disruption of continuity takes place in St. Nazaire, since it is the house where Patrick is abused, but, at the same time, it also represents a new beginning, because the protagonist is able to reorganize perceptions of reality, consequently his thoughts and feelings, paving the way for a new sense of identity. Unfortunately, if for Edward/Patrick there is a 'clue to exit', it is also true that, since trauma is an infectious pathogen that can be transferred from one generation to the other, as argued by Cathy Caruth, the inheritance of the loss has already affected the future generation of Robert.

4. *The inheritance of the loss or the loss of inheritance?*

Each novel has its own purpose: the purpose of St Aubyn's book is to tell a story, which, moving from the contingent data of his personal experience, becomes a paradigm for contemporary society. The main theme of motherhood, which is exemplified by Mary's devotion and Eleanor's detachment, is indissolubly interwoven with other themes of equal complexity, such as the power of language acquisition, which are analysed from different perspectives, adopting the points of view of the protagonists. This polyphonic structure can determine challenges for readers and, consequently, misinterpretations. Nevertheless, referring to Bakhtin's analysis, even if there is a dialogue with different voices, there is not true heteroglossia:

one of those voices, the most dominant, is Patrick's – in the reductive but unavoidable sense, the author's 'own'. This too the narrator must reify, stylise and leave behind by wearing his previous masks as a child, a young and then middle-aged man. The narrator mimics Patrick in order, through the travestied tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, to become himself. (Robinson & Sheils, 2015: 26)

Polyphony allows to detect a fragmented type of selfhood that is composed of separate selves, each offering a distinct voice, each claiming equal rights on St Aubyn's identity.

The process of redefining an identity implies to come to terms with past, in order to shape the inherited loss that will be handed down to future generations, and, in doing so, otherness becomes fundamental, because the traumatic events are told from different perspectives, to add details and, consequently, pieces of a meaningful mosaic. Unfortunately, this recovery process does not determine a positive result, it is an ongoing investigation. Patrick's/St Aubyn's identity is still under construction, as exemplified by the words of the employee of the New York Immigration Office, "She couldn't understand why an English lawyer was born in France", [...] 'She clasped her head and said, "I'm just trying to get a concept of your life, Mr Melrose". I told her I was trying to do the same thing and that if I ever wrote an autobiography, I'd send her a copy" (*Mother's Milk*, 210).

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Let's haal: a sociolinguistic research on Iranian-American communities in the United States

Soraya Mehrabi

Abstract: The American context represents the ideal domain for investigation in the context of migration and the processes of identity formation. This paper sets out to explore language attitude and media representation of Iranian-American communities via a sociolinguistic study, carried out through social media in the years 2016-2017. Iranian-American second and third generation informants were questioned with structured and semi-structured interviews with the aim to explore the use of language, such as code-switching, and the use of typical Persian-American blends, that have been, quite strikingly, neglected in this context. The linguistic practices of these communities will also be studied from a socio-historical perspective, to see how language affects identity building that combines *Iranianess* with *Americaness*, and the role played by the sending (i.e. Persian) and receiving (i.e. American) cultures. The paper will also discuss out-group dynamics, showing how ethnic stereotypes contribute to promoting a misrepresented image of the Iranian-American community.

Keywords: Iranian-Americans, transnational identity, language use, code-switching.

I. *Language in the creation of identity*

The ethnic language of a migrant community has an essential role in the process of the construction of identity. Often the ethnic language of a community represents the primary way through which the migrant community keeps alive the tie with its sending culture. Within these migrant communities, we could witness the presence of a duality symbolised, on one side, by the culture of their country of origin, and by the culture of their host country on the other (Mostofi

2003). This duality creates a feeling of *in-betweenness*. In the case of Iranian-American communities, we could see how their identity has been shaped by the interplay between the domestic context in which the Iranian culture and the Persian language have prominent roles, and the public context in which we find the American culture and consequently the use of English as the main language. Certainly, the strong presence of English in everyday life and in the public sphere could lead Iranian-Americans to abandon their ethnic language in favour of the English language (Holmes 2013). There are, indeed, studies concerning the maintenance of Persian among Iranian-American communities (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi 2016; Modarresi 2001) in which the actors involved in the preservation of the Persian language and the factors behind this preservation, or the possible reasons of a language shift have been accurately studied. Nevertheless, there is still insufficient literature on language use in the Iranian-American communities, and further research is needed (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi 2016).

This research aims to find out and to make explicit the hidden connections between language and social variables, to see how language is a marker of identity and consequently how the speakers' attitudes and practices have an influence on the construction of identity. We will see how the maintenance of the ethnic language has an important role in the preservation of ethnic identity and also for retaining a connection with the homeland (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi 2016). Furthermore, we have to remember that mother-tongue has a special value within these communities: «Language is a primary marker of identity. [...] It is a means through which cultural heritage is obtained and passed on. Of all the languages that one may speak, the one with most impact on one's individual identity is one's mother-tongue [...] This tongue is the tongue in which one is born and grows up, the tongue close to one's heart, the tongue in which one dreams, the tongue that has evolved over time through its interaction with its natural and social surrounding, the tongue of locally-situated wisdom, knowledge, metaphors and expressions» (Borjian and Häberl 2016: 8).

Unfortunately, in the younger generations of the migrant communities in the U.S., the use of English prevails to the detriment of ethnic

languages, so we witness the presence of many children who can speak only English, also in the case of Iranian-American communities (Ansari 1992; Fillmore 1991). In some cases, schools actually encourage the children from these migrant communities to avoid the use of their ethnic language.

I.I. Iranian-American communities in the United States

In contextualising the Iranian-American communities, we had to refer to the work of Bozorgmehr and Sabagh (1988) and the work of Ansari (1992) since their research offers fundamental sources of the studies on Iranian-American communities. The work conducted by Bozorgmehr and Sabagh (1988) is indeed one of the first attempts of a systematic study of the Iranian-American communities, and for this reason, we cannot neglect it. Nevertheless, all the works mentioned above refer, chronologically, to a context that existed prior to that studied in this paper. We have thus updated the statistical information of the Iranian-American communities including the data from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2016 census.

According to the ACS census of 2016, Iranian-Americans residing in the United States amounted to 476,171; whereas the total number of Iranians residing in the U.S. during 1986 was 245,000 (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988). The fact that the community has doubled in number in only 30 years indicates that its growth is proceeding very slowly. Certainly, the difficulties resulting from the closure of the U.S. Embassy in Iran after the Hostage Crisis have influenced the migration of Iranians to the U.S., as, for example, it made the procedure for visa application difficult. Indeed, after the Hostage Crisis, all Iranians who wanted to ask for a visa had to go to a third country (usually Turkey) where there was a U.S. Embassy, and only then could proceed to request a visa. Iranian migration is usually divided into two waves: the pre-revolutionary wave which was mostly made up of students who came to the United States in order to cultivate and to enrich their knowledge (consider the modernisation program undertaken by the Pahlavi dynasty which encouraged many students to go abroad), and the post-Revolutionary wave which was

characterised by a high presence of refugees, asylum seekers, due to the political and religious connotations of the Iranian Revolution which forced many Iranians to flee the country. Two characteristics of Iranian migration are particularly interesting in the study of Iranian-American communities. One is its heterogeneity: religious and linguistics diversities are indeed all at the heart of the Iranian-American communities, and they have an essential role in defining their identity (Mobasher 2006; McAuliffe 2008). The second is the geographical distribution of the Iranian-American communities which see California as the preferred destination of Iranian people, indeed Iranian-Americans residing in California amount to 122,500 or 170,500. The case of Los Angeles, also called “Teherangeles” due to its high presence of Iranians, represents an evidence of this predilection, and if we take a look at the Westwood neighbourhood of L.A. we find a state within a state where Iranians have settled, turning it into an Iranian-based neighbourhood (Adelkhah 2001).

II. Methodology

After that introductory contextualisation, we will now present our sociolinguistic research carried out in the years 2016-2017 on Iranian-American communities residing in the United States. We conducted our research using a survey-based method addressed mainly at the second and third generations of Iranian-Americans who had, at least, one parent of Iranian origin. We adapted the survey from the questionnaire used by Maria Grazia Sindoni in her sociolinguistic work on cultural and linguistic representations of Italian-Americans (Sindoni 2016: 78-80, 2015). The structure of the survey consists of two parts. Firstly we have the part concerning the sociodemographic characteristics of our informants, and secondly we have all the questions pertaining to the linguistic practices and attitude of our informants, as well as the questions about out-group dynamics and media representation. The survey, which was entirely anonymous, was diffused through the use of social networks. In our case, the choice fell upon Facebook due to the fact that it allowed us to reach a large group of potential informants. The survey was then sent to

the Facebook groups which presented keywords related to the Iranian-American communities and we addressed it to the users born in the United States and who had, at least, one parent or one grandparent born in Iran.

II.I. Characteristics of our sample of informants

Our sample is composed of 30 informants who present the following socio-demographic characteristics. We note that our sample shows a higher percentage of female informants, 63%, whereas male informants are 37%. If we consider the age distribution, we note, in descending order, the following percentages: 33% for the age group of informants over forty; 27% for the age group 19-25; 23% for the age group 31-39; and, finally, the lower percentage (17%) for those of the age group 26-30. If we take a look at the educational attainment of our informants, we notice that the higher percentages are for those who have a Master degree or a higher title (47%) and for those who have at least an Undergraduate degree (40%), while the lower percentage is for those who have just the diploma (13%).

III. Data analysis

In this section, we will present the findings of our research concerning the linguistic practices of our sample of informants. All linguistic questions such as bilingualism, the use of *Pinglish* and code-switching will be examined with reference to how these linguistic practices are intertwined with the process of identity construction. Furthermore, we will then analyse the out-group dynamics in order to understand how non-Iranians perceive Iranian-Americans. This analysis could give noteworthy evidence of how some stereotypes are still present in American public opinion.

III.I. *The importance of Persian among Iranian-American communities*

Within the Iranian-American communities, the Persian language has still an important position; indeed, when asked “Are you bilingual?” 73% of our informants declared to be bilingual. The importance of the family as the main agent for the maintenance of Persian and consequently also for the preservation of Iranian culture is given by the answer to the question “If you speak fluent Persian, where did you learn?” where 79% affirmed to have learnt Persian at home. Naturally, the self-perception of the speaker could be misleading so an informant could sometimes have a wrong perception of his linguistic competence; in this case, it is interesting indeed to cite the case of one of our informants who said that he did not use mixed words but subsequently wrote an answer in which a hybrid form was documented: “No, shahs of sunset is *Los Angelesi* trash”, where the ending -i is a suffix which represents the indefinite in Persian (Lambton 2001).

With regards to the linguistic creativity of speakers, we found some expressions which are halfway between Persian and English. Indeed, Iranian-Americans usually speak in *Pinglish*, a combination of English elements with Persian elements that give rise to a hybrid language, in which Persian elements are transliterated. This makes the phenomenon of code-switching very common among Iranian-Americans, thanks also to their fluency in English; it is also true that due to their professional occupations within American society (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988; Bozorgmehr and Douglas 2011), Iranian-Americans need to have fluency in English to work in such positions. Nevertheless, Persian is somehow relegated to domestic use; if we take into consideration the question “Who do you mainly use Persian words or expressions with?”, we notice from the answers given by our informants that most of them speak Persian with other Iranians (46%) or just with their parents and relatives (42%). Another interesting use of Persian is that of a “secret” language. Some speakers use it «as a “code” or a “secret” language that they can use when they do not want others to understand what they are saying» (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi 2016: 111).

III.II. *Code-switching, neologisms and forms of blends*

We will now give space to a qualitative analysis of some of the expressions used by our informants where we find neologisms or forms deriving from the blending of Persian elements with English elements as "*I'm so chehos*" or "*wow, chehos*", "*Jam it up*", "*Let's haal*" or "*I'm haaling*". In the expressions as "*I'm so chehos*" or "*wow, chehos*" meaning 'I am tired' or indicating a feeling of indolence, our participant has created a neologism derived from the blending of two Persian elements *che* and *hosele*. With the same term we have other expressions as "*No tarof, no hosseleh*", and in the Urban Dictionary we also find an apocopated form, *no hos*, with the following definition: «A lazy feeling or impatience towards a specific task or activity. "Hos" = a combination of patience, energy, and will». Another example is "*Jam it up*" meaning 'pick up!', here the Persian element is *jam* from the verbal form *jam kardan*. We can notice how the Persian element is interestingly used as a perfect phrasal verb. Also, in the case of "*Let's haal*" and "*I'm haaling*" respectively 'let's have fun' and 'I'm having fun', we find that the Persian element is perfectly integrated in the English verbal form. In particular, we find that in the case of "*I'm haaling*" the speaker added to the Persian element the suffix -ing to form the present continuous. Finally, we have "*Let's go digeh*" which is a case of intrasentential code-switching and it could be translated with 'come on, let's go!'. All these examples taken from our data show how Persian elements are creatively mixed with English, witness to the fact that language has no boundaries. We also have cases of intrasentential code-switching in which it is the English element that has been used within a Persian sentence: *khali stress daram* 'I'm too stressed out' and *Engad negative nabbash* 'don't be so negative', where *stress* and *negative* are terms taken from the English language. The presence of these examples are indicative of the fact that the Persian and English languages not only coexist, but their coexistence gives to the speaker a new creative way to express himself. The same argument could be applied, at the same time, to identity creation, because the interplay between Iranian identity and American identity, far from excluding each other, presents a cohesiveness which derives from a combination of *Iranianness* and *Amer-*

icanness and that cannot be understood if we neglect one of these two elements. All these creative linguistic practices promote an idea of identity which is not monolithic: «Expanded uses of diaspora, and certainly creolization, demonstrate that people thrive not by getting stuck in fixed quasi-racial identities, but at the nodes and connection points where new ideas and original inventiveness are developed. As Derek Walcott famously declared, ‘No nation, but the imagination’» (Cohen 2007: 22).

III.III. *Out-group dynamics*

An accurate analysis of out-group dynamics shows that many stereotypes are still present in American public opinion. When we asked our informants “Are there words that non-Iranians use to define Iranian-American people? If so, which ones? Are they good, bad or neutral?”, we found the term *terrorist*, which has an evident negative connotation, mentioned several times and its use was probably encouraged after the events of 9/11 (Bozorgmehr and Bakalian 2009) in which all people considered as Middle Eastern had to face widespread feelings of hatred from the American people. Although the Iranian-Americans had nothing to do with the attack of the 11 September 2001, they have been targeted as Middle Eastern and, for this reason, were the victims of the backlash too. These events surely changed the atmosphere in which the migrant communities lived, and consequently also the way they lived. Many institutions and associations tried to distance their image from the negative connotations which flourished in this period. Some Iranian-American associations began to highlight the elements of sameness with American society and distance themselves from the actual Iranian government.

We did, however, also find definitions with positive connotations such as *beautiful people*, *overachievers*, *smart*, *businessmen*, *clever* and we find that some of these terms have a reference to the consideration of the Iranian-Americans as overachievers and businessmen. Similarly, we have a series of terms which presume Iranian-Americans to be wealthy and rich: *gold-lovers*, *big noses*, *all rich*, *snobby*. All these terms come from the stereotypes created by some TV shows which depict

the Iranian-Americans as people leading a luxurious and superficial lifestyle. One of these shows is the stereotyped representation of the "Shahs of Sunset". The term "big noses" is probably a reference to the fact that Iranian women often resort to rhinoplasty (this is a trend adopted especially by Iranian women in Iran). It is interesting to note the widespread use of Persian to define Iranians, the term Persian despite its neutrality, implies a sort of timeless identity due to the reference to the past and, in a way, it removes the reference with the present.

We also find that among the terms used by non-Iranians there are some such as *Middle Eastern*, *exotic*, and *Oriental*, which create a sort of distance from the Iranian-Americans who are considered as "the others". Even though many Iranian-Americans were born in the United States and have never been to Iran, people continue to call them Middle Eastern or Oriental. In particular, the terms *exotic* and *Oriental* create an image which is decontextualised and misrepresented.

In the case of the indistinct use of *Muslim* to identify all Iranians, people reveal their lack of knowledge of the religious diversity of the Iranian milieu. This indistinct use of Muslim is not only incorrect, but it errs in giving a homogeneous representation of the Iranian-American communities, which, on the contrary, are based on heterogeneity (Bozorgmehr 1997). On the same level, we have the use of *Arab* to define Iranians which is another case of misinformation. This reveals a lack of awareness regarding the Middle East and explains why many people believe that all Iranians are Muslims.

Such cultural ignorance and a tendency to make broad generalisations often lead to people defining Iranians as *extremist*, *religious*, *backward*, *sand niggers*, and *camel jockeys* (all these examples are taken from the answers of our informants); all these terms have a negative connotation, but we will see in detail why they are used. The first two, *extremist* and *religious*, give the idea that all Iranian-Americans are, first of all, religious and, secondly, all extremists. As we have said before, the religious component of the Iranian-American communities is characterised by heterogeneity, so the use of *religious* and *extremist* is inappropriate especially if we consider that there are Iranians who are not religious at all. All these representations come from the tendency

of people to abstract the political and ideological situation of Iran to the Iranian people, also in the case of Iranian people who live abroad. In this case, the media also have a significant influence in perpetuating an image of Iran which is fundamentally religious (think about all the images of women wearing a veil) and in depicting Iranian people as being extremely religious. Luckily, there are some attempts to reveal the other face of Iran and Iranian people, and things are improving nowadays. The term backward contributes to the misrepresented image of Iranian people, and it is inappropriate since Iranian-American communities have not only high educational attainment but also important work positions. Two of the terms mentioned before are not only used for Iranian-Americans but for all people who are from the Middle East (*sand nigger* and *camel jockey*) and both have a negative and derogatory connotation.

IV. *Iranian-American identity*

IV.I. *Is Iranian-American a transnational identity?*

An emblematic example which best describes Iranian-American identity is the celebration of *Mehregan*, an old Persian festival which takes inspiration from Zoroastrianism. The reason for which this celebration is so peculiar to the Iranian-American identity is given by the fact that this festival is almost unknown out of the American context. Indeed, as Ghorashi (2004) wrote, this festival is not part of the national celebrations in Iran, and there are few references to it in literature. This is interesting if we think about how much resonance is given to it in America, but also in Australia (Honari 2008; Abramian 2008). It is not without reason that Ghorashi affirms that «*Mehregan* is a creation of diaspora» (2004: 332); indeed, the celebration of this festival could be explained if we refer it to the concepts of “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1984) and “imagined communities” (Anderson 2006). The celebration of *Mehregan* would represent an emblematic case of the creation of a new tradition in which Iranian-Americans could think and define themselves as an identity

somehow distinct from the Iranian identity *tout court*. It is important to highlight the importance of the deterritorialization of these practices which are comprehensible only if we consider them in the light of the new context in which they are operating, in our case the American context.

This deterritorialization is essential in the process of the construction of Iranian-American identity, not only because it allows a distinction from the Iranian identity in the strict sense of the word, but also because it permits the creation of a new set of traditions and practices within American society. Furthermore, the creation of this set of deterritorialized practices, which refer to the past grandeur of pre-revolutionary Iranian history makes it easier for them to distance themselves from the actual political situation in Iran. The latter is particularly important if we consider the tensions between the U.S. and Iranian governments, indeed most Iranian people, in order to avoid being victims of feelings of hate, try to hide or disguise their origins (Mahdi 1998); in this respect, the celebration of a festival, which refers predominantly to the pre-Islamic period, is a political choice aimed at reinventing an identity in which the sameness with the American society is emphasized. As Ghorashi wrote: «Mehregan is more than just a re-creation of Iranian culture of Iranians in diaspora. [...] By creating a fall celebration in America the similarity between the two cultures is emphasized (celebrating a fall festival which is similar to for example Thanksgiving). Next to this emphasis on sameness, the extensive celebration of an ancient Iranian ceremony includes the construction of various kinds of boundaries as well. The first boundary is towards American culture (by emphasizing 'who we are as Iranians'), and the second one is towards the Iranian government (by celebrating a non-Islamic festivity). In this way, the construction of Iranian identity through Mehregan is about sameness and difference simultaneously» (2004: 335).

As a result of this deterritorialization we could refer to the Iranian-American identity as transnational, this is also why we often see in these celebrations elements of the pre-revolutionary period (particularly with reference to the monarchist period or the pre-Islamic period), all these attempts are directed towards the creation

of an “imagined community” in which the Iranianness and Americanness are combined in harmony: «Iranians remain faithful to their ‘imagined’ culture and yet can feel American at the same time. The bottom line is that this imaginary home makes it possible to be different and similar simultaneously, and thus not to live a dual life» (Ghorashi 2004: 336).

IV.II. The effects of the backlash of 9/11 on the Iranian-American communities

After the events following the 11 September 2001, we witness a sort of fury shown by American society towards the migrant communities (especially those from the Middle East), defined as backlash 9/11 (Bozorgmehr and Bakalian 2009). These migrant communities tried different ways to seem more Americanised such as choosing to adopt an Americanized name to disguise their origin, or choosing to speak only English in order to avoid discrimination. We witness thus a process of cultural assimilation (adopting a more Americanised name or adopting in some way American principles and attitudes), but also a physical assimilation, trying to portray themselves as Americans (in this case, the concept of “whiteness” has a prominent role because it makes it easier to have a physical assimilation to Americans) and, in some cases, people resorted to plastic surgery (Mobasher 2006; Shirazi 2014).

It is also in the light of the backlash that the religious element is somehow rejected, probably due to the fear of being associated with extremism or terrorism. Even if some Iranians distance themselves from Islam because they think that it would lead inevitably to an association with current Iranian politics, there are also Iranians who believe that the Islamic element cannot be cancelled out, because it is part of the Iranian identity: «Unlike the Persian nationalists, there are other Iranians who define themselves through a combination of religious (Islamic) and cultural (Persian) features. [...] To them, Persian cultural traits and the Islamic religious practices are distinct but inseparable dimensions of Iranian collective identity» (Mobasher 2006: 101).

Because of the negative connotations related to being Muslim, most Muslim Iranians are afraid of confessing their religion because they fear that people, and even non-Muslim Iranians, will point an accusing finger at them and presume them to be sympathising with the current Iranian government (Mobasher 2006).

Therefore, the definition of oneself as an Iranian Muslim could have political consequences, i.e. one could be considered as an extremist, but this does not surprise us because the same argument could be made for the choice of self definition as "Iranian" or "Persian", where Iranian is considered to be more liable to a reference to the present Iranian government, the term Persian, on the contrary, would recall the ancient history of Iran, so a reference to the "positive" connotations of this (Mobasher 2006). However, this trail of prejudices does not affect only Muslim Iranians, but all Iranians because people tend to generalise their prejudices even to those who openly affirm to be against the current Iranian government.

We can clearly see the presence of these stereotypes by taking into account how many times the participants wrote that non-Iranians define Iranians as terrorists, showing that this stereotype is still widespread in American public opinion. Although nowadays we witness a greater openness towards the representation of Iran, sometimes there is still a misrepresentation of Iranian reality and cultural elements are often politicised.

V. Conclusion

Language shows no barriers, it is indeed extremely flexible and, as we have seen, it hides great potentiality. The only barriers that exist are the ones created by ourselves. We have also seen that identity is characterised by fluidity and it can adapt to any context and situation. In this case, Iranian-American identity is a good example of this fluidity because it has adapted to the American context, converting its identity into a new one by referring to a remote past which has the benefit of removing the references to the uncomfortable present. It has done more than this, this new identity has created a set of new festivals with new

traditions, contributing to the creation of not only an imagined community but also an imagined homeland because the Iran remembered by Iranian-Americans is no longer the Iran of today. Language has a significant part in the construction of identity. Consider, for example, the implications behind the simple act of defining themselves as Persian rather than Iranian. Certainly, there are still many stereotypes that survive in public opinion and that contribute to the misrepresented image of the Iranian-American communities. Far from the removal of these stereotypes, we witness a significant creativity in the process of identity construction, which contributes to form what we now define as Iranian-American which is not just Iranian nor just American, but both at the same time.

Note by the author

Concerning the concept of “ethnicity”, I want to clarify the connotation that it has in this work: «[Ethnicity] has to do with a group sharing sociocultural characteristics – a sense of place, ancestry, a common history, religion, cultural practices, ways of communicating, and often a language» (Mooney and Evans 2015: 133); moreover, we quote the enlightening words of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss: «Mais le péché originel de l’anthropologie consiste dans la confusion entre la notion purement biologique de race [...] et les productions sociologiques et psychologiques des cultures humaines. [...] Aussi, quand nous parlons, en cette étude, de contribution des races humaines à la civilisation, ne voulons-nous pas dire que les apports culturels de l’Asie ou de l’Europe, de l’Afrique ou de l’Amérique tirent une quelconque originalité du fait que ces continents sont, en gros, peuplés par des habitants de souches raciales différentes. Si cette originalité existe – et la chose n’est pas douteuse – elle tient à des circonstances géographiques, historiques et sociologiques, non à des aptitudes distinctes liées à la constitution anatomique ou physiologique des noirs, des jaunes ou des blancs» (1987: 10-11; emphasis added).

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“Poiché nulla di sé e del mondo sa la generalità degli uomini, se la letteratura non glielo apprende” come ammoniva Leonardo Sciascia, anche sui temi dell’immigrazione la verità del fenomeno emerge a volte con più chiarezza e forza nella testimonianza o nell’invenzione letteraria che nelle statistiche demografiche ed economiche (...). In questo, come anche nel precedente volume, i curatori e gli autori si sono impegnati a indagare il duplice verso di questa esperienza: quella della migrazione come tema o, per usare un termine improprio, come “oggetto” e quello della migrazione come forma di ricerca interiore, come distanza che aiuta a leggere e a ricostruire, pienamente umanizzandoli, i meccanismi dell’appartenenza. (...) Il titolo di questa collana suggerisce di muoversi “in-between spaces”, a cavallo di confini linguistici e culturali che diventano, da barriere, congiunzioni e da trincee, sentieri di comprensione della diversità come cifra caratteristica non solo dell’umanità nel suo complesso, ma di ogni uomo nella sua identità personale.

Dalla prefazione di Emma Bonino

Leonardo Sciascia warned that “nulla di sé e del mondo sa la generalità degli uomini, se la letteratura non glielo apprende”. This means that the truth about immigration and all its pertaining issues sometimes emerges more strongly in literary representation and creation rather than in demographic and economic statistics (...). In the present issue, as in the previous one, the editors and authors investigate the dualistic aspect of this experience: on the one hand, they deal with migration as a topic, or, to call it improperly, as a “subject”; on the other hand, they muse on migration as a soul-searching condition, as a distance useful to read and reconstruct the sense of belonging by humanising it. (...) The title of this series suggests to move within “in-between spaces”, whilst rising above linguistic and cultural borders which become connections instead of barriers, new paths instead of trenches. So, thanks to that, we will be able to understand diversity as a typical feature not only of humanity but also of each individual identity.

From the preface by Emma Bonino