

Diasporic Subjects and Migration

SANDRA PONZANESI

Migration has always represented the most unsettling and yet enriching force of human civilization. It has redesigned geopolitical boundaries, economic structures and cultural identities. The uneven growth of the world population has increased the pressures of migration. The World Bank predicts that migration will become one of the most important determining forces of the twenty-first century. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) attributes this phenomenon to new 'push factors' such as easily accessible information about other places, cheaper forms of transportation, and the emergence of a professional body of 'migration agents' who arrange the journeys and the necessary documents. Even though Asia is the mostly densely populated continent, the fastest population growth remains in the region surrounding the European basin: the Middle East and Africa. Globalization in the form of the information revolution and trade liberalization complicates this scenario further. The world has become smaller but also more polarized. The gap between rich and poor, online and offline, order and chaos, integration and fragmentation has expanded structurally.

Western Europe today is the destination for many international migrants, voluntary and forced. With slow or zero population growth in Western European countries, governments have encouraged the temporary migration of workers. Perhaps the most publicized case has been Germany, which has a large population of "guest workers" from Turkey. Within Europe, migration from the peripheral countries such as Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Southern Italy, Greece, along with migration from Eastern Europe (particularly the former Yugoslavia) and North Africa, to the core regions of Western Europe, has changed the make-up of local populations. France has received more than one million migrants from North Africa while Germany has invited between two and three million guest workers. In the early 1990s many countries

expressed fear over the possibility of Eastern Europeans beginning to migrate voluntarily to Western Europe in search of better economic opportunities. While estimates placed the possible number as high as ten million, the actual number of migrants has been considerably lower, and with the toughening of entry requirements for immigration many applicants have been turned away.

It needs to be reiterated that migration is certainly not new to Europe, since migrations to, within and from Europe have been an integral part of the national formations and their transformations. What is new are the modalities with which new migrations are pressing against the borders of the newly defined Fortress Europe, as specified above, and how they qualify and magnify the altered histories of a colonial legacy and of global intersections. This shows that in Europe migration has shifted from an outward to a centripetal phenomenon. Whereas during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century migration to the Americas represented a great incentive and the solution to internal economic stagnation, and later an escape from the advent of fascist forces, the migration of the second half of the twentieth century consisted instead of a strong absorption of people from what has been defined as the end of empire. Those colonial peripheries – which, with the demise of the great European empires (British, French, Dutch, Portuguese and Italian), came to crowd the old metropolitan centres and question national identities – have been strongly voiced within the post-colonial debate of the last decade.

It is therefore important to recognize the specificity of European fluxes of migration as quite distinct from the North American melting-pot credo. Few studies have focused in a systematic way on diasporic cultural practices in contemporary Europe. Yet Western Europe offers a privileged site for an analysis of this kind, for its historical relationship with former colonies and spheres of influence has attracted growing concentrations of immigrant minorities. With the demise of empire the periphery came to coexist with the centre; the synchronicity of different historical backgrounds came to be lumped together with the flat diachronicity of the old metropolitan centres. It is in this transition from there to here, from 'us' and 'them', from colonial past to post-colonial present, that the migrant subject must be located in his/her multiple intersections and negotiation of identity. And it is through the idea of an imperial centre and its many ends that Europe has constructed its own homogeneous image, in opposition to those peripheral colonial histories which were an integral part of the European project of modernity.

However, not all migrant flows express trajectories from the former colonies to the former European centres. The impact of globalization and transnational capitalism associated with the difficult process of nationalization and economic development of many 'post-colonial countries' has blurred the lines of origin and destination of so many and diverse strands of migration. That has also caused great confusion for the labelling and characterization of these strands, and has made the analysis of gender and ethnic relations within

communities of origin and of arrival even more complicated. This is due to the fact that migrancy empowers women and ethnic minorities, by emphasizing shifting identities and cultural negotiations, as much as it disenfranchises them, by enforcing processes of integration and homologation.

The migrant as a 'material subject' moving from one continent to the other, fleeing civil wars, famine, political persecutions or just in search of better opportunities, must be distinguished from the notion of the migrant as a symbolic category. The latter expresses migrant subjectivity as crossing the boundaries of hegemonic discourses, and of imposed categories of identity formation. Refugees, transnational workers, the exiled, expatriates, diasporic people, transnational operators or cosmopolitan intellectuals are often jumbled under the same heading – that of displaced people – despite the significant differences of their backgrounds. The fascination with people whose identities do not fit with any geography is not new to our society. What is however new and highly emphasized, to the extent of becoming overinflated, is the critical intensity with which cosmopolitan subjects, post-colonial people and globetrotters are celebrated as the new gurus, as people whose in-betweenness, cross-culturality or liminality in some respects more accurately embodies our contemporary condition.

This second notion has acquired a certain cachet in recent poststructuralist debates, since the migrant figuration allows the envisioning of trespassing disciplinary boundaries, epistemological categories and nationalistic dogmas. Most important, from a feminist standpoint, the migrant trope helps to envision the intersection of sex, class, race, age and lifestyle as fundamental axes of differentiation. Various theories of nomadism and cosmopolitanism have tried to encapsulate the notion of the migrant as an embodiment of the contemporary condition of dislocation, not only in spatial terms but as crossing existing categories, of gender restrictions and bodily limitations. Notions such as diaspora (Brah, Hall, Gilroy, Smadar, Swedenborg, Barkan), borderlands (Anzaldúa), edges (hooks), eccentric subject (De Lauretis), margins (Spivak), in-betweenness (Bhabha), rhizome (Deleuze), exile (Said), nomadic subject (Braidotti), cyborg (Haraway), transversal politics (Yuval-Davies), borders (Balibar), multiple geographies (Stanford-Freeman) all emphasize theories of space as a way of describing the postmodern condition as encapsulating multiple variables of female subjectivity.

Though highly interlocked, these two readings of the migrant condition should not be conflated. An inflated migrant rhetoric will rob actual dispossessed people of their language of suffering and loss. Kevathi Krishnaswamy pleads for a political relocation of such concepts, in which the experiences of political exiles, economic refugees and migrant labourers do not become histories that designate a wide range of cross-cultural phenomena. He asks:

What part has the 'cosmopolitan', 'Third World Intellectual' played in the manufacture of the 'diasporic consciousness'? How have metropolitan discourses framed contemporary conceptions of hybridity and migrancy? Has the mythology of migrancy

provided a productive site for post-colonial resistance or has it become complicit with the hegemonic postmodern theoreticisation of power and identity? (Krishnaswamy 1995: 128)

For this purpose it is important to distinguish a diasporic sensibility from a migrant predicament. Even though the diasporic imagination stems from concrete and historically positioned routes of dispersion and scattering, it has nowadays acquired a great figurative flexibility which mostly refers to practices of transgression and hybridization.

The original notion of diaspora refers, in fact, to a collective trauma, of the banishment and exile of Jewish communities. In a second stage, diaspora also came to signify the dispersal and genocide of Armenians and the coercive uprooting of African people for the purposes of slavery. There are also other forms of diaspora such as imperial diasporas (the indentured labour of Indian people), trade diasporas and cultural diasporas such as in the case of the Caribbean (Cohen 1997). At present diasporas evoke globalized and transnational forces of the world economy, international migrations, and diasporic intellectuals who can account for multiple subject positions such as Homi Bhabha and Avtar Brah. They define the task of the intellectual who articulates his/her difference.

The migrant subject, by contrast, remains more closely linked to the geographical process of uprooting and resettling. S/he has a culture of origin and of destination and a trajectory often motivated by economic reasons, though not necessarily. S/he posits serious questions of integration, assimilation and segregation, and the revision of citizenship criteria on the part of the hosting nations, all issues and problematics which have been gathered under the banner of multicultural policies. These issues have promoted debates not only at the cultural surface but mostly within the political and economic subtext. The debates held within the cultural arena address the paradox of alternative cultural traditions and national identities having come to coexist with universal values of Western democracies. The migrant experience has abandoned its private realm of family traditions and entered public life, reframing the old issue of migration as an interactive process and not as a unilateral problematic.

For the sake of clarity I will stick to the notion of migration as referring to that broad spectrum of phenomena which are usually associated with spatial dislocation, both in its sociological component (demographic and urban shifts, the relocation of labour force, the reassessment of citizenship and nationality), and in its cultural implications (the questioning of Western aesthetic paradigms and canon formations, the defence of linguistic pluralism and literary innovation, the promulgation of cultural and gender difference). In order not to evade its problematic or to escape into a self-referential jargon that celebrates migration as a free-floating and empowering condition, it is important to address the wider issues at stake and to evaluate migration both in its rhizomatic historical formations and in its contemporary geographical interchanges. The

challenge is indeed to put the category of 'migration' under fire and yet validate its utility for highlighting asymmetric relationships of power and representation.

Europe and the Lost Empire: Nationalism, Migration and the Post-colonial Predicament

People from the former colonies made, and are still making, the journey to metropolitan centres, where, together with new immigrants, asylum seekers and migrant workers, they profoundly destabilize 'older, more global imperial identities' (Schwarz 1992: 206). As Gisela Brinkler-Gabler and Sidonie Smith write, 'Now post/colonial encounters take place "at home" in the metropolitan centres, with profound effects for the imagining of the national identity' (1997: 8).

People migrating to the heart of the old empire represent the famous flux of return, the inversion of the colonial journey from centre to periphery. The patterns of absorption of these new strands are very much based on colonial policy. The British colonial policy of indirect rule, for example, is still reflected in British immigration policy, which allows certain immigrant communities to enter 'Britain' so long as they rely on their own community of origin. No claim should be made to an effective integration, since, as Paul Gilroy so poignantly illustrated in his influential *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, the notions of British identity and of blackness were considered to be mutually exclusive (see also Gilroy 2000). People born in Britain or of mixed parentage created a shift in the notion of the old metropolitan centre, bringing to the fore all those submerged ethnicities which created the discrepancy between the proposed model of national cohesion and the new diversification from within. As Gilroy states, the pattern of cultural pluralism is a euphemism for a non-modifiable national purity.

These issues had already been addressed during the 1984 Essex Conference entitled 'Europe and Its Others' (Barker 1985), in which the most prominent critics of colonial discourse analyses gathered (Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Benita Parry, Lata Mani, Sneja Gunew and others) in order to focus on representations of colonial and imperial power. Spivak was critical of the conference's title because it implicitly consolidated Europe as a sovereign subject by defining its colonies as the 'others' and not as constitutive subjects. To use the Third World as a convenient signifier, argued Spivak, offers 'an entire privileged discursive field within metropolitan radical criticism. In that field, "The Third World Woman" is a particular hollowed signifier' (in Barker 1985: 128).

Spivak contributed to a shift in the focus from colonial towards post-colonial discourse analyses by deconstructing the rigid opposition between

Europe and its others. These are not given entities but a web of complex power relationships which have not stopped with the end of the empires but have continued into the new world relocation of culture. Crucial for the post-colonial discourse is, in fact, the notion that the ends of empire have been brought home and have made visible the racial nature of the old national identities by highlighting the multicultural rupture of the new.

Furthermore, it was necessary to augment colonial discourse analyses with a feminist agenda. Gender relations had played a crucial role in the operation of colonization and also in the rise of nationalist movements, through the use of the strategic role of women as upholders of collective traditional values, on the one hand (therefore oppressed within their patriarchal society), and as emancipated individualized selves (obviously suggested by the colonizer's model of liberation), on the other. Frantz Fanon has broadly discussed the image of the woman as a site of controversy, as an object of control more than as a locatable agency, within the conflictual policy of empire. However, with decolonization and the pronounced phenomenon of migration towards Europe the issue has been resuscitated with some verve.

As Nira Yuval-Davies (1997) points out, this is due to the contradictory relationship between women and culture when it comes to notions of nation, diaspora and global multiculturalism. Women are usually marginalized within ethnic projects, even though they are used as a site of interaction between hegemonic and minority cultures, in order to give content to what authenticity and tradition mean. Women, writes Yuval-Davies, are in fact the site of struggle among conflicting identities, and are often called on to

be the intergenerational transmitters of cultural tradition, customs, songs, cuisine, and, of course the mother tongue [*sic*]. This is especially true in minority situations in which the school and the public sphere present different hegemonic cultural models to that of the home. (Yuval-Davies 1999: 115)

Multiculturalism and post-colonial homogenization can therefore have detrimental effects on women, in particular when different cultural traditions – often defined in terms of culturally specific gender relations – are used to reproduce ethnic boundaries. This clash becomes obvious in multiculturalism and post-colonial critique when the attention is shifted from the cultural domain to the legal system. Practices which are ethnically and gender encoded – such as the wearing of the veil, clitoridectomy, polygamy, child marriages – may contrast with the legal system of the host country based on secular models. Here the limits of multicultural diversity become more tangible and pressing. At the same time the dominant culture, which interferes with the religious traditions of minority groups in order to emancipate women, participates in the sex industry, marriage bureaux and the exploitation of domestic servants, profiting from the vulnerable and subordinate role that women in migration have both within their own societies and within the host ones.

Ian Chambers and Lidia Curti's *The Postcolonial Question* (1996) is one of the first volumes to present an analysis of the post-colonial condition within Europe, analysing the specificities of Southern Europe and contesting post-colonial dogmas, which are mainly held within the North American academy. Usually migration literature is seen as an extension of the post-colonial literary debate. However, migration literature and post-colonial literature in general hardly focus on the internal differences present within Europe.

The post-colonial debate tends to be dominated by the English language as it rotates around the axis Britain/India, re-proposing the old dichotomy of empire while claiming to voice subaltern histories and marginal positions. This is a highly asymmetrical scenario; for this reason various recent studies have focused on the different heritages of empire within Europe (Portuguese, French, Dutch, Italian, German) in order to analyse more effectively the condition and process of multiculturalization within Europe, but also the new strands of migration and their interconnectedness with past and modern legacies.¹

Both post-colonial and multicultural practices, usually inflected by American models, must be deconstructed and contextualized within the specificities of the European case, significant for its own multilingual and colonial legacies.

Multiculturalisms and Politics of Identity in Europe: Case Studies

So far most of the parameters used for addressing and exposing the identity trouble brought about by immigration are premised upon the seemingly successful American model of the 'melting pot'. These parameters are, however, strongly inadequate for the mapping of the European situation in its historical and geopolitical specificity.

The United States is a nation with a strong democratic authority, capable of absorbing, and being remoulded by, the innumerable and vast transnational streams of immigrants that have been conspicuous from the moment of the foundation of the nation, a nation with a strong settler identity, supposedly made by an internal plurality that is capable of silently coexisting with the higher credo of the American dream of the self-made man. This model of the self-made man often erases the violent forms of internal colonization, such as that of the Native Americans, and the project of modernity undertaken on the back of slavery.

The American model cannot easily be applied to the situation in Europe, where migration has not only been mostly outwards, as specified above, but also historically discontinuous, uneven among the different national states, dictated both by colonial legacies (therefore an integral part of European modern history, as Gilroy claims) and divergent economic factors (dependent on global interactions but also on the internal economic policy followed by

the EU). It is therefore pertinent to ask whether European society is ready for the permanent phenomenon of immigration.

The differences with the United States are obvious. The USA has space, a dynamic economy and a national identity which is not based exclusively on ethno-cultural origin, but on respect for the constitution and the Bill of Rights. Europe has no space, less economic dynamism and does not view itself as possessing an immigration culture. The European Union consists predominantly of welfare states which have reached a reasonable level of social harmony; furthermore, they are nation-states that from an ethnic and cultural point of view are much more homogeneous than the United States. Europe is also the continent where the distinction between civilization and barbarism was invented. The fear of the stranger is strongly rooted in the European mentality. The scientific construction of racial taxonomies at the height of the European empires is one of the most damaging and protracted manifestations of the colonizing mission. The invention of new borders and the shifting symbolism of old boundaries make evident that not all multicultural processes and not all post-colonial strategies are the same.

In order to show how the politics of multiculturalization in Europe are very much linked to the legacy of the different colonial empires, though strongly influenced by the international redistribution of the labour force caused by transnational capital, I will make a brief excursion into the different patterns of multiculturalism which occur within the different European states.

According to Umberto Melotti (1997), the British approach, based on its colonial policy of divide and rule, is relaxed about the formation of ethnic minorities but is not committed to equality of membership in the national community, as France is. Following a long tradition of egalitarianism, France aims at extending full citizenship to immigrants on the basis of assimilation, as was done in colonial times. However, this egalitarian model refuses cultural loyalties that may compete with loyalties to the French Republic.

In *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction: Voices from the North African Community in France* Alec Hargreaves (1997a) emphasizes the importance of 'alternative voices', *beurs* or writing of other descentance in France, as a necessary stage to problematise the French assimilationist credo. This credo is based on the Enlightenment model of 'equality', which does not leave space for the cultural and political differences claimed by non-Western communities. Migrant identification, or post-colonial discourses, have therefore an important role to fulfil in contesting from within the ethnocentric assumptions hidden behind a supposedly progressive agenda.

The German approach to the multicultural trouble is different again, based on the ethnic principle that German blood means German nationality. For decades Germany denied its status as a host immigrant country. Incoming ethnic Germans were not considered immigrants, regardless of where in the world they were coming from. They were viewed as rediscovered members of the German nation and automatically granted citizenship. Other incomers,

such as Turks, were not considered immigrants because they were seen as 'guest workers', therefore subject to repatriation and not integration (Horrocks and Kolinsky 1996).

These three European nations, Britain, France and Germany, have offered multicultural models of integration and transformation very different from the US one, because they are inserted into different democratic and colonial traditions. Within the 'dominant' Northern European model of multiculturalization the southern front is neglected, even though countries such as Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece have been subjected to a constant stream of immigration from outside the EU. The 'EU-phoria'² in this region was very short-lived when confronted with the high level of anxiety shown in respect of the new stretchable borders. The policy of the countries facing the Mediterranean is of great importance for the rest of Europe. Italy as a gateway to Europe is far from being just a suggestive visual metaphor. Due to its position in the Mediterranean and because of its kilometres of barely controllable coasts, Italy is confronted with newcomers daily. Through narrative accounts of their experiences in Italy several migrants have attempted to engage in a dialogue with public opinion. In *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy*, Graziella Parati (1999) offers a 'limited but eloquent' selection of narrative voices which document the uniqueness of the Italian case within the larger scenario of the migration of cultures.

Donna Gabaccia's *Italy's Many Diasporas* (2000) offers a similar account. The plurals in the title refer less to the global destinations of Italians and more to two different considerations: that Italians left their country as Veneti, Siciliani, Neapolitans rather than as 'Italians'; and that a distinct feature was the varied character of their dispersion – trade diaspora, cultural diaspora, nationalist diaspora and mass diaspora. The formation of the modern Italian nation often seemed to find form more easily outside of Italy than within. Gabaccia argues: 'for a country with a long history of sending emigrants abroad, Italy experienced considerable distress in welcoming migrants onto its national territory' (2000: 170), and adds that 'a nation accustomed to thinking of its migrants as subject to racist and capitalist oppression abroad suddenly looked into the mirror to see itself as the oppressor' (2000: 172). This might have to do with the fact that Italy, unlike the United Kingdom, France, or Germany, has not developed a clear understanding of how its history of migration has defined its national identity.

However, even the 'processes of emancipation' piloted by the central governments of countries following a more advanced multicultural policy have their drawbacks. The institution of affirmative action and positive discrimination policies have the paradoxical function of empowering minorities only if they fit into the essentialized and fixed categories provided by multicultural state policy. Against this vision Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner claim, in their preface to *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe*, that multiculturalism is not simply a novel project of social engineering, devised

for the twenty-first century by well-meaning liberals or communitarians. They demonstrate that multiculturalism is the

outcome of ongoing power struggles and collective negotiations of cultural, ethnic and racial differences. These are currently reshaping the public sphere and civil societies of the new Europe. Consequently multiculturalisms are multiple, fluid and continuously contested – a negotiation and transcendence of difference and otherness at different scales, from the communal and local to the national and supranational. (1997: vii)

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was a major turning point in European history which strongly marks Europe's specific tackling of the Cold War problematic and the highly charged symbolism of political frontiers (such as that expressed by the Wall). The notion of borders within Europe is profoundly different from that in the United States, where the Mexican frontier has come to embody a global division between developed capitalist countries and the rest. Within Europe the proximity between what used to be defined as the First and the Second Worlds has created – with the collapse of the Soviet regime – a hazy 'transit zone' (Eastern Europe going Western), a vacillation of the very notion of border (Balibar). The Eastern frontier has become the site of a recycled workforce for the expansion of the Western economy, but also a receptacle of lost histories and identities that claim their centrality in the shaping of European identity.

However, the Maastricht Treaty and the Schengen Accords have shown their limitations when faced with the drama of the Dover affair, where more than fifty illegal Chinese immigrants were stifled to death in the back of a lorry supposedly transporting tomatoes from the Netherlands to the United Kingdom. The shifting of responsibility for the frontier from country to country, with Britain blaming the Netherlands for their careless controls at the borders, is symptomatic of the vanity of political regulations when faced with the urgency of economic imbalances created by the connection between capital and metropolis. Furthermore the proto-European model of integration and cohesion is a fiction, an invention made to counterbalance bigger empires such as the American one but, as Nuruddin Farah (2000) writes in his *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora*, the European Union is another empire of a more sophisticated order, which has taken the role of negotiating away the imperial responsibilities of countries such as Britain, France, Portugal, the Netherlands and Italy. The people of this new empire are barricading themselves behind the empty rhetoric of fear and helplessness. But, as Balibar has so powerfully remarked, borders are vacillating:

This means that they are no longer localizable in an unequivocal fashion. It also means that they no longer allow a superimposition of the set of functions of sovereignty, administration, cultural control, taxation, and so on, and consequently a conferral on the territory, or better, on the duo of territory and population, of a simultaneously englobing and univocal signification of 'presupposition' for all other

social relations. Further, it means that they do not work in the same way for 'things' or 'people' – not to speak of what is neither thing or person: viruses, information, ideas – and thus repeatedly pose, sometimes in a violent way, the question of whether people transport, send and receive things, or whether things transport, send and receive people: what can in general be called the empirico-transcendental question of *luggage*. Finally it means that they do not work in the same way, 'equally', for all people, and notably not for those who come from different parts of the world, who (this is more or less the same thing) do not have the same social status, the same relation to the appropriation and exchange of idioms. (1998: 219–20)

Balibar's leitmotif 'borders are vacillating' has the advantage of showing us the significations that are at work in every tracing of a border, beyond the immediate, apparently factual determination of language, religion, ideology and power relations. This does not mean that borders are disappearing. Less than ever is the contemporary world a 'world without borders'. On the contrary, borders are being multiplied and reduced in their localization and their function; they are being thinned out and doubled, becoming border zones, regions or countries where one can reside and live.

Migrant Figurations

Nomadic subjects

Taking up the issue of the imaginary yet material presence of the borders referred to by Balibar, this section will focus on migration as part of the symbolic production of cultural practices within Europe as dictated by the specificities of European intellectual consciousness.

To understand migration as a symbolic representation has had an enormous impact within disciplinary fields such as Women's Studies. One of the most recent figurations has been offered by Rosi Braidotti (1994). Her nomadic subject is a feminist figuration whose task it is to subvert conventional representations and modes of thought. It criticizes gender-blindness by claiming that nomadic cartographies need to be continuously redrafted in order to activate a process of counter-memory, 'a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self' (1994: 25). It refers to an engagement with the rethinking of the bodily roots of subjectivity, in which embodiment must be understood as an overlapping point between the physical, symbolic and sociological. The nomadic subject envisioned by Braidotti is not just the deterritorialized traveller (the literal nomad as much as the itinerant in cyberspace) but, in the main, a figuration that entails the situated, differentiated and multiply located feminist subject:

though the image of 'nomadic subjects' is inspired by experience of peoples of cultures that are literally nomadic, the nomadism in question here refers to a kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour. Not all nomads are world travellers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one's habitat. It is the subversion of a set

of conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling. (Braidotti 1994: 5)

Though linked to the personal experience of geographical, linguistic and disciplinary nomadism (Braidotti is an Italian immigrant to Australia, educated in Paris, and working on European networks of Women's Studies from the Netherlands), Braidotti's feminist concept, inspired by Gilles Deleuze's nomadic epistemology, has had a great impact on the possibility of envisioning female agency within revised epistemological categories. Braidotti constructs one of the most inspirational metaphors of the nomad as the creator of powerful new tropes and visions that aim at engendering transformations and at subverting dominant patterns of thought. It is an intellectual style, a process to increase critical consciousness. Nomadism here is not about being homeless but about developing skills that allow a home to be re-created, as heterogeneous, transmobile and polyvalent.

Braidotti is very careful not to conflate the epistemological position with the material condition of migrants who have a clear destination and very clear purposes for moving from one space to another. She declares that 'not all diasporas are equal, though they get homogenized by the gaze of the colonial observer' (Braidotti 1994: 10). Migration to Europe has affected both the 'white women and the domestic foreigners' (22), women whose role as holders of traditional values and of the original home culture is often in conflict with the national ideology of the host country and of international feminist issues.

The nomadic subject has, therefore, the function of envisioning a feminist multiple subject positioning that is in constant renegotiation and transformation in order to unsettle patriarchal patterns of domination but also gender processes of hierarchical relocation, such as white women versus Third World women. It is in the fluidity and performativity of the nomadic figuration that women enter the realm of migration as an empowering notion in which fragmentation, dislocation and multiaxiality come to be signifying practices for self-representation.

Cartographies of diaspora

Another valuable migrant figuration has been theorized by Avtar Brah, a UK resident of Indian origin, born in Uganda. Diaspora is both a material condition of dislocation and a postmodern notion which expresses an intellectualization of existential dispersion. In both cases it indicates a post-national space where 'multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition' (Brah 1996: 208). Diasporic spaces enable the representation of those who straddle two or more cultures, languages and ethnicities and offer a way of rethinking post-colonialism as blurring the lines of national enclaves.

However, the notion of diaspora does not do away with gender inequalities. On the contrary, it makes them more acute and urgent since women must negotiate with conflicting politics: of home and abroad, tradition and emancipation, ethnic belonging and metropolitan fusion. The itinerary of women is therefore, as Paul Gilroy writes, both 'rooted and routed' (1993: 3), and it indicates a myriad processes of cultural fissure and fusion that must be constantly situated and embodied.

Brah inflects the question of diaspora with a multiaxial slant. She investigates questions of 'difference' and 'identity' through a focus on the intersections of ethnicity, racism, gender, sexuality and class. One major area of her research is concerned with youth, diaspora and cultural change. She fuses empirical and theoretical material to map issues such as 'diversity', 'difference' and 'commonality' as relational concepts. Particular attention is paid to South Asian Muslim women in Britain and how they deal with gendered and racialized discourses. The concept of diaspora space is central to the framework of analysis Brah proposes, since it marks the simultaneous articulation of migration, race, ethnicity and class. Brah explores how the power relations which are produced by these intersections work as both inclusive and exclusive in contemporary conditions of transnationalism. For example, minorities are positioned not only in relation to majorities but also with respect to one another. Brah argues that individual subjects may occupy minority and majority positions simultaneously; this has important implications for the formation of subjectivity.

The Black Atlantic

Paul Gilroy, a second-generation British immigrant himself, who has collaborated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies established by Stuart Hall, provides a corrective to the ethnocentric dimension of cultural studies. Gilroy points out how notions of Blackness and Britishness are mutually exclusive not only in the political symbolism of the nation but also in the cultural realm of identity construction. This is because 'the marginalisation of race and racism has persisted even where cultural studies have identified themselves with socialist and feminist political aspirations' (Gilroy 1993: 12).

The British formula of ethnic pluralism only determines the areas of tolerated vicinity without addressing the possible zones of interaction, contamination and transformation that are not only present among different ethnic groups within the British metropolitan centres – *par excellence* the areas of fusion and syncretism, the reflection of the global within the national parameter – but were already established at the beginning of modernity, through the very first moments of expansion and colonization. This reading shows that the other ends of empire are not liminal, separated, but intrinsic to the national construction of Britishness and with it to the gender model propelled within British feminism.

Gilroy is troubled by the very notion of migration, regardless of its creative or sociological component. Migration to Europe implies the vision of a 'white Europe' engrossed in its post-colonial melancholia, an essence in itself that reactively works against those 'racialized' groups which are already within, and not at the other end of, history. Migration functions as a dangerous tool of multicultural myopia, an instrument that makes of diversity a 'culturalism' and erases the still dominant political and economic materiality of racism and prejudicial representations.

Gilroy's major contribution to the debate on migration is his claim that there cannot be a debate on migration without addressing the historical source and presence of today's racism in contemporary Europe. The exploration of racial taxonomies created at the other end of the empire and protracted through fascist forces needs to be addressed and contested within the cultural contexts of Western metropolitan culture in order to understand how race-thinking is intrinsic and not external to the European project of modernity. It must be added that the racial taxonomies of the empire were highly gendered and based on the objectification of the female body (Black Venus, The Hottentot woman, women and harem, the representation of *sati*), which has enormous consequences for the politics of representation in today's Europe. This refers to the use of cultural images, from billboards to films, to photography and museum exhibitions, that are still permeated by the same racial and gender bias – about black inferiority and oversexed but victimized female natives – which characterized colonial discourse.

Gilroy's major trope of migration is that of the Black Atlantic. The image of a connected black culture travelling across the Atlantic, transmitting ideas and cultural forms is Gilroy's powerful contestation of the priority attributed to national cultures, and to the idea that diaspora necessarily equals separation and cultural fragmentation. Gilroy recognizes that there exists a double consciousness in the black flesh; that is, the black sees his own image through the 'other'. Gilroy emphasizes the interconnectedness between discourses around race, class, gender and sexuality and their impact on the black and transglobal communities. He does not want to minimize the impact of diaspora. However, he regards the notion of the Black Atlantic as a way to break out of constraining categories such as the nation, culture or ethnicity.

Conclusion

The texts discussed in this chapter offer a panoramic view of European migration as a force and of diasporic subjectivity as a gendered and ethnic category. These interrelate with the different strands of material immigration within Europe itself, as originating from the diverse forms of European colonialisms and post-colonial aftermaths and the multicultural policies followed by the different national states. Migration is thus not a spontaneous

and self-contained process but is dictated by the push and pull of globalization and by other contemporary factors that often endanger and destabilize local survival.

Several critics oppose the use of 'migration' as a meaningful category at the local level, as is the case with Gilroy and other post-colonial critics who read migration as a form of ghettoization of non-Western cultures. Parati (1999) views the category of 'migration' as necessary for pedagogical purposes, in order to broaden the curriculum and give visibility to voices and experiences which get easily stifled by a conservative and traditional canon such as the Italian one, still holding on to Benedetto Croce's definitions of genre and aesthetic achievements.

As illustrated in the various approaches to the category of 'migration', it remains fruitful and often necessary despite its obfuscatory and contestatory nature. It helps to visualize and voice experiences that would otherwise be submerged by the wider dominant parameter. However, sketching these 'alternative' trajectories (by forming subcanons, new traditions and enabling alternative figurations) should not be a point of arrival but a 'testing ground', a 'provocative manoeuvre' that unsettles the self-fulfilling prophecy of a 'global world' modelled on old colonial paradigms. To address migration as a site of transition and transformation between received and appropriated categories, norms and patterns is the best way to envision a pluralistic and syncretic future.

Notes

1. For a critical study on the Maghrebis in France, see Hargreaves 1997a, 1997b; for a study of the emergence of an Italian post-colonial strand, see Ponzanesi 1999; and for a panorama on Lusophone traditions, see Chabal et al. 1996.
2. I borrow this term from Katrina Irving's article 'EU-phoria? Irish National Identity, European Union and the Crying Game' (in Brinker-Gabler and Smith, 1997: 295–314).

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