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**Pietro Deandrea**

### **Always on the Other Side**

*We do return and leave and return again,  
criss-crossing the Atlantic,  
but whichever side of the Atlantic we are on,  
the dream is always on the other side  
(Pauline Melville, Shape-shifter)<sup>1</sup>.*

In her article on postcolonial studies in Italy, Marta Cariello aptly writes that if the cyborg represented the critical body par excellence in the 1990s, early 21st-century theory is bound to be faced with the migrant body as the quintessential critical presence (Cariello 2016: 35)<sup>2</sup>. In order to reflect on this inescapable and urgent presence for our times, Issue no. 18 of *Le Simplegadi* delves into the multifarious relationships between migrating subjects – both human and artistic – and notions of identity. We simply believe that topical issues related to migrations and the ever-contested concept of identity deserve an articulate analysis, not least because their points of intersection offer numerous suggestions capable of undermining the apparently monolithic structures of neoliberal globalization. These structures are certainly rooted in a long history of colonial oppression in its various forms and localities. More recently, to quote Achille Mbembe, they have been deteriorating into “obsession with boundaries and visas, the emergence of racism in most parts of Europe, the strengthening of right-wing parties in the context of an economic crisis”<sup>3</sup>.

In their critical analysis, many of the articles included in this issue explicitly or implicitly address the facile and inhumane solutions to this (much more than economic) crisis proposed by most institutional actors. The first group of contributions is the most overtly topical for our present-day crisis. Roger Bromley’s study of the Equatorial Guinean writer Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel centres on the EU’s southernmost border and provides an opportunity to reflect on the colonial nature of European powers together with decolonial possibilities of counter-thinking. Carmen Concilio’s pages on NoViolet Bulawayo’s novel *We Need New Names* touch upon issues of invisibility and mental condition among illegal immigrants in the US, whereas Pietro Deandrea focuses on refugees in the UK from a spatial perspective, considered in both their oppressive forms of confinement and in their liberating strategies

<sup>1</sup> Pauline Melville. 1990. *Shape-shifter*. London: The Women’s Press.

<sup>2</sup> Marta Cariello. 2016. Il corpo critico: Pensare ai limiti dell’Europa. *From the European South: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Humanities*, 1: 35-41.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas M. Blaser. 2013. Africa and the Future: An Interview with Achille Mbembe. *Africa is a Country blog*, 20th November, <https://africasacountry.com/2013/11/africa-and-the-future-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe/> (consulted on 4/10/2018).

of counter-actions. Similar questions are examined in Paola Della Valle's article on Caryl Phillips, a second-generation Black British author whose recent prose shows an increasing preoccupation with globalization migrants. Like Deandrea in the article mentioned above, Ilaria Oddenino and Daniela Salusso concentrate on the literature concerned with present-day refugees in Europe, but from their peculiar perspectives – Oddenino on the Calais jungle as depicted in a graphic reportage by Kate Evans, Salusso on the linguistic strategies to de-simplify and problematise the complexity of migrations. Between these two articles, Ellen Patat's reflections centre on how Muslim women are represented by some authors within the context of the so-called clash of civilisations in contemporary Europe.

In her contribution, Salusso mentions British Prime Minister Theresa May's declared intention of creating a "hostile environment" for unlawful immigrants. Sadly, as recent news confirmed, this also led to the institutional persecution of elderly Windrush immigrants who could not provide evidence of their living and working in the UK and were thus targeted as 'illegals'. This is a clear example of how the recent 'refugee crisis' does not imply that the issues around earlier, apparently settled migratory waves should be seen as pacified and solved. Accordingly, the second group of articles collected here examines key historical events (including migratory phenomena) from colonial and postcolonial times. Adriano Elia touches on the African American Great Migration and identifies, in Langston Hughes' poetical reconfiguration of the blues, gestures towards collective change. Nadia Priotti examines Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* and its depiction of 1930s multicultural Paris, where various strands of migratory movements crossed and sometimes replicated colonial hierarchies. Paola Carmagnani offers a genre-oriented analysis of the translation of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* for the stage by the Indian-born American writer Santha Rama Rau, throwing light on her re-articulation of the English novelist's Eurocentric vision. The two pieces closing the second section share an interest in more recent historical tragedies of the Indian subcontinent: through his reading of Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan*, Giuseppe De Riso unravels multiple perspectives on identity within and among the fighting and migrating ethnic groups scarred by the 1947 Partition (with an emphasis on the role of rumours); and Pier Paolo Piciuccio analyses the protagonist of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* following the contradictory strands which compose her identity. Similarly to stances in other articles included here (such as Concilio's references to Roberto Beneduce's ethno-psychiatric studies), Piciuccio makes use of critical paradigms pertaining to Trauma Studies: the increasing presence of these critical tools for the study of migration-related literature certainly shows how urgent these issues are.

The contributions composing the third and final group of *Le Simplegadi* no. 18 go further back in time in their studying of identity-formations and their relationship with migratory processes, since they share an interest in the presence of myth as a crucial element. In what represents an exception to the Anglophone scope of this issue, Fabiana Di Brazzà identifies in the figure of the siren a crucial crossroads between Tomasi di Lampedusa and classical sources. Maria Camilla Di Tullio reads Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, including its central image of the ocean voyage, through the lenses of Hindu mythology and ethics. Mattia Mantellato investigates Derek Walcott's *Omeros* as a poem where colonised peoples

develop their sense of identity through ecocritical relations with nature. Pierpaolo Martino emphasises how Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* tackles questions of identity-in-migration through metamorphic translations of ancient myths into new forms such as pop culture. Miriam Sette recounts Norman Douglas' search for an identitarian rebirth in the wake of the traces of ancient Greece which he found in the Italian deep south. Finally, Roberta Trapè focuses on the Australian artist Paul Carter and, in an original co-authorship with Carter himself, reflects on his involvement with Italian urbanism, classical art and philosophy, culminating in what she defines as a "migrant epistemology".

By and large, these articles testify to the far-reaching range of configurations of identity within the field of colonial and postcolonial literatures and arts. All these configurations are bound to be confronted with different forms of coloniality of power – stumbling blocks like the Simplegadi, the mythical rocks which were believed to cause so many shipwrecks. At the same time, they open opportunities towards badly needed forms of counter-actions and self-affirmation.

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