



International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies

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Thinking and Writing as Nomadic Subjects
Exploring Languages, Literatures and Ethnographies in Motion

18

2014

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Introduzione

Itala Vivan

La costellazione di saggi qui riuniti sotto il titolo “Thinking and Writing as Nomadic Subjects. Exploring Languages, Literatures and Ethnographies in Motion” viene alla luce in un mondo che appare, ed è, materialmente in movimento, in preda a una trasmigrazione epocale che sta sotto gli occhi di tutti. Tale coincidenza, tuttavia, non deve sembrare strana e neppure fortuita, poiché rivela come il pensiero nomade che sottende la raccolta si collochi all’interno delle cose e nel cuore del tempo, comprendendolo e facendolo proprio, tanto da autorizzare i suoi autori a fissare lo sguardo sull’odierno Mediterraneo senza provare stupore né terrore.

Le torme di profughi che in questi mesi affollano vecchi barconi e si aggrappano alle sponde nord del nostro mare comune, o che marciano lungo i binari ferroviari, assaltano i treni e scavalcano barricate di filo spinato lungo le frontiere europee, sono essi stessi un mare brulicante in movimento, un discorso in carne e ossa che attesta con ineludibile verità il cambiamento in corso nel mondo. Anche a livello di dibattito intellettuale, comunque, gli orizzonti stanno mutando e le idee si muovono sconvolgendo classificazioni precedenti.

Il campo di studi aperto dalla critica postcoloniale ha introdotto nel dibattito teorico a livello internazionale alcuni concetti cruciali, come quello del sostanziale ibridismo delle culture, sino a sviluppare un pensiero della contaminazione che applichi nuovi parametri ai concetti cardine di identità e soggettività – e rimanga coerente rispetto alla valenza critico ermeneutica insita nello sguardo di soggetti che sono costantemente ‘fuori posto’ e, per usare le parole di Edward Said, “sempre nel posto sbagliato”. Le riconfigurazioni del discorso critico riflettono una nuova soggettività che si propone come nomade perché priva di centro e quindi decentrata, non eterodiretta, e finalmente senza fissa dimora sotto un profilo identitario. Il soggetto nomade, parte di tale condizione, risulta fluido e relazionale all’interno di una struttura globale.

La nuova mappatura del mondo e la sua visione dinamica hanno infatti portato a una sovversione e a una riconfigurazione complessiva del presente, spostando e risignificando il centro e facendo scomparire la periferia, in un orizzonte in cui tutto è centro e niente periferia. Si tratta di un riferimento globale ove la soglia storica implicita nella definizione di ‘postcoloniale’ si disfa e si ribalta in una globalità inedita, mentre il gesto della critica postcoloniale revoca e mette in questione le discipline delle archiviazioni tassonomiche, postulando un nuovo archivio e nuove memorie che siano ponti transizionali verso un altrove dinamico.

L’inevitabile ferocia della teoria postcoloniale, che smaschera e demolisce connivenze e complicità disciplinari universalizzanti, identificando – ancora secondo Said – l’imperialismo culturale come estensione dell’imperialismo politico, non impedisce una pratica più morbida e affabile, quale è quella che caratterizza i saggi della raccolta che qui sono stata chiamata a presentare, nella mia ormai antica qualità di postcolonialista perennemente ‘fuori posto’ nel mondo accademico. L’affabilità si esplicita tramite il linguaggio: ed ecco che in questi contributi fioriscono diversi e svariati linguaggi disciplinari che attraversano confini invisibili affermando lo stato di transizione dei sistemi di conoscenza e perseguendo un dialogo che presuma, anziché escludere, diversità di approcci

e punti di vista, metodi di analisi e pratiche esperienziali. Si avverte, nelle voci così varie degli autori, una comune intenzione di avviare un discorso critico consapevolmente ‘fuori posto’, e un sommesso ma fermo tentativo di contrabbandare idee transdisciplinari aldilà delle linee di controllo. Tali elementi unificanti costituiscono la filigrana della raccolta, il suo disegno leggibile in trasparenza e però anche sorretto da solide riflessioni teoriche. Antropologia e glottodidattica, etnologia visiva e analisi linguistiche e letterarie si incrociano vagabondando su aree disciplinari molto diverse, intessendo una molteplicità di traiettorie discorsive che risultano convergenti nello scopo di articolare una ricerca aperta e soprattutto dinamica, ossia tale da rimuovere barriere e favorire scambi fecondi.

Il corpus della raccolta si dipana in quattro momenti, il primo dei quali è dedicato alle lingue. In “English and Mobility: Linguistic and Stylistic Transformation in New Anglophone Literatures”, Esterino Adami prende in esame i romanzi postcoloniali di Xiaolu Guo e NoViolet Bulawayo esemplificandone le peculiari modalità espressive messe in campo per rappresentare narrativamente identità plurali. L’investigazione rivela l’agilità delle invenzioni linguistiche e stilistiche delle due autrici anglofone e mette in luce l’operazione di sottile ricodificazione condotta nel manifestare la trasmigrazione del soggetto nomade. Tale soggetto emerge come identità multipla, confermando quanto già osservato da Stuart Hall nel contesto della sua celebre analisi sociologica.

Il contributo “Immigrants in ELT Books” di Nenad Tomović offre un’utile rassegna di come vengano rappresentati gli immigranti in un gruppo di libri di testo per l’apprendimento dell’inglese come seconda lingua, prodotti in Gran Bretagna e Stati Uniti. L’analisi di Tomović fa emergere concetti di diversità e alterità, e consente di rilevare i principi teorici del multiculturalismo sottesi alle società implicate nei processi di assorbimento degli immigranti entro un tessuto linguistico anglofono.

Il secondo momento della presente raccolta attinge il proprio materiale di indagine al campo specifico delle letterature. Il saggio di Alessandra Consolaro offre un’analisi esemplare del romanzo in lingua hindi *Ādigrām upākhyān*, di inequivocabile valenza politica, ispirato a una vicenda realmente accaduta nello stato indiano del West Bengal. Le mille storie d’un villaggio e la folla dei personaggi rivelano la molteplicità dei saperi subalterni e post-umani che lottano per affermarsi nella propria realtà epistemologica, contro le egemonie e aldilà di esse. Il romanzo richiama concetti e teorie formulati da Gayatri Spivak, incarnandoli in un quadro d’insieme la cui precisa localizzazione si combina con una deterritorializzazione concettuale.

L’acuto saggio di Jolanda Guardi porta alla ribalta dell’attenzione uno straordinario racconto dello scrittore egiziano Yūsuf Idrīs incentrato su un protagonista dall’incerta identità sessuale che scopre la propria omosessualità in età matura. Il trascolorare identitario del personaggio è magistralmente usato, come sottolinea Guardi, per mettere in luce la rigidità dei confini di genere all’interno della cultura egiziana, e più in generale araba, e risulta in una visione della mascolinità che è altra e alternativa rispetto a quella egemonica.

La terza fase della collezione contiene riflessioni ispirate all’antropologia. Il contributo di Elena Bougleux “Processes of Dis-location and Re-location of Knowledge and Power” si divide fra, da un lato, una serrata analisi teorica del potere in rapporto alla conoscenza e, dall’altro, un esemplare case study da lei stessa osservato all’interno di un Research Centre creato nell’anno 2000 nella città di Bangalore. I giovani indiani assunti nel Research Centre da una corporation occidentale hanno il

compito di trasformare saperi e abilità applicative in processi produttivi e infine prodotti di mercato: un iter che li espropria del loro patrimonio conoscitivo per trasformarlo in oggetti che siano fonte di profitto e con ciò di potere. Nel processo di trasferimento dei saperi entrano in gioco dei concetti di contesto e contenuto chiaramente collegati a realtà culturali; e i lavoratori indiani emergono come entità nomadi che operano ri assemblando significati, eludendo norme e infrangendo confini e barriere.

Il saggio di Sara Roncaglia “L’etnografia visiva come sapere nomade per studiare il lavoro delle donne in agricoltura” fa riferimento a un progetto applicato alle pratiche delle agricoltrici di montagna in provincia di Como per interrogare e rileggere criticamente le nozioni di conoscenza e di archivio, e confrontarsi con la ricerca e la disseminazione dei suoi risultati. Nel corso del progetto, che ha infine condotto alla produzione di un video, sono emersi interrogativi epistemologici e rilevanti questioni di genere, frutto di riflessioni plurali e di incontri avvenuti nel tempo e nello spazio. Lo sguardo sulla condizione femminile nel contesto del lavoro agricolo ha spostato il discorso verso una marginalità ulteriore all’interno delle classi subalterne contadine, decentrando l’attenzione e allo stesso tempo inserendo prospettive metodologiche e disciplinari diverse.

Ai tre momenti di cui si è detto se ne aggiunge un quarto, con il contributo di Carola Benedetto, “Pierre Rabhi. L’agro-ecologia, il femminile e la Śakti”, che si colloca in dialogo e in conversazione con quanto precede, narrando l’esperienza eccezionale di un innovatore agro-ecologico nutrito da una duplice cultura, arabo-musulmana prima, europea e cristiana poi. La pluralità dei saperi e delle radici che contraddistingue questa figura ne fa un emblema della trasversalità di quel pensiero nomade che costituisce l’asse concettuale cui si ispira e si rifà la silloge dei saggi qui raccolti.

Itala Vivan, professore ordinario già alla Facoltà di Scienze Politiche dell’Università degli Studi di Milano, ha insegnato studi culturali e postcoloniali in università italiane e statunitensi ed è stata addetta culturale presso l’Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Londra. Ha svolto ricerca sulle società coloniali di lingua inglese e sul loro passaggio al postcolonialismo, analizzandone espressioni letterarie e forme culturali. Ha al suo attivo una ricca produzione saggistica su libri e riviste in Italia e all’estero, ed è presente sulla scena culturale con un ininterrotto lavoro di analisi sulle problematiche contemporanee. Negli anni più recenti ha analizzato il ruolo dei musei culturali nella società odierna.

Primo momento

Lingue

Stage One

Languages

English and Mobility: Linguistic and Stylistic Transformations in New Anglophone Literatures

Esterino Adami

Abstract (English)

This article investigates the interconnected themes of language, mobility and identity and their narrative renditions in the anglophone context by providing an interdisciplinary analysis of some extracts from two recent novels, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (2008) and *We Need New Names* (2014), respectively written by Xiaolu Guo and NoViolet Bulawayo, who resourcefully elaborate new linguistic and textual forms to express the plural questions of identity. The helpful notion of 'language and mobility' discussed by Pennycook (2010) lends support to the argument that language, identity and mobility represent coterminous cultural forces at work in the constant shaping and changing of the contemporary globalised and postcolonial world

Abstract (Italiano)

L'articolo prende in esame l'intreccio tematico fra lingua, mobilità e identità, e delle sue rese testuali nel contesto anglofono, in particolare attraverso un'analisi di taglio interdisciplinare di due recenti romanzi, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, di Xiaolu Guo (2008) e *We Need New Names*, di NoViolet Bulawayo (2014), che affrontano il nodo plurale dell'identità elaborando nuove forme narrative e giochi linguistici. L'articolo adotta la prospettiva critica promossa da Pennycook, attraverso il concetto di *language and mobility* (2010), quale utile strumento analitico per esplorare le sovrapposizioni di lingua, identità e nomadismi/migrazioni che costantemente hanno luogo nei mutamenti del mondo contemporaneo, globalizzato e postcoloniale.

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the dialogic interplay between English and the sense of mobility, namely how complex notions regarding the power of language(s), the possibility of movement and the significance of body discourse that govern our contemporary age are combined, negotiated, overlaid and manipulated in a variety of contexts. To investigate these concepts I will use as a case study two recent anglophone narrative texts, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (2008) and *We Need New Names* (2014), respectively authored by Xiaolu Guo and NoViolet Bulawayo, who resourcefully elaborate new linguistic and textual forms to express the plural questions of identity. My methodology is based upon an interdisciplinary approach that combines the tools provided by an assortment of fields such as postcolonial discourse, variational sociolinguistics, critical applied linguistics and stylistics (Ashcroft 2009; Blommaert 2010; Jeffries 2010; McArthur 2003; Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008; Pennycook 2010; Oboe 2013), but I will specifically adopt and adapt the considerations provided by Alastair Pennycook in his groundbreaking volume *Language and Mobility. Unexpected Places* (2012), an essay that deliberately challenges the restraints of academic writing by using an assortment of various materials and genres and provokingly interrogates important issues of language, power, identity and belonging.

The pivotal element of my argument lies in the recognition of agencies functioning in our postcolonial and postmodern world, where the multiple roles of English, the migratory movements and the access to resources as well as the configurations of identity constitute centripetal and centrifugal forces within a globalised scenario. Narratives, in the fictional domain too, constitute a starting point for this type of investigation and provide a wealth of perspectives, meanings and discourses as they reinterpret reality through the resources and potentiality of language. In this article I also advocate the need for new methods of investigation with the aim to update labels, notions and interpretations in an integrated fashion, thus considering the contribution deriving from studies and perspectives of various nature and going beyond strict disciplinary boundaries.

2. Moving English in the world: breaking standards, breaking boundaries

Language is a key aspect of this debate and in the case of English a proliferation of labels has been proposed, for example English as first language, English as second language, English as a foreign language, English as lingua franca, or more recently Postcolonial English and Lingua franca English (see for example Canagarajah 2013; Sharifian 2009; Schneider 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007; Jenkins 2003). Here I will take up the notion of English Language Complex (ELC) as an interpretive framework to account for the manifold manifestations of English in the world. This label, originally coined by McArthur (2003, 56), is also employed by Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008, 3) with the aim “to comprise all subtypes distinguishable according to some combination of their history, status, form and functions”. These numerous subtypes testify to the different diachronic, diastatic and diatopic transformations of the language and include definitions such as metropolitan standards, colonial standards, regional dialects, social dialects, Pidgin Englishes, Creole Englishes, ESL, EFL, immigrant Englishes (Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008, 3). Within this framework, the notion of immigrant English is particularly useful since it covers a range of socio-cultural and sociolinguistic elements such as the role of English, the influence of English dialects, the formality of language methodology and acquisition, the interference of the mother tongue (and possible of other dialects) of the migrants, but also the desire to either integrate in a new society or return to their homeland after a certain period (Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008, 9-10).

The study of variation in English has brought to light the dynamic realities of language and the role that speakers actually play in reshaping textual and stylistic features. Going beyond the vision of English as a monolithic and unitary entity, and embracing the vision of a language system that favours plurality rather than prescriptivism, hence the plural term Englishes, it is worth reflecting on the mobility of English in its global diffusion, a topic that recently gained scholarly attention (see for example Cimarosti 2014). In order to unearth the various cultural stratifications of the language, Pennycook (2012) examines a range of different types of material such as personal accounts, autobiographies, family diaries, and even photographs, which collectively bespeak colonial and postcolonial memories. In this light, he introduces the notion of ‘trace’ as a token of additional meanings inscribed in signs and objects, which are often obliterated for ideological purposes. However his cultural project shows a broader scope and intends to revive these elements: “When I talk of traces, of retracing history, therefore, I intend much more than finding objects in the past, of walking along pathways previously walked; rather, I am to invoke those absences that are part of the

present, past and future” (2012, 14). Traces are the heritage produced by the mobility of people and languages and, as such, they encapsulate values and meanings in ‘unexpected places’ by promoting the rejection of purism in favour of hybridity and dynamicity. Consequently their textual renderings may be found in fictional works by postcolonial authors, who engage with the process of re-inventing language, memory and identity as they influence and partake in the outcomes of the English Language Complex.

Place deixis, i.e. the geographical and implicitly cultural anchoring of voices and perspectives emerges as a salient component of Pennycook’s agenda, especially with regard to “how we relate affectively to particular places and how travel, movements and mobility are essential for an understanding not only of the contemporary world but also of how our conditions came to be” (2012, 17). These domains are essential paradigms in the writings of both Guo and Bulawayo as they question the sense of travelling, being, becoming from the periphery of the world to the metropolitan centres of power. Pennycook’s reflections also draw attention to the need of new ways to approach the current global scenario and to interpret the authenticity of language, and its traces, across boundaries and behind boundaries, from China to Britain, from Zimbabwe to America, in search of ‘imagined homelands’ and ‘imaginary communities’, to misquote some key notions of postcolonial and postmodern discourse.

Moving across borders and spaces, as happens in the case of migrants or diasporic writers, is part of those fluxes that through globalisation are reshaping the world in its economical, social and cultural dimensions, and from which translocalised and deterritorialised forms of language emerge. The semantic shade of flux, in fact, concerns not only a continuous movement but also endorses a sense of change, and this of course affects language too. With reference to the intertwining diversity of linguistic communication today (in particular as far as English is concerned), Blommaert (2010) speaks of two paradigms: sociolinguistics of distribution and sociolinguistics of mobility. Whilst the former belongs to a traditional view of the use of language in society, the latter indicates the potential of language as a resource that can be adapted to suit a variety of purposes. This approach thus sheds light on the capacity of moving subjects to redesign speech and discourse and express the dynamics of identity in motion. Incidentally, it might be argued that one of the most pervasive and rooted cognitive metaphors, i.e. those knowledge structures that are used to indicate broad conceptualisations of life and the world (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010), reads *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*, and therefore it produces a mental mapping of life and its various stages as legs or parts of a (long) journey. Consequently the idea of movement appears to be fundamental to human culture, in its double physical and mental dimension, when travelling subjects, namely people and identities, go through the diaspora experience, and transform cultures and languages.

Bearing in mind such premises and adopting Kachru and Smith’s (2008, 168) contention that “literary works in English are a valuable source of sociocultural knowledge not easily recoverable from grammars, dictionaries, and textbooks” in the following sections of the paper I will focus on how the manifold question of language and mobility is stylistically and textually rendered in two recent novels by anglophone writers, in which various cultural processes indicate the repositioning of subjects and identities. Although language in narrative texts of course is mainly grounded upon the use of constructed quality, many recent studies (e.g. Jeffries 2010; Stockwell 2002) have pointed out the proximity of literary and non-literary domains, which rather than being oppositional are in

reality coterminous and share many features, structures and meanings. Moreover, the choice of analysing the fictional work by Guo and Bulawayo is also justified by the interpretation of their novels as examples of ‘translational writing’, i.e. narrative texts that stem from the interplay or translation of different languages (Gilmour 2012; Moji 2015), as well as cultures and even individuals that metaphorically or pragmatically move from one position to another, from one context to another, engendering a pregnant movement of transnational and transcultural belonging. Translation as a cultural concept can in fact be akin to migration and it “may be seen as recreation and renewal” (Gilmour 2012, 211) as exemplified by the structural linguistic patterns of the two novels under discussion in this article.

3. Language and mobility in *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*

I will briefly introduce the novel by Xiaolu Guo¹, whose first-person homodiegetic narration belongs to a young Chinese girl that moves to London to learn English and begins a love affair with a nameless older English man. The novel is presented as a kind of personal diary written in a variety of registers and styles, including immigrant English and instances of code switching with Chinese, and is openly addressed to the narrator’s partner thanks to the use of direct personal pronouns as in the following example: “I not met you yet. You in the future” (Guo 2008, 3). The story chronicles the protagonist’s linguistic and cultural transformation, in a kind of socio-emotional development of identity that entails various levels (i.e. the encounter with the western world, the difficulties and the frustrations of the language barrier, but also the irruption of sentiments and the exploration of feelings), and in fact, according to Oboe (2013, 267), it regards “the formation of an idiosyncratic idiom, an in-between language which is a daring experiment in transcultural communication”. In other words, this text can function as an example of heteroglossic postcolonial discourse envisaging a city that “is a complex and ever-shifting contact zone: a crucible for bilanguaging, code-switching, linguistic creativity and cross-‘infection’; as well as for miscommunication, noncommunication, and various kinds of linguistic separatism and essentialism” (Gilmour 2012, 210). To a certain extent all these linguistic and cultural dimensions will engage Zhuang in her new migratory condition.

Before addressing the intertwined themes of language, identity and mobility, it is worth considering some textual and paratextual elements that the author employs: first of all the deft combination of styles and registers, which draws from the use of immigrant English, code-switching with Chinese, eye-dialect forms, as well as other semiotic and graphological resources, such as the use of various fonts, the non-uniform layout and the insertion of sketches and editor’s notes. A characteristic example can also be found in the opening epigraph, not only for the message that reads “Sorry of my english”, disclaiming responsibility for the lack of language proficiency, but also because of the typeset which reminds of real-life handwriting, thus suggesting a sense of authenticity in the text. The emerging result in this and many other strategies is of course an effect of marked

¹ Xiaolu Guo is a British-Chinese writer, essayist, screen-writer and film-maker. Her filmography includes some documentaries such as *Far and Near* (2003), *How is your Fish Today?* (2006), and *She, a Chinese* (2009), whereas her narrative production includes *20 Fragments of a Ravenous Youth* (2008), *UFO in Her Eyes* (2009) and *I am China* (2014). *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* is her first novel written in English (see also her website: <http://www.guoxiaolu.com/index.htm> as well as Zhen 2008).

defamiliarisation, which somehow challenges the reader to decode information and elaborate on meanings and implications. Moreover, the narrative arrangement of the text as a fictionalised diary allows each chapter to start with an English word, followed by a denotational definition, that the protagonist encounters in her life and that she tries to understand, acquire and discuss. These lexical terms refer to a variety of semantic contexts and meanings, including words such as “prologue”, “beginner”, “free world”, “romance”, “nonsense”, “pathology”, and symbolically function as clues in the building of the plot, or traces in Pennycook’s critical vocabulary.

The issue of identity is central in the novel and even touches on onomastic references, since the narrator’s real name, Zhuang Xiao Qiao, appears to be too difficult to be used by people in London and thus she decides to shorten it into the letter Z, a drastic clipped form that may actually have negative connotations, being the last letter of the alphabet: “I say name start from Z, ‘But please no worry to remember,’ I say, ‘my name too long pronounce.’” (Guo 2008, 48). To a certain extent this process of name reshaping also indicates a violation of identity, or at least a levelling and marginalisation of the subject, who is even not allowed to have a full name, a fundamental element for the sense of personhood. In her exploration of language, culture and feelings, through the mechanisms of migration and confrontation, Z offers a reflection on the changes, permutations and aspirations of identity, which are often communicated in the verbal medium, thus investigating the boundaries, clashes and stratifications of languages: “Every night, when I write diary, I feeling troubled. Am I writing in Chinese or in English? I trying express me, but confusing – I see other little me try expressing me in other language” (Guo 2008, 38). In fact, in recording her diary, initially by means of non-standard, almost ‘broken’ English, the girl on the one hand acknowledges the puzzling and shocking experience of “re-writing” one’s identity in another code, thus manipulating the very sense of the self and its constraints, and on the other endorses the polyphonic idea of the correlation between language and identity. From this perspective, English in particular, in the light of its colonial, postcolonial and globalised discourses, disrupts the monolithic unity of language as a fixed system and favours the playful dimension of language in use, especially in unexpected places and sites, to borrow Pennycook’s vision.

This is also attested by the various parts actually written in Chinese and accompanied by the fictional editor’s translation, a metatextual strategy that in puzzling the reader questions the prototypical compositional arrangement of a novel by pointing out the proximity between fiction and real life. Writing therefore becomes a form of identity expression for the protagonist, who experiments forms of transnational communication and hybridity, but it might also be argued that the innovative style elaborated by the author concerns the hybrid genre of the novel, which for Oboe (2013, 269) traverses canonical genres and emerges as a form of “dialogical monologue”, because the book is presented as a diary, thus a personal, intimate account of one’s life, but in a paradoxical sense it becomes a public testimony because it is textualised, i.e. made into a format which is naturally meant to be read by someone. Moreover, it is also openly addressed to Z’s lover, therefore triggering a further comparison between the narrator and her English partner, or in cultural terms between the self and the other, a dialogue that necessarily implies a linguistic as well as cultural and emotional negotiation.

The discourse pivoting around mobility cannot ignore the meaning of the body because, as previously suggested, movements and migrations concern primarily a scattering of human beings, of

people that for different reasons move from one context to another and have to go through displacement and relocation. Such aspect is salient as it reveals the significance of embodied culture, the physical and cognitive experience of migrants and their appropriation and abrogation of language in complex and challenging ways. The verbal presentation and textual construction of the body also pertains to postcolonial criticism inasmuch as it evokes the ‘material’, i.e. flesh and body dimension of the individual from the periphery of the formal colony that strives to work out a form of non-verbal, emotional communication. Such an attempt also stands an indexical ability to convey meanings working in balance with the longing and exasperation of migrants, who, as second-language learners, are reduced to liminal positions, similarly to children who struggle to acquire a basic language:

I open my notebook again, looking at my everyday’s study, my everyday’s effort. I see myself trying hard to put more words and sentences into blank pages. I try to learn more vocabularies to be able to communicate. I try to put the whole dictionary in my brain. But in this remote countryside, in this nobody’s wonderland, what’s the point of this? It doesn’t matter if one speaks Chinese or English here; it doesn't matter if one is mute or deaf. Language is not important anymore. Only the simple physical existence matters in the nature. (Guo 2008, 283)

The quotation thus frames the vision of the protagonist for whom communication takes different forms and connects identities: in this light, by means of migrations and movements, it is possible to establish relations and go beyond the constraints of language competence by creating new forms of communication, not only such as uncertain varieties of English but also other types of contacts in a broader, holistic attempt to understand life and people.

The theme of mobility, in its various meanings, is often interpreted in terms of stantiality, so with reference to the idea of home, not only as a geographical location but also in the emotional perception. Z often compares her native China with the UK, but when she travels across Europe on her own, her action of wondering becomes a tool for further reflection on identity construction as well as a means to conceptualise the practice of reshaping life in novel ways: “I just want to go back to London, to my lover. Home is everything. Home is not sex but also about it. Home is not a delicious meal but also about it. Home is not a lighted bedroom but is also about it. Home is not a hot bath but it is also about it.” (Guo 2008, 212). From a lexical point of view the quotation appears to be rather simple, but in reality, to capture the various experiences rising out of the migratory process, the author employs narrative devices such as parallelism (home is) followed by adversative adverbs (but) that provide new perspectives, also alluding to material and/or corporeal aspects.

If mobility can be seen as paradigm-shifting and affecting people, cultures and languages, it is also important to consider another parameter, namely the speed of motion. In the globalised, twenty-first century, speed is a governing criterion in all contexts, but when Z returns to her country and thus ends her complex and sometimes contradictory love affair with the English anonymous lover for some time she still has an epistolary relation with the man, which may represent a form of ‘slow language’ (Oboe 2013, 278), almost in antithesis to contemporary media and computed-mediated communication: “This is the last letter i received from you. The last. [...] It is the best gift you ever gave me” (Guo 2008, 354). The unusual, nearly bizarre intention of penning down letters also carries a

symbolic counter-value in relation to the procedures of commodification of modern life and society as the gift disrupts economic dependencies and endorses free spontaneity.

4. Language and mobility in *We Need New Names*

The second literary text I intend to mine in this article to gain linguistic and narrative examples of the intertwined issues of language, mobility and identity is authored by Zimbabwean writer NoViolet Bulawayo (pen name of Elizabeth Zandile Tshele)². Originally published in 2013, the novel is a coming-of-age story revolving around a young girl called Darling, initially set in a small bush town in an unnamed country in southern Africa (provokingly renamed Budapest by the local children and clearly evoking Zimbabwe) and then in a metropolis in the USA (the wealthy urban context of Detroit, labelled as “Destroyedmichygen”). In cultural terms, naming is a powerful, meaning-making tool, especially in postcolonial discourse, since giving a name to a person, a place or an object implies establishing specific power relations (Ashcroft 2009), but it can also be employed as a textual practice to construct and validate a particular ideology through the mechanics of language (Jeffries 2010). In this novel, naming in reference to both people and places constitutes an important rhetorical resource for the author, who skilfully approaches and sensitively remoulds the topic of migration and cultural displacement. Moreover, some extra-textual onomastic items are worth noticing: the nom de plume NoViolet deliberately misleads and baffles the anglophone reader by virtue of its prefix, which is commonly interpreted as a negative element (no), but in reality the prefix derives from the author’s mother tongue (Ndebele) and conjures up positive connotations in memory of her deceased mother, Violet, as it means ‘with Violet’ rather than ‘without Violet’ (Moji 2015, 183). In this creative manner, English is subtly recoded and subjected to a process of Africanisation that translates and endorses a localised reality by manipulating semantic references.

Strategically the writer attributes the focalisation of the text to a ten-year-old child in her attempt to comprehend the weight of social and cultural frictions, as well as their inequalities. For a child, the interrelation between language and mobility is too large a concept to handle and therefore it is imaginatively constructed as a game, through which names are given to places and fancifully appropriated and recreated. Therefore, the country-game allegorically seems to draw from the idiomatic expression ‘to go places’, which means to become very successful, in order to evoke global scenarios that align with the modern structures of power in the world. A sense of bitter irony, however, marks the characterisation of those ‘peripheral’ countries that are presented as the opposite of the current ideas of welfare and wellbeing:

To play country-game you need two things: a big outer one, then inside it, a little one, where the caller stands. You divide the outer ring depending on how many people are playing and cut it up in nice pieces like this. Each person then picks a piece and writes the name of the country on there, which is why it’s called country-game. But first we have to fight over the names because everybody wants to be certain countries, like everybody wants to be USA and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and

²NoVioletBulawayo is an anglophone writer from Zimbabwe, educated both in Africa and in the USA. *We Need New Names* is her debut novel and she has also published some short stories (see also her website: <http://novioletbulawayo.com/>).

Greece and them. These are the country-countries. If you lose the fight, then you just have to settle for the countries like Dubai and South Africa and Botswana and Tanzania and them. They are not country-countries, but at least life better there than here. Nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in – who wants to be a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart? (Bulawayo 2014, 49)

The metaphor of the country-game brings to the fore the contemporary configuration of the relations between the different parts of the world, relegating most African and Asian countries to a marginal sector, which is often denied the possibility of mobility and progress. Against the predominance of Western countries, and in particular the Anglo-American axis, the ‘other’ countries are crystallised in their perennial crisis and hypocritically supported by aid agencies.

When Darling finally emigrates to America to illegally settle in the Midwest, all her life is radically transformed, but the dream of and hope for a better life have to come to terms with strong intolerance and hostility, thus impinging on the construction of subjectivity: “The other kids teased me about my name, my accent, my hair, the way I talked about or said things, the way I dressed, the way I laughed. [...] in the end I just felt wrong in my skin, in my body, in my clothes, in my language, in my head, everything” (Bulawayo 2014, 165). All components of identity are here under attack: not only the physical aspect, the body features and the clothes one wears, but even the innermost sides such as language, thought and perception are rejected, annihilated and humiliated. The girl therefore has to face a painful identity crisis induced by the refusal orchestrated by the new surrounding community in which she now lives, but she will manage to respond to such harmful load and react keenly by mastering the English language and achieving educational goals, thus channelling the force that reverberates in dynamic phenomena such as migration and mobility in positive and creative ways. The many tribulations that Darling has to deal with reflect the negotiating mechanisms of subjectivity when eradicated from home and are rendered in a linguistic and narrative style that fractures social schemata. For Moji (2015, 182) for example “semantic and cognitive dissonance are read as textual markers of displaced sites of meaning and therefore symbolic of the psychic and social dislocation experienced by migrant subjects”, and the novel in fact recasts the child’s perception in terms of mobility between languages, cultures, contexts against the backdrop of globalisation.

5. Concluding remarks

In this article I have discussed the notions of English language, mobility and identity by turning a lens on how these issues resonate in narrative renditions from an anglophone context. The old Kachruvian taxonomy of outer circle and expanding circle turns out to be not applicable to writers such as Guo and Bulawayo, who innovatively appropriate, abrogate and reinvent languages, styles and themes by manoeuvring viewpoints, challenging ideologies and expressing new voices. One of the main principles on which this article is based regards the concept of mobility, in its broad, multiple and dynamic extensions, which according to Blommaert (2010, 22) “is the rule, but that does not preclude locality from being a powerful frame for the organization of meanings. Locality and mobility co-exist, and whenever we observe patterns of mobility we have to examine the local environment in which they occur”. Similarly to the perspective of language as local practice put

forward by Pennycook (2010), this vision recognises not only the effects of migration and diaspora, and their cultural, social and linguistic consequences, but also the key function of local contexts as a cultural laboratory, in which social practices are constantly negotiated and adapted. The experience of both Z and Darling in fact is highly influenced by the milieus in which they live: moving into London, adapting to the alien English world, surviving the dire conditions of Zimbabwe, migrating to the USA are all actions that cumulatively construct layers of meaning and shape forms of identity.

My argument has drawn extensively on Pennycook's language in unexpected places, namely how language material represents and is represented by a plurality of domains, genres and discourses. It is a significant reconfiguration of perspective because it highlights the dialogic relationship between subjects and their sense of expected/unexpected in places, as Pennycook (2012, 17) affirms that "how reflection on why languages, events, moments may be unexpected sheds light on the normative vision of the expected". The way in which the protagonists of the two novels use the English language does not conform to expected standards of proficiency and represents a minimal or non-standard form of English, or rather a type of immigrant English, but nonetheless it subtly delves into present-day socio-cultural and socio-political scenario and at the same time foregrounds alternative viewpoints and modalities, or in other words the 'unexpected'.

In closing, I argue that approaching the interconnected issues of language (spread and power), mobility and identity represents an important arena for a better understanding of the contemporary world and its many sociocultural and socio-political *equilibria*. However, it is also important to reflect on and refresh methodological tools and classificatory labels and concepts in order to grasp an ever-changing and ever-growing reality: paraphrasing the title of Bulawayo, it might be argued that today there is a need for new approaches that interpret the sense of mobility in relation to the value of locality and local contexts, thus acknowledging a network of cultural forces. This orientation is in line with Blommaert, who holds that "part of the shift we need to make is also a shift away from a metropolitan perspective on globalization, stressing the uniformity of such processes, towards a perspective that does justice to 'vernacular globalization', to the myriad ways in which global processes enter local conditions and circumstances and become a localized reality" (2010, 197). In constructing their narrative works, Guo and Bulawayo illustrate the poetics of mobility and identity as they refresh, reinvent and galvanise language in its systems, styles and manifestations, thus endorsing the potentiality of immigrant English.

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Immigrants in ELT Books

Nenad Tomović

Abstract (English)

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief overview of how immigrants are depicted in modern ELT books and how frequently they appear in them. In order to address this issue we analyzed a random sample of most frequently used ELT books and briefly described immigrant-related content. Immigrants do appear in all books we analyzed, although there are certain differences in how frequently they appear and in the ways in which they are described. The only common feature of these books is that they offer almost identical pictures of modern society and multiculturalism.

Abstract (Italiano)

L'articolo intende analizzare le modalità di rappresentazione della figura del migrante nei libri per le didattiche dell'inglese. A livello metodologico, l'analisi si riferisce a un campione di testi per l'insegnamento dell'inglese più utilizzati e ai temi relativi a questa figura. In tutti i testi presi in esame, emerge la figura del migrante, sebbene vi siano differenze nella frequenza con cui viene presentata e nei modi in cui viene descritta. L'unica caratteristica comune di questi testi è che tutti raffigurano, in maniera quasi identica, la società moderna e il fenomeno del multiculturalismo.

Introduction

Virtually all modern societies are ethnically diverse, and this diversity is growing due to immigration. Although people have always been forced to move, this tendency became more prominent in the 20th century, while in this century the number of immigrants is increasing more than ever. Regardless of whether a particular society is a single community which recognizes cultural diversity or consists of several communities, it is certain that people who come from other countries, i.e. immigrants, play an important role in developed countries, particularly in those where English is spoken as the first language.

Target culture in ELT books

Most ELT books, regardless of whether they are published in English or non-English-speaking countries, contain elements of the target cultures. These target cultures are most often British or American, and they have already proven to be flexible and prone to incorporating other cultures. According to Samovar et al. (2010, 39), cultures “often adopt those outside elements that are comparable with their existing values and beliefs, or that can be modified without causing much disruption.” UK, USA and other English-speaking countries are home to millions of immigrants, and their cultural impact is clearly visible in their societies. Since ELT books usually describe various characters in typical situations, it is no longer acceptable to portray only characters based on continental European stereotypes of a typical white American or British character, whose name is

John or Tom, who enjoys playing baseball or drinking his five o'clock tea, but on common people who live in these countries, regardless of their origin. Immigrants are more or less well-integrated into English-speaking societies, and as Kramersch hypothesizes, Americans do not have the category of outsiders, or as she put it in German, *Ausländer*, “because they expect anyone who lives in this country to ‘belong’ here, to be an insider, irrespective of whether they are actually citizens” (Kramersch 2003, 9). This distinction is important, since most of the US population are immigrants by origin, while the British population consists of immigrants, people whose ancestors were immigrants and are British-born and those who are native inhabitants. Thus, we decided to focus on British ELT books, because they are dominant in Europe and are very popular among teachers and students alike and because the category of outsiders is more easily distinguishable in them.

Regardless of many problems that immigrants face, it is certain that the target cultures are aware of them and have become more diverse and heterogeneous due to their cultural impact. A realistic representation is necessary for the books to successfully convey the multicultural contexts of the target societies. The books we used for the purpose of this paper fulfill this condition.

Who are immigrants?

Who are immigrants? According to Collins English Dictionary, an immigrant is “a person who comes to a country in order to settle there”, although this definition can be found in almost every major dictionary of English (Oxford, Webster, etc.) with no significant differences. However, in order to further explain who immigrants are, it is necessary to use a related concept – the Other. According to Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2004, 23), the Other refers “to any group of people perceived as different – perhaps in terms of so-called ethnicity, religion, political alignment, class or caste, or gender”. If we adhere to this definition, we can deduce that an immigrant is necessarily the Other, but it is not vice versa, since the Other can be a native born of the same ethnicity, religion, race etc., but whose political stance or sexual orientation can be perceived as different by the group he/she belongs to.

However, in many cases it is difficult to identify immigrant characters, because it is not always stated whether a character who appears in the text is simply a foreigner who wants to learn English, who is temporarily in a foreign country (e.g. an expat, tourist, etc.), or someone whose parents or grandparents were immigrants, but he/she is not an immigrant. All these characters bring the textbook closer to the foreign student and/or immigrant who uses it, while immigrant characters demonstrate that the society in question is multicultural and provide examples of how different people can live and function together. For the purpose of this paper, we will classify immigrant characters into three categories: *explicit immigrants*, whose status is clearly stated, *presumed immigrants*, whose status can be assumed, and *immigrants by origin*, whose ancestors were immigrants, but the characters themselves are native born and correspond to the term *second-generation immigrants*.

Immigrants in ELT books – examples

Although this paper is focused on contemporary ELT books which are used all over the world and in English-speaking countries, the reader should bear in mind that many ELT textbooks, or to be more precise, their “ancestors”, were actually written for immigrants. According to Howatt and

Widdowson (2004, 12) “the first textbooks designed solely to teach English as a foreign language do not appear until the late sixteenth century after the arrival of large numbers of French Huguenot refugees”. The most important part of this statement is that these books were designed for foreigners who left their country as refugees, but many of them certainly continued to live in England as immigrants. The authors do not provide much information on whether these materials directly mentioned French refugees and the problems they faced, but it is certain that they were what contemporary marketing experts call “target buyers”. However, the authors inform us that these materials usually comprised texts in two languages, useful everyday phrases, some grammar and vocabulary.

On the other hand, many modern ELT books are written for everyone, i.e. for people who want to learn English, regardless of whether they want to stay in their country or want to live in an English-speaking one. In short, contemporary ELT books are written to cater to as many people as possible and do not focus on immigrants as a group, although they provide some material that helps them integrate into the new culture.

In order to provide a general overview of how immigrants are represented in ELT books, we decided to analyze a random sample of frequently used ELT books. The books we analyzed are the following:

- Comyns Carr, J. and J. Parsons. 2007. *Success Upper-Intermediate*. Pearson Longman.
- Goldstein, B., G. Holley and R. Metcalf. 2008. *Framework*, Level 5. Richmond Publishing.
- Harmer, J. 2011. *Just Right*, Intermediate, Marshall Cavendish.
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- Norris, R. 2008. *Ready for FCE*, Macmillan.
- Puchta, H. et. al. 2005. *English in Mind* 3. Cambridge University Press.
- Soars, J. and L. Soars. 2012. *New Headway*, Pre-Intermediate. Oxford University Press.
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After analyzing these books, it turned out that every one of them featured immigrants in one way or another in at least one unit. However, immigrants are seldom in the focus of the lesson, although they do appear in reading, listening, vocabulary or grammar activities or in photographs. There is an exception in *Just Right*, where there is a text about Vedran Smailović, a cellist from Bosnia, who left his war-ravaged country and is now living in Manchester. It is stated that he worked with Yo-Yo Ma, a French-born American cellist of Chinese descent; although Mr. Smailović's story makes it clear that he is an immigrant, whereas Yo-Yo Ma is simply described as a successful musician, and his immigrant background is not elaborated upon as is Mr. Smailović's.

Ready for FCE contains a reading comprehension activity with a not very typical story about a British family who lives in France and raises their multilingual children in Brittany. Technically

speaking, this family could be classified as emigrants from the British perspective, although they are immigrants in France.

New Headway Pre-Intermediate Fourth edition features immigrants in several lessons and activities. To begin with, there is a Ukrainian lady living in Ireland who remembers the Chernobyl disaster. In Unit 6 there is a lesson about multiculturalism in London which describes how different people live and work together in the same street and is followed by interviews with several immigrants, i.e. a Turkish florist, a Chinese doctor, a Colombian restaurant-owner and an Indian dentist born in Kenya. The next unit contains a text about a woman from Germany who moved to the UK when she was a child and became a famous archaeologist. Apart from these characters, whose status is unquestionable, there are also some minor characters whose names, origin and/or ethnicity are explicitly stated, but we do not know whether they are just international characters or immigrants.

Close Up C1 does not contain texts about immigrants or with immigrant characters. However, some immigrants can be recognized from the photos, although they can be described as presumed immigrants, or immigrants by origin, and there is a listening activity in which explicit immigrants are mentioned. This listening activity is included as extra material, which means that it is not always likely they will be mentioned during the course.

Headway Intermediate, Fourth Edition, explicitly mentions immigrants in a listening activity (a Spanish mother, Bolivian father and their bilingual children who live in England), and they appear in just one photograph.

Framework, Level 5, contains a text about two immigrant girls who live in France and are trying to reconcile their religious beliefs with the new law which bans wearing religious symbols in public schools. In this case, the immigrants do not live in an English-speaking country, although they live in a Western country.

New Framework Upper-intermediate 4 provides an activity focusing on a poor refugee from Afghanistan, who had to cross several countries to find a safe environment. The entire activity is focused on the plight of refugees and on what happens to them until they are granted asylum. Of course, in this case, the character has two statuses – first, he is a refugee, and later he becomes an immigrant. The same book contains other immigrant characters in a speaking/listening activity. Their names, physical appearance and the suggested discussion about multiculturalism are very likely to address various aspects of Western democratic values.

Success Upper-Intermediate also features immigrants. However, in this case, there are several activities that focus on Westerners immigrating to other countries in the past and on family histories of people who are of immigrant origin (Unit 1). However, this section is focused on Europeans who left their countries and on how other continents were populated by Europeans.

English in Mind 3 provides a variety of texts and activities which focus on immigrants and multiculturalism. Unit 1 provides a very short listening activity which mentions various foreigners who live in the UK, which seems to be an indirect warm-up for a text about cultural influences, in which it is stated that “Britain has a long history of influence from other cultures”, starting with Romans 2000 years ago, and then moving on to modern immigrants and providing basic information about artists of immigrant descent. The next unit contains a text about two deaf children of Latin American descent who live in California, while one of them is described as an explicit immigrant, who

had moved to the US with his parents. There is also a short grammar exercise based on a text about a British teacher who works abroad. There are also two short similar exercises in other units that feature immigrants, i.e. a vocabulary activity about a Spanish girl living in London (unit 16), and a listening activity followed by a short text about the singer and songwriter Dido (same unit). Furthermore, the same unit contains a text about happiness based on an interview with a famous American psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who is an example of a successful immigrant. His immigrant origin is more or less obvious from the text, since he mentions his own experience as a child during World War 2. Although he does not mention his country of origin, as he is living in the U.S, the reader with some background knowledge in history can easily conclude that he spent his childhood in Europe. His professional biography, which is not available in the book, proves that this is correct. Finally, *English in Mind 3* features a recurrent character from Hong Kong, who appears as a character in several texts and is depicted as someone who has British friends and seems to be fully integrated.

Although designed for elementary students, *English File* also has a number of activities that involve immigrants. However, their status is not always clear from the context, since some activities involve people from other countries without stating whether they still live there or not, while some activities briefly mention world-famous immigrants, for example Yehudi Menuhin, without providing further information about their immigrant status.

Discussion

After analyzing these books, it is possible to draw some general conclusions about them, while taking into account the particularities that each book offers. First of all, what all these books have in common is multiculturalism, which is part of English-speaking societies and is addressed by every author, both directly and indirectly. As an important part of Western societies, multiculturalism is today nearly always present in descriptions of these societies in ELT books and is often utilized, both explicitly, i.e. by including texts which inform the reader about its values, or implicitly, which means that it can be perceived from the values incorporated in the text, photographs, activities and other types of content. A realistic representation of society is important, both because of its didactic value and because of the target group, which includes foreigners, some of whom are immigrants.

Concerning the representation of immigrants, it can be concluded that every book we analyzed deals with immigrants in one way or another, although immigrant characters usually play minor roles, with the exception of *English in Mind 3*, in which the immigrant character appears in several texts and is represented together with British-born characters.

Close Up C1 and *Headway Intermediate* Fourth edition seems to have the least immigrant-related content, and *Success Upper-Intermediate* is focused on Westerners living abroad, while immigrants who live in an English-speaking country are under-represented.

There are two kinds of setting in which immigrants live: they can be foreigners who came to live in an English-speaking country or nationals of an English-speaking country living abroad. On the one hand, foreigners who live in an English-speaking country are often described as people who had to escape a war-ravaged or poverty-stricken country or those who simply wanted to have a better life and decided to leave their home-countries seeking a better future somewhere else. On the other

hand, characters from English-speaking countries are usually professionals, but the reasons why they left their country are either vague or are based on their decision to experience something new and see other countries. We might say that there is some bias here, although we cannot deny that there are many people in English-speaking countries who would have been able to stay at home and to find decent jobs.

Stereotypes are usually avoided, although some emerge inconspicuously (e.g. a refugee from Afghanistan in *Framework 5* or a Ukrainian lady associated with the Chernobyl disaster described in *New Headway Pre-Intermediate*). But we cannot say that they are negative or that they are not based on what really happened to many people from the group in question. In fact, we can conclude that some of them simply have stock roles. Furthermore, immigrant characters do not have negative roles, but positive (e.g. in *English in Mind 3*) or neutral ones, which means they are simply described as people doing their jobs without any further data about their personalities. We can also add that immigrant characters often act as bridges between nations and cultures and their attitude toward their new country is always positive.

Concerning the representation of society in which immigrants live, we can describe this as a reflection of an almost ideal society. To be more precise, immigrant characters in these texts do not face the many problems they can actually encounter in real-life situations, such as rejection by the members of the local community or even discrimination. Many Western countries do their best to maintain the functionality of their societies and to promote multiculturalism, and authors of ELT books seem to be following that practice. Most of them tend to see the world through rose-colored glasses and simply avoid mentioning problems immigrants might face. In fact, this statement is very similar to some critiques of multiculturalism, and particularly to an argument that “multiculturalism refuses to acknowledge social problems connected with immigrants” (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010, 9).

Finally, there is a question which is very difficult to answer – are immigrants sufficiently represented in modern ELT books? It is our opinion that they deserve more space in some of the books we analyzed for a number of reasons. First of all, many immigrants are the primary users of these books, since English is for them a second or a foreign language and they might find it easier to identify themselves with the characters and/or content of the books. Other users of ELT books, who are learning a foreign language, might also find it useful to see how the target culture works, what it involves and how multiculturalism is incorporated in the whole picture of a particular society.

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Secondo momento

Letterature

Stage Two

Literatures

Some Thoughts on the Posthuman Condition in the ‘Ur-village’

Reading the Hindi Novel *Ādigrām upākhyān* by Kuṇāl Siṃh

Alessandra Consolaro

Abstract (English)

This article stems from the workshop *Pensieri nomadi, corpi in movimento. Exploring InFluxes and Cultures in Motion*, that took place in Torino on 16th October 2014 with the aim to activate interdisciplinary lines of research, that can be useful in investigating and examining the globalized world we live in, as well as create a bridge between research in the academic field and activism in the territory. The novel *Ādigrām upākhyān* (*The chronicles of Ādigram*) by Hindi writer Kuṇāl Siṃh has been food for thought for this paper, as it presents some features that can be analyzed as nomadic thinking and that deal with the posthuman condition in the context of the clash between State Government and local population in West Bengal. The aim of the paper is an illustration of some possible links between the discourses of posthumanism and postcolonialism in the literary context. I will discuss issues of knowledge, democracy, and history/storytelling addressed in the novel, drawing on VC Seshadri, Shiv Visvanathan, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti.

Abstract (Italiano)

Questo articolo nasce dal workshop *Pensieri nomadi, corpi in movimento. Exploring InFluxes and Cultures in Motion*, svoltosi a Torino il 16 ottobre 2014 con l'obiettivo di stimolare linee di ricerca interdisciplinare utili per una ricerca e un'analisi del mondo globalizzato in cui viviamo, e di creare un ponte tra la ricerca accademica e l'attivismo sul territorio. Il romanzo *Ādigrām upākhyān* (*Le cronache di Ādigram*) dello scrittore hindi Kuṇāl Siṃh ha dato lo spunto per le riflessioni di questo articolo, poiché presenta alcune caratteristiche che si possono analizzare come pensiero nomade e che trattano della condizione postumana nel contesto dello scontro fra governo statale e popolazione locale in Bengala Occidentale (India). Lo scopo dell'articolo è presentare alcune possibili congruenze tra il discorso postumanista e quello postcoloniale nel contesto letterario. Si discuteranno problemi di epistemologia, democrazia e narrazione di storia/e che affiorano dal romanzo, facendo riferimento a VC Seshadri, Shiv Visvanathan, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Donna Haraway e Rosi Braidotti.

1. *Ādigrām Upākhyān*

Kuṇāl Siṃh's short story *Ādigrām Upākhyān* (*The Chronicles of Ādigram*) was awarded by Bhārtīya Jñānpīṭh in 2009;³ in 2010 he published a novel with the same title, which was awarded the prize for young writers by the Sāhitya Akadēmī, anointing Kuṇāl Siṃh as a Hindi writer of the new generation recognized by the Hindi establishment. *Ādigram* is the name of a real village located in Dakshin

³ Born in Calcutta on February 22, 1980, Kuṇāl Siṃh hails from Kolkata and lives in Delhi, where he got his M.Phil. in Hindi from the Jawaharlal Nehru University. He started publishing poems at a very young age, and has worked as editor for some important literary journals such *Vāgarth*. His short story *Sanātan Bābu kā Dāmpatya* (*Sanātan Bābu's Happy Married Life*) was awarded by Bhārtīya Jñānpīṭh and Kathā. In 2011, he was nominated best young Hindi writer by Bhārtīya Bhāṣā Paṛiṣad, New Delhi. His work has been translated into many Indian languages as well as into English and German. He is interested in cinema and is also a translator.

Dinajpur district in West Bengal, India, but in the novel it functions as the prototypical village, it is the ‘Ur-village’ – *ādi* (primal, original) + *grām* (village). This is how I am going to read its chronicle, as a story of the postcolonial subaltern subject in a posthuman perspective. I am not much interested in the literary quality of the text, somewhat flawed by too many passages that seem mere *exercices de style*; my focus is on the possibility of taking the novel as a starting point to trace possible links between the discourses of posthumanism and postcolonialism in the literary context. *Ādigram* can be read as the symbol of what is globally happening wherever farmers’ lands are expropriated, and local population are displaced in the name of progress and development.

Ādigrām Upākhyān is a political novel, clearly written in connection to the case of Nandigram, 2007 (Sarkar and Chowdhury 2009). It has no linear story, but to summarize the main storyline, it tells how the Government of West Bengal –the elected Communist Party longest in office in the world– authorizes the expropriation of land to be allocated to a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), with a development plan including the arrival of multinationals. The local population, which has a history of participation in activities of the Maoist armed struggle, opposes the plan and organizes forms of resistance. The repression is violent and brutal, but it will fail to quell the revolt.

Ādigrām Upākhyān depicts the growth of the anti-land acquisition movement in a remote village in West Bengal. The mainstream historiography has argued that land acquisition policies and the subsequent resistance at Nandigram were an effect of neoliberal policies. Actually, the process of economic liberalization that began in the 1990s in India is linked to an accentuation of criminalization of politics, corruption, bureaucratization, and collapse of ideology. The crisis of the Bengali leftist parties becomes an example of the process through which politics has emptied out of any ideal meaning and has ended out being the *longa manus* of the major powers. The publicly projected image of the village projects it as a microcosmic peasant utopia, or as a unified ‘village community’. Nevertheless, through the different stories that are narrated in the novel it clearly appears that anti-land acquisition movements are inherently polysemic phenomena that are home to a multitude of aspirations, ambitions and desires. Locally embedded social cleavages and identities are negotiated during the course of the anti-land acquisition movement. In fact, local interests, aspirations and desires are sharply divided along multiple social fault lines such as class, politics, and gender, within the movement itself: between poor, untouchable landless agricultural laborers and intermediate caste land owners/supervisors; between party political ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’; between patrons and clients; and between men and women (Nielsen 2010; Nielsen and Waldrop 2014, 203-218).

Kuṇāl Siṃh takes inspiration from great storytelling lover and heir of the great Indian narrative tradition Phanishvarnath Renu’s model of “choral novel” (Hansen 1981), composing a text where not only there is no linear story, but there is also no protagonist. The story is organized in chapters/sections, each having two titles, a stratagem that emphasizes a multiplicity of voices. Such a complexity is also exacerbated by numerous digressions. The novel, therefore, is not realist in style, but becomes a mosaic of stories and viewpoints, with a fragmentation of focalization points. The characters are farmers, small traders, thieves, children, men and women, and each of them becomes the starting point of a story through which new aspects of the described reality are revealed.

For example, the first character the reader is introduced to is Baghā, the old village thief who steals only at night and lives in the ruins of the *zamīndār*’s palace. His disciple and adoptive son,

Dakkhinā, becomes instead representative of the most modern forms of crime, and he will eventually join the special police forces – so that he can steal in broad daylight! Gulāb, Dakkhinā's partner/wife, is an illegal migrant from Bangladesh. She does not accept Dakkhinā's choice and will eventually leave him to join the Mātāṅginī Hāzrā Vāhinī, a group of female fighters opposing the police violence.

Another key figure is Harādhan. He is one of the few educated people in the region not only because he can read and write, but because he possesses three books. He is not married, as it is rumored that he is the son of a ghost. His murder by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI] area secretary will trigger violence in the region. The other local intellectual is Harādhan's friend Photographer, who publishes the local newspaper, *The third eye*. He suffers from night blindness but tries to keep it hidden; he also does not believe to his eyes and must perform compulsive rituals, ever coming back to check things.

Among the characters who are actively engaged in politics stands out Rāsbihārī Ghoṣ, the district deputy, a functionary of the CPI, the ruling party. Opposed to him is Raghunāth, who is engaged in politics in the form of armed struggle. People say that he got his training in Jharkhand, but subsequently quit the armed groups and got connected to an Adivasi tribe, becoming the community headman. When he visits the village once a year, he becomes the focus of attraction for all young people.

The village is a meeting place where things and ideas are exchanged: Fāṭakeṣṭo, who “knows everything about Mao Zedong, Saddam Hussein, George Bush, America and Vietnam,” runs a tea kiosk near the highway, which is the place where people get together, discuss, comment, talk. Exchanges also occur between the different communities and through moving people: for example, Buddhadev, who loves music and poetry, marries a Santali woman, and subsequently emigrates to Kolkata, where he gets a job. When Ādigram is placed under siege, though, he and other workers hailing from Ādigram are laid off: they will get back the job only if they can present a certificate stating that they are not terrorists.

Children have a pivotal role in Ādigram's life. They act as a group but have complex individual stories that are told in digressions and come back over and over in the narration. For example, Belā is the invisible girl, being the daughter of parents who desired a male; Ḍhoḍhāī ran away from home because he is addicted to smoking bidis, and lives on trees; Saddām Husain started drinking when he was nine in order to get over the mourning of his mother.

Last, but not least, there are the creatures of the forest, liminal beings who are discriminated by the village society, but with whom they nevertheless maintain is a constant relation: the Santali community, the Kinnar group, and wild animals.

Ādigram Upākhyān tells many stories, but one common feature on which I want to focus is the notion that the villagers' knowledge is different from the official one: in the eyes of the State, the corporation, the police, the media, whatever villagers say or think is not valid, not reliable, as they are backward people and cannot understand what is really important. The clash between Ādigram's population and the supporters of 'newness' is very much the clash of different ways of knowing the world. In the next sections I will discuss some epistemic issues connected to posthuman subalterns, and in the final section I will come back to the novel introducing an example of subaltern knowledge in a posthuman context.

2. Nomadic thinking and the posthuman condition

Nomadic thinking is the invention of ever new concepts and ideas. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) define it as the process of getting out of a 'territory' whose warp and woof represent identity and identification processed. Nomadic is not 'leaving', but rather 'not territorialize', it means to re-territorialize on the deterritorialized. The nomadic intellect does not migrate: it is a perpetual getting out without knowing where to go, within the vortex of a flat space-time. It is the experience of the in between, where rhizomatic knowledge can be found. It is the exteriority with respect to the semiotic apparatuses of the state –nation, empire– “a power (*puissance*) against sovereignty, a machine against the apparatus” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 352). The nomadic subject, according to the anti-psychoanalytic teaching by Deleuze and Guattari, does not adhere to herself, but it is a perpetual return of paradoxes, a structural failure of adherence to rules, roles, model imposed by the dominant majority.

Nomadic subjectivity is post-identitarian and non-linear (Braidotti 1994). The nomadic subject is never based on the individual but it is always relational, it is embodied and situated and is able to think any difference starting from sexual difference. The nomadic subject is in a constantly reprocessing relation to her origins: this is one of the reasons why nomadic persons are excellent narrators and storytellers. In Braidotti's formulation (2005), nomadic thinking abandons classical dichotomies in favour of a plural thinking towards future. The nomadic subject is not inside or outside, but inhabits a dynamic process 'in becoming' within a complex relational system. Nomadic space is not a relative global, but an absolute local. This view shakes the anthropocentrism that is embedded in much philosophical and biological thinking.

The topic of the posthuman has been debated for at least two decades, with reference to the great technological revolution and the advent of bio-genetic, bio-technologies, neuro-sciences, the success psycho-cognitive sciences and cybernetic. Here again, there is a sort of binary regarding the positions on the issue: either an exalted acceptance of the new reality, or a radical criticism of it. I take the expression “the posthuman condition” from Pepperell's ground-breaking book (1995), that proposed a posthuman manifesto claiming the end of a human-centric universe. This implies the end of humanism, according to which humans enjoy superiority and uniqueness compared to other living beings, and an arrogant human infallibility is postulated, ignoring the exploitation of the environment, of animals and plants, as well as the exploitation of humans on other human beings. The term 'posthuman' has been variously defined (Hayles 1999; Gray and Mentor 1995; Wolfe 2010; Latour 1993), but it generally describes a condition or a perspective that radically challenge the very notion of 'human', calling for a redefinition of this concept involving various disciplines and theoretical orientations, with implications for the social, cultural, political, economic, and material sphere. The notion of 'posthuman' has many articulations, but it focuses on the absence of essential differences between humans and machines, more generally on cybernetic mechanism and biologic organism. The posthuman rethinking of notions of 'individual' and 'human' takes the lead from the consideration of how subjectivities, bodies, agencies and cognition modify as they are connected to technologies and communication webs. This decenters, destabilizes, complicates the categories of human and individual. In this paper, though, I don't want to discuss posthumanism in the Haraway cyborg style (1991), meaning to be 'after' our embodiment. I embrace posthumanist theory in the sense Braidotti proposes it (2013), countering phantasies of disembodiment and autonomy inherited

by humanism. This theory overturns the notion of a stable, independent, ‘uniquely human’ human self, in the hope to create the conditions for the emergence of less violent social and political relations. The posthuman becoming is a process of redefinition of the sense of connection to a shared worlds and the environment – be it urban, social, psychic, ecologic or planetary.

3. Which posthumanism for subalterns?

Spivak emphasized how the legitimation of the colonial project was based on some assertions regarding indigenous populations postulating that they were “not graduated into humanhood” (1991: 229). These people were more or less ‘animals’, but definitely ‘not human.’ This explains very well the fact that groups, communities and populations that have been emarginated resist the idea of abandoning a notion of full humanistic subjectivity, with all the benefits that this implies. Even more so, as they should do it in the very historical moment when they are “ready for graduation”. Many theorists and critics of the contemporary society, though, have pointed out that becoming posthuman is not a matter of choice: this is something that has already happened, in a particularly evident way in science, technology, and medicine. Haraway (1991, 151- 55) has been one of the vocal philosophers about the fact that the present time is an irremediably posthuman time, when borders between animal and human, organism and machine, physical and non-physical have collapsed, creating a triple hybridity. This creates a context where the solution may lie not in claiming that ‘we are not animals’, but rather that ‘we are all animals’.

Tribal communities living on forest products and populations living on farming are directly affected by the scientific researches supported by a post/transhumanist agenda: bio-technology and genetically modified seeds have direct repercussions on their life, as they are affecting the environment and killing bio-diversity, so that farmers cannot reproduce seeds as they have done for centuries, but they must buy them from transnational companies like Monsanto. Instead of solving core issues like local population’s rights over forests, forest produce, people's rights over land and resources, and the trader-contractor-politician nexus, the Indian central and regional governments have signed hundreds of memoranda of understanding with foreign and domestic companies for exploitation of minerals without the consent of the local people. The Government of India too is in the globalization process: in the name of globalization resources around which millions of people live –such as water, forests, and land (*jal, jañgal, jamīn*)– are expropriated and given to corporate houses, creating poverty and misery in the villages. At the core of the clash between the governments and the Maoists lies the question of ownership of *jal, jañgal, and jamīn* of the tribal local population, who used to be the owners of the mineral-rich region, and the model of development which the governments – State as well as the Union – are thrusting upon them. The message, meaning and politics of the resistance movement cannot easily be subsumed under unequivocal shorthand labels such as anti-industry, anti-globalization and/or anti-development.

3.1. Cognitive justice

Posthumanist critique need not be thought of as an import from ‘the West:’ at least one indigenous articulation of criticism to humanism can be found, for example, in the criticism to modern science and the politics of knowledge proposed in the past century by Dr. Chetput Venkatasubban (CV) Seshadri (1930 – 1995), who claimed that there is no special place for man in the universe and no

special epoch for man in the universe. A chemical engineer, he got his PhD from Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, USA), was Professor and Head of the Chemical Engineering Department of Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur, and was the founding director of the Shri AMM Murugappa Chettiar Research Centre. Seshadri denounced that the modern scientific method is not value-free: “many concepts that are accepted as absolutely self-evident once stated or as arising out of a 'scientific method' are really based on very deep-seated cultural roots that need not necessarily be universal; consequently they become very difficult to stream into the consciousness of the practicing engineer who does not share the tradition” (Seshadri 1982, 5). The ‘scientific method’ has its roots in the Judaic-Christian Weltanschauung, based on an anthropocentric vision of the world (Seshadri and Visvanathan 2002). In order to investigate alternative epistemologies Seshadri founded the PPST (Patriotic & People Oriented Science and Technology) Foundation, an institution that, despite the infelicitous name, turned out to be an active epistemic workshop, where scientists and intellectuals would meet semi-literate farmers and craftspersons in informal, lively and inspiring conferences.

Seshadri equated modernity to colonialism and stated that it required alternatives, as science and technology fail to explore the tacit epistemology underlying their life worlds, obfuscating its historical and cultural roots. Modern science aligned itself with colonialism, providing justification for imperialism and expansionism into Africa and Asia. European colonial powers claimed a monopoly in knowledge in order to retain their claimed superiority. They imposed their own epistemological paradigm as universal discarding any alternative epistemology: any other ‘third world’ forms of acquisition or accumulation of knowledge, such as Indian scientific and technological traditions, were labelled as worthless, obsolete, magical, to be eliminated.

Seshadri’s critique of thermodynamics exposed its economic root, the fact that it links energy to its utilization, becoming the only criterion in order to prioritize resources. This creates a gap between “an industrial high calorie regime” and “biomass society”, leaving second rate science for a second rate society. In fact, in mainstream taxonomies of energy, biomass is categorized as residual, low in the list of ‘efficient energy’ such as nuclear, oil, hydroelectric power, or even wind energy, and biomass is reduced to the language of scarcity and crisis, as a way of life of societies outside the pale of industrialism.

The best example for this is the forest. Forest was used for multifarious purposes, wood was used both as domestic and industrial fuel (melting metals, molasses production). The so-called ‘tribal’ communities got food, fuel, medicines, and fodder. Yet, starting with colonial timber exploitation to contemporary paper industry, the forest becomes a reservoir for paper industry that, according to ‘modern’ energetic considerations, promotes the only efficient use of it, as raw material for paper and cellulose industry. Local population loses the right to access the forest in order to get forest products. Forest policies in colonial India started this process long time ago and today, in the name of development, forests are being converted into on-crop cultivations of fast growing eucalyptus (Gadgil and Guha 1992).

The idea of progress and development in its linear form is completely disadvantageous to tribal populations, “violence is the value of science” (Seshadri 1974, 3). Thus, ‘backward’ farmers and tribals from the ‘third world’ not only must face the violence of national states and transnational corporations, but the very logic of modern science. Seshadri identifies the “biomass society” as a radical critique to science and technology: Chipko and anti-dam or anti land-grab movements can

succeed only if the laws of energy are written anew. It is clear nowadays that nuclear, oil, the green revolution and/or modern medicine are not sustainable solutions for the earth. Together with techno-futurist sceneries, also the local and the traditional become sites of innovation.

The resistance and victory of biomass societies to an “industrial high calorie regime” is exemplified in Seshadri’s view by the Vietnam War. This analogy is recurrent in *Ādigrām upākhyān* as well, where not only the Vietnam-like guerilla organized by the population is described, but also the last chapter (*Ye daaḡ daaḡ ujālā.../ Amār nām tomār nām Viyatnām Viatnām* [This stained tainted light.../My name your name Vietnam Vietnam]) focuses on the state response to it that takes place in *Ādigrām*. When Harāḡhan Maṅḡal is shot by the secretary of the local CPI cell (the governing party), this creates the *casus belli*: slowly the opposition gets overt and a demonstration is organized, but the ruling party reacts with a violent repression and the adoption of the military strategies that were used by the USA army in Vietnam. The major difference is that in this case there is no declared military conflict, nor two armies facing each other, but the local population is attacked by a coalition of the forces of the global capitalism and the nation- state. To use Seshadri’s vocabulary, the State – that in the case of West Bengal is a leftist government– has no problems with electricity and industrialization plans, but cannot accept the biomass, insofar it is composed by a composite and complex mix of ordinary people that cannot be collectively organized and standardized by trainers, educators, masters and other agents of the hegemonic culture.

You and I, we have all seen the demonstration in Kolkata, when over one million people filled the roads against America’s attack to Vietnam, they say it was the most participated protest march in the world. You remember clearly, posters had the writing “Amar nām tomar nām Vietnām Vietnām”. Today again this sort of demonstrations have appeared and can be seen in Kolkata, but *Ādigrām* has taken the place of Vietnām. (184)

The notion of biomass is not only confined to a discourse about the environment and Nature, but it requests to discuss and reinvent the very basis of science, citizenship, and society, all grounded on a covert recognition of human superiority in the universe – a claim that much research on biology has proven false, insofar many animal communities are far superior in some features to the human ones (Haraway 2008). Biomass politics goes beyond the ideas of freedom and equality, it is beyond the discourse of Enlightenment and French revolution, of the Communist Manifesto or human rights: it focuses on the feelings that bond humans and nature. Seshadri contrasts the triangle ‘liberté égalité fraternité’, that constitutes the fundamental basis of modern politics, to another triangle: ‘pollution, waste, obsolescence.’ This triad recognizes the interrelation among many different complex systems, and takes into account the cyclic nature of processes that is otherwise ignored. Scientific and technological knowledge are synonymous just for ‘Western’ science and knowledge: for example, the World Bank K4D (Knowledge for development) program is based on the assumption that “basic components of the knowledge economy are readily available, why not appropriate them for growth and innovation” and it aims to “the development of country plans that integrate ICTs into the educational system.” (World Bank 2008, cover) This is apparently a very benign statement, yet the World Bank seem to “have created newer and alternative mechanisms (that are not so direct and interventionist like before rather more subtle and indirect) that allow it to sustain its prior status-

quo (i.e. continue to be the dominant actor in its relationship with Global South¹²) only to advance its agenda of creating a global neoliberal order” (Surma 2011, 4-5).

In this vision development may happen only if people have access/right to information. Knowledge acquisition in this formulation presupposes that knowledge is separated by the knower, that whatever is situated in the knower has simply no value: the knower has no knowledge at all. In fact, other sources of knowledge are at best considered as ‘ethno-science’ –which is very telling about the racist assumption that anything connected to white/European is the norm, is not ethnically connoted– pre-scientific, which means primitive, savage, superstitious. They are no knowledge at all, as whatever they know – agriculture, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, theoretical sciences, husbandry, weaving, water reservoirs, soil conservation techniques– is not recognized as a form of scientific and technological knowledge, as it is not created in the laboratory, which is the center, the place where invention occurs. In this view, any other place – the village, the city, the slum, civil society – is the periphery, a marginal region where only innovation and diffusion can happen, but no invention.

Counterposed to this view, there is the “carnival” of non-mainstream knowledge (Visvanathan 1997), that admits the existence of different forms of knowledge and problem-solving ability for common people, recognizing the innovative world of invention by commoners. This is a know-how reservoir that has been passed on generation by generation, implying a radically democratic knowledge system, that Visvanathan calls “cognitive justice.” Instead of referring to standard cartographies of power and innovation forms of knowledge based on the notion of complexity,

“represent new forms of power sharing and problem-solving that go beyond the limits of voice and resistance” [reframing] “the axiomatics of knowledge based on hospitality, community, non-violence, humility and a multiple idea of time, where the citizen as trustee and inventor visualizes and creates a new self reflexive idea of democracy around actual communities of practice” (Visvanathan 2009).

3.2 Obsolescence, belatedness and repetition

In the previous sections I highlighted how the issue of hegemonic or subaltern forms of knowledge is crucial. Particularly in the trans-human discourse (Moravec 1988) the ‘subaltern,’ who has no access to the advanced technological hegemonic knowledge, is more than ever the ‘Other’ of the ‘posthuman.’ Population that have access to every technology are necessarily hegemonic, while those who have little or no access to it – the poor in terms both of money and access to technology– are the subordinated, who are doomed to be dominated by those who control money, technology, and power. Even if we embrace a progressive vision and grant that today’s (non-human) subaltern will be tomorrow’s human, they will remain pre-posthuman: the anachronistic effort of people who have not been considered and treated as humans to get humanism is desperately out-of-date. Their pre-posthuman subaltern agency relegates them into the sphere of otherness. Therefore the subalterns’ destiny seem to be constantly obsolete and late: even if they get partial access to technology, their control on it remains scarce. They appear to be the disposable waste of society, their knowledge being what Foucault would define a “subjugated knowledge” (1980, 82).

Actually, the notion of ‘belatedness’ was an integrant feature of colonial historiography (Chakrabarty 2000). Apparently, though, the curse of being late has been cancelled from ‘shining

India' thanks to the technological turn, the introduction of neoliberal capitalism and globalization (Chakrabarty 2011). India is no more a 'backward' country, it has become 'contemporary'. Industrial globalization, consumerism, and urbanization have brought about 'the new'. Therefore belatedness has been confined to subaltern, to the 'biomass society.' The problem is that in a system structured on relations of 'before' and 'after', if something happens that looks like something else, what comes 'after' appears as 'belated'. This introduces the issue of difference, repetition, and change (in the sense of the rise of something really new). According to Deleuze (1971), new and repetition are not opposed. It is through repetition that newness comes into the world, through defacement and displacement (moving, removal, replacement, relocation, transfert): things really change not when A transforms itself into B, but when, while A remains exactly the same with regard to its actual properties, it imperceptibly "totally changes."

As Asha Achuthan (2015,47) aptly noticed, "(p)redominant critiques of science in India that continue to have valence today [...] (h)ave articulated the empirical subaltern as seat of resistance to technology, retaining, in this move, the commitment to the 'human' of liberalism that they also purport to critique. Such a subaltern is also seen as having cultural continuities, in whatever inchoate fashion, with an anterior difference – an immutable past. When such a 'subaltern-as-resistant' is purported to offer crisis to western science, as the hybridity framework suggests, resistance is asked to carry the referent of revolution, without fulfilling the promise of inversion of the dialectic that revolution, to merit the name, must carry. I would suggest that, in such a case, resistance remains the Kuhnian anomaly, without converting to crisis." It is crucial therefore to investigate belatedness and repetition under a new perspective, in order to interrogate failures, waste, gaps that inevitably remain in the translation, in the retelling of A into B.

3.3. Common sense, nonsense, and resistance to epistemic violence

Before introducing the final section that introduces a literary example of the issues so far discussed, I will now turn to the double epigraph put at the beginning of *Ādigrām upākhyān*. The first is a Hindi quote from Hindi poet Nāgārjun:⁴ *Āo rānī ham dhoemge pālki /yahī huī hai rāy Javāharlāl kī* (Come, queen, we will carry the palanquin/ this is what Javāharlāl set!). This poem is a satirical comment on the extravagant welcome thrown by prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, for Queen Elizabeth during her 1961 visit to India (the full text of the poem is available online: Nāgārjun 2015). The political meaning of this quotation, hinting to the contemporary forms of neocolonialism, is clear enough.

The second epigraph –in English– quotes Alice's walrus, giving a false reference to *Alice in Wonderland* when it is actually a quote from *Through the Looking-Glass*. What has this to do with a whole discourse about the insurrection of subjugated knowledge and recycling ideas? I think this is a perfect frame for the "resurgence of biomass". Interestingly enough, also Deleuze (1996; 2005) plays with Alice. He follows her in her constant change in shape and size, in her chaotic encounters with strange and unexpected creatures. Alice often proves uncertain, she is constantly questioning, somehow resisting to the events, and getting carried by the overturning of things and of their

⁴ Born Vaidyanāth Mīśra (1911 – 1998), he wrote extensively in Hindi and Maithili, and was renowned as the 'people's poet'. A revolutionary inspired by the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, he was an activist in the struggles of the poor and landless peasantry and was a leader in anti-system movements in North India (Consolaro 2011, 155-158).

meaning. Moving and transforming continuously, Alice learns to live within the paradoxes, she learns to ask questions swapping subject and object, cause and effect, and looking for new meaning to words and phrases. Deleuze likes Alice because she is nomadic. Her uncertainty is not just made of doubt, but of attempts. In Deleuze's reading, Alice with her constant changes goes beyond common sense, against the habit to assign a fixed identity to things. Common sense is generally based on the binary depth/height. Alice/Deleuze proposes a third path, that is the thought of surface, of nonsense, paradox, folly, dream. The folly connected to this logic of meaning is a process of self-change that leads to learning how to inhabit nonsense. This is what allows to re-think our world, to appreciate non-hegemonic forms of knowledge that can help us find meaning again.

4. Story-telling, history-telling

In the final section I come back to *Ādigrām upākhyān*, focusing on two passages showing how knowledge (non-hegemonic as well as hegemonic) is disseminated through storytelling. I will introduce much plot summary and some translated passages, that are meant to be read having in mind the previous discussion. In the novel two characters are introduced as story-tellers, and they are actually the ones who put together fragments of knowledge that help the villagers to get awareness of their past and their present situation. Gyanendra Pandey uses the term "fragment" to term the kind of historical sources that are often neglected by mainstream historians. Mainstream – nationalist– historiography depends on the state archives and elite documents. The recovery of subaltern speech is a struggle where the "access to the authentic voice and history of subordinated and marginalized groups" is circumscribed by the imbrication of popular forms, oral histories, and memories by "the language of the dominant and the privileged" (Pandey 2005: 62) This discussion calls for an interrogation of "the historical construction of the totalities we work with, the contradictions that survive within [fragments], the possibilities they appear to fulfill, and the possibilities they suppress at the same time" (Pandey 2005, 67).

The first passage I want to introduce is told by Parimlendu Dā, the village story-teller, who constantly repeats 'stories' about *Ādigrām's* 'history'. In the chapter titled *Which Babarnama mentions Adigram? The hot fragrance of rice reached the old man* (60-70), children insist to listen once more to the story of Rānī Rāsmaṇī.

Rānī Rāsmaṇī (commonly called Rani Rashmoni, 1793–1861) is a historical figure (Dakshineswar 2015). Born into a poor farming family, she is said to have been exceptionally beautiful, and she was married into a wealthy *zamīndār* family when she was eleven years old. After her husband's death she took charge of the *zamīndārī*, proving herself a natural leader. Being very pious from childhood, she founded the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, Kolkata, appointing Śrī Rāmkr̥ṣṇa Paramahaṃs as the priest of the temple. She remained closely associated to him, leading an extremely religious and austere life, as a widow was supposed to do in Bengali Hindu society of the time. Her daring performance and confrontations with the British made her a legendary figure whose story became household tale in her time.

Parimlendu Dā's version of this her/story as well as his other narratives of *Ādigrām's* past emphasize that the social structure of the region contained significant caste, class and gender divisions, but people in the region still united to resist the colonial state when threatened, such as against the colonial power. His construction of Rānī Rāsmaṇī is chronologically set in the second half

of the 18th century, but the *zamīndār* she is married to is Bābar, whose palace was in Ādigrām – the Muḡal king Bābur actually lived in the 15th-16th century. Interestingly enough, the description of the arrival of the revenue agents of the East India Company has striking resemblance to the depiction of the arrival of multinational corporation agents: two white men, the third one is an interpreter who knows local dialects and English. They announce the villagers of Ādigrām that their land has become property of the East India Company, and that they have to pay land revenue to the Company. Local people react and one day the corpses of both white men are found in the forest of Ādigrām. This is the very first murder to happen in the history of Ādigrām.

... and it was not of one single person, but of two, both white officers. People came to see from far away. The corpse's skin had become stiffen like trees. People could not decide whether the corpses had to be burn like Hindus or buried like Muslims. Hindus were not willing to accept that cremation might be the last rite for mlecchas, and on the other side, Muslims too were not ready to give some ground in their cemeteries. For the first time in the whole region two corpses were abandoned to wild animals. For the first time wild animals tasted human blood. (63-64)

The British reaction is extremely violent: the army is sent to fight weaponless peasant who have family and children, therefore it is a one-sided battle. Farmers not only become peasants even on their own land, but before sowing the crops – rice, or else opium or indigo – they must now get permission from the Company. To make things worse, enters famine: even if people are starving the Company does not concede any reduction in the land revenue.

Rānī Rāsmaṇī maintains the characteristic of extreme beauty, but in Parimlendu Dā's story she also possesses the features of the *sūfī* Divine love: her sight causes in any man an unquenchable passion and, like in the famous poem *Padmāvat*, he sets out for a journey of renunciation to the self, a quest for a mystical fusion with the object of his love (de Bruijn 2012). Parimlendu Dā continues his story introducing another famine, that hit Bengal when Rānī Rāsmaṇī was eighteen.

Parimlendu Dā tells that on one side in this region there was the terrible Bengal famine, and on the other side there was the inhuman despotism of the East India Company agents who raised the agrarian tax. With the time, the spark of rebellion started to ignite within those who survived the famine. They united and started organizing sporadic attacks. Corpses of the Company's agents were found sometimes in ponds, sometimes in the forest. Later on in Adigram there was the murder of two other English collectors. In history books this rebellion is called the "Cuār rebellion". The British were unable to crush this rebellion. Even the children of the area had become expert archers. There were secret meeting in the jungle and plans were made about the next actions. For the first time in history slogans like "I'll give my life, but not my land!" resounded.

But what kind of history is Parimlendu Dā talking about? Is there any mention of the "Cuār movement" or slogans like "I'll give my life, but not my land!" in the book prescribed in the school syllabus? Even the master who came from Kolkata to teach history doesn't know anything ... and what about the event of October 27th? The children insisted that Parimlendu Dā tell once again the story about October 27th. (67)

As Parimlendu Dā's story goes, on October 27th 1770, a dark new moon night – the same date in 2007 marks the outbreak of violence between Nandigram and the adjoining CPI(M) stronghold–some agents of the Company left Nalhati Bazar in the middle of the night on oxcarts loaded with cereals, unsuspecting what was expecting them. A women fighting battalion confronts the cart procession, led by a naked Rānī Rāsmaṇī depicted as an incarnation of the śakti itself. The cart drivers are frozen and the guardian lāṭhī soldier literally dissolves in love, undergoing *fanā* –"passing away" or "annihilation" – that is generally meant of the self, but here becomes a complete destruction of his body. In the meantime, the women unload the cereals from the oxcarts and disappear as suddenly as they had come.

This story starts a discussion among the children, who compare the education they are receiving at school to the knowledge of the local history that comes out of Parimlendu Dā's narration.

So, this Rānī Rāsmaṇī, how could she marry Bābar the *zamīndār*? They say that Bābar was as black as a black night, he had a protuberant belly, one eye was made of stone, he could not hear from one ear, he walked with a limp, and his body constantly smelled like acrid sweat. Could it that be that just for these reasons he was the only one who could marry Rānī Rāsmaṇī?

"Well, he must have had an excellent education in Kolkata, na?"

"Of course!" said Saddām in his drunkenness.

"Then why the history teacher knows nothing about Rānī Rāsmaṇī?"

"Well, Rānī Rāsmaṇī is from Adigram, the education in Kolkata must be different" ponders Harigopāl.

"Whachyoumean? Is history taught on different books in different places?", says Bāblū. He has never liked the subject 'history'. He always fails.

"No, Harigopāl is wrong. One and only history is taught in every place. And Rānī Rāsmaṇī's story in nowhere to be found in the history book that is in use in our school!" Fatikcandra thought out.

"Who knows, maybe that book is one of those used in Kolkata, and has been accidentally adopted in our school".

"Who knows, maybe Parimlendu Dā is a liar!"

"Who knows, maybe he tells the truth, maybe there was actually a Rānī Rāsmaṇī and nobody told us. This is the reason why we think that what Parimlendu Dā tells is a lie". (70)

In the chapter *Give me red, comrade!*- *The old man carried on the story with a gun, Harādhan was killed* (137-154) another storyteller gives an unsettling turn to the very process of disseminating stories, showing how narrating the world is not a neutral act. Thanks to his mastership in storytelling villagers get awareness of the process through which wars take place and armed conflicts are started and managed. But in a subtle way the coincidence of fiction and reality shows how the storyteller himself is part of the power game he is explaining. This character is a stranger who arrived in Ādigrām on a very inauspicious day, during a solar eclipse. He introduces himself as no *sādhū-mahātmā*, but a pure *kissāgo*, a storyteller who is not "in search of devotees, but listeners". In the magic ambience that he creates the enthralled audience would see the story become true. And this is what literally happens during an anarchical performance of his creative talent while telling a story titled "Give me your blood, I'll give you freedom". This is a story about modern warfare, technology, power, and subaltern people.

It tells about a scientist who had developed an elixir that could made people sick and disabled for generations. He works for a king, who makes him spray it into the surrounding kingdoms provoking a total ethnic cleansing, so that he can take over. After years of continuous war, when he thinks it is time to perform an *aśvamedha* rite and put an end to the armed conquest of the world, he reads in the press about another country possessing an elixir as deadly as his own. The king tries to get hold of the scientist, suspecting that he had given the formula to the enemy, but he is nowhere to be found. He then declares in a press conference that the construction of lethal weapons only leads to the destruction of the world, therefore an agreement must be reached among all countries that possess lethal weapons. He also announces the "third world war," the last and definitive war to Kalinga, the only place that refuses to recognize his supremacy. All media will be allowed to cover the war, and a whole set of merchandising products will be made available: Mission Kalinga T-shirts, video games, stickers, etcetera. The only problem is that Kalinga is a remote and peaceful country, where people are friendly and confident of other people, and have no army or weapon. The General in charge to start the war finally kill some civilians, and sends an SMS to the king announcing that the war has begun on time. By killing civilians, though, the General has antagonized the entire population, that organizes guerilla groups. The sophisticated and technological army is useless against them, therefore a new strategy has to be developed: the king is tired of war, not of winning! Enters media warfare: the king allies with multinational corporations to create SEZ, controls culture and information, and falsifies documents in order to forge a false truth. When the king of Kalinga watches on TV the false news of his own surrender, he dies on the spot. The final act – or the first one of the terrible war that is going to be waged on the village– is the manipulation of knowledge through the infiltration of agents of the hegemonic culture. These are two brothers-storytellers, Alhā and Ūdal, who go to Kalinga disseminating wonderful stories that enchant the whole population – one should point out that the epic of Alhākhaṇḍ, extremely popular in Northern India, “was appropriated and chanted by some Dalit minstrels who reinterpreted it, not as a tale of Rajput but of Dalit chivalry” (Gupta 2010: 323). On repeating Alhā and Ūdal’s story about a horrific war in which a man died in a village that could be Ādigrām, the great storyteller invites Harādhan on the stage, taking him as an example of those villagers. The storyteller describes the war with great mastery, to the point that when the first shooting occurs in the story Harādhan shouts, falls to the floor in a pool of blood and while the storyteller is portraying the first death in the war, he actually dies.

The next day *The third eye* publishes a photo showing the local CPI secretary pointing the gun at Harādhan’s chest, with blood on the ground. Harādhan was the gentlest man in the village, he was single, devoted only to his work: just like the General in the Kalinga story, the murderer had chosen the easiest target in order to start a war. If Photographer had not interfered with his picture and newspaper the media would even have been able to deny that somebody called Harādhan Maṇḍal had ever lived in the village!

Conclusion

The passages introduced in the previous section show how the clash between subaltern local populations and hegemonic political and economical powers reflects also an epistemological divide, that can be understood within the frame of the postcolonial and posthumanistic discourses. In this article I have read Kuṇāl Siṃh’s Hindi novel *Ādigrām upākhyān* as a story of the postcolonial subaltern

subject in a posthuman perspective. Ādigram is the symbol of what is globally happening wherever farmers' lands are expropriated, and local population are displaced in the name of progress and development. I have presented some passages of the novel that illustrate issues of knowledge, democracy, and storytelling. I have discussed some aspects of posthumanist theories emphasizing the presence of an Indian posthumanistic thinking in the thought of V.C. Seshadri. I have connected it to Chakrabarty, Visvanathan, Deleuze, Guattari, Haraway and Braidotti, in order to highlight possible links between the discourses of posthumanism and postcolonialism.

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The “Urmann” is a Woman

A Re-reading of Yūsuf Idrīs’ *Abū ar-riḡāl*

Jolanda Guardi

Abstract (Italiano)

Questo articolo presenta un’analisi del racconto *Abū ar-riḡāl* di Yūsuf Idrīs. Pubblicato dallo scrittore egiziano nel 1988, il testo affronta l’omosessualità partendo da un’idea differente da quella di mascolinità prevalente in Egitto nel discorso sociale e politico degli anni Ottanta del XX secolo. Il tema, presente nella produzione letteraria in lingua araba fin dall’epoca classica, non costituisce di per sé una novità. Originale è il presentare il personaggio omosessuale senza censure o giudizi morali e, soprattutto, il concepire la mascolinità attraverso parametri del tutto diversi rispetto a quelli comunemente presenti nel discorso coevo. Al momento della pubblicazione il racconto passò quasi inosservato al pubblico arabo, mentre gli studiosi in Occidente hanno semplicemente ommesso di affrontare l’argomento nelle poche analisi proposte. Una rilettura di *Abū ar-riḡāl* oggi contribuisce alla ridefinizione del canone letterario.

Abstract (English)

In this article I propose a close reading of Yūsuf Idrīs’ short story *Abū ar-riḡāl*. This text, published by the Egyptian author in 1988, addresses issues of homosexuality as opposed to the idea of masculinity prevailing in the social and political discourse of the Eighties in Egypt. Homosexuality is not a new subject in Arabic literature. It is in fact present in the literary production in the Arabic language since the Classical Age, and several homosexual characters can be noticed in modern and contemporary literature. The difference stands in presenting homosexuality without censorship or moral judgment, and above all masculinity is conceived by parameters, which are others in respect to those of the state discourse. When the short story was published, it passed almost unnoticed by the Arab reading public while scholars in the West did not discuss the issue at the core of it. Nowadays, when a lot of novels and short stories by Arab women and men writers propose the homosexual character anew, *Abū ar-riḡāl* testifies the presence of different point of views in the Arabic literature.

Introduction

In 1990, Bruce W. Dunne published a paper with the title “Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research” in which he recalls Joan Scott’s (1986) idea about gender as a useful category of historical analysis. Starting from this point, he analyzes the reasons why homosexuality is a “close subject of enquiry” (Sabine Schmidtke 1999, 261).⁵ Among these reasons, he identifies the lack of public debate about sexuality in Arab countries, the fact that homosexuality has become a taboo in official discourse, and that male homosexuality is a neglected subject in historical as well as interdisciplinary scholarship in the Middle East. Dunne, moreover, states that what may be described as a structural myopia of predominant heterosexual scholarship is entirely congruent with the

⁵ In order to let the presence of female scholars emerge, I write the first name of an author the first time I quote her/him.

orientalist epistemological legacy of treating texts (e. g. quranic prohibitions) as constitutive of social realities (Dunne 1990, 56).

Among the different sources that, in his opinion, have to be more studied he quotes modern and contemporary novel. Following Dunne’s work, and almost ten years after the one of Schmidtke (1999), some scholarship was published about homosexuality in classical as well as modern and contemporary Arabic literature. As far as this issue is concerned it is sufficient to quote, among the most recent ones, the works of Hanadi Al-Samman (2008), Samar Habib (2009), and Tarek El-Ariss (2013; for a more detailed literature see Jolanda Guardi and Anna Vanzan 2012). These works do not overcome a binary reading of the homosexual character in Arabic literature: classical, modern and contemporary Arabic literature is the subject of study only relating to the negative portrayal of the homosexual character. On the contrary, what I try to let emerge is a more nuanced reading; I am looking for writings in modern Arabic literature that are not male-/mainstream and that present a different writer’s attitude towards the homosexual character, describing her/him in a positive way (Guardi 2012; Guardi 2014; Guardi 2015).

The Urmann is a Woman

This paper focuses on a close reading of *Abū ar-riḡāl*,⁶ a short story published in 1987 by Egyptian author Yūsuf Idrīs. Idrīs (1927-1991) was one of the most prominent Egyptian writers. Although he wrote more than thirty novels and devoted himself to the writing of plays too, it is in the short stories that he achieved the peak of his literary talent. At that time he began to write, the literary field was permeated by the heritage of the Egyptian New School (*al-madrassa al-ḥadītha*) that preached for a writer who could describe life as painful as it is in order to bring reality to the general reader. As one of the members of this New School puts it, “stories should be based on naked facts and accurate observations without any interference of the imagination” (Marcel Kurpershoek 1981, 13). Idrīs himself once stated that he began to write because of his political engagement (Kurpershoek 1981, 50). In fact, his political engagement began in 1945, when he arrived at the University in Cairo to study Medicine and joined the Marxist inspired group Executive Committee for Armed Struggle (*Al-laḡna at-tanfīdiyya li-l-kifāh al-muṣallāh*), while he simultaneously wrote for some leftist journals.⁷ Idrīs was deeply patriot and believed in the nation as an ontological category, and that a strong Egypt would free all Egyptians from poverty and misery. The Communist organizations of the time aimed at liberation through the national struggle which was seen as the basis for the class struggle that, following the national independence, would eventually lead to socialism. Leftist intellectuals saw Nāṣir’s revolution as a necessary stage within their program, and Nāṣir increasingly came to use the language of the left wing to describe his vision of a strong and sufficient nation. In 1950, Idrīs began to distribute his radical publication, *Everyman’s Magazine*, and this led to his arrest and a one-year suspension from the University of Cairo (Kurpershoek 1981, 25-26). The support to Nāṣir’s regime

⁶ The story was published on 1st November 1987 in the Egyptian magazine *Uktubīr* (40-45). In 1988 an English translation followed, which does not fully correspond to the original Arabic text. The Arabic text I refer to is Yūsuf Idrīs 1990, 409-449. The book has a double page numbering, one for the collection and the other referring to the original edition in the short stories book *Al-atb alā an-naṣar* (81-121). All translations from Arabic, where not otherwise stated, are mine.

⁷ He was also imprisoned three times, under both the monarchy and the ‘Abd an-Nāṣir regime.

lasted until 1954, when the Egyptian leader changed his attitude toward the Communist Party and the leftists in general stating, for example, “Take communists [...] we know this type of person aims only at anarchies, for they can only live in anarchy. They are printing leaflets filled with lies and deception... Their appearances are rosy, but under the surface, they are filled with grudges [...]” (Keith Wheelock 1960, 42-43). In the same year, Idrīs criticized Nāṣir’s policy, because of the presence of British technicians in the Suez Canal Zone although it was nationalized as Egyptian. He was arrested and put in the al-Qanāṭir prison for political prisoners (Kurpershoek 1981, 25-26). That is to say, Idrīs was an engaged author who tried to write for the “common Egyptian reader” and, in order to achieve his goal, he chose subjects and ways of writing close to this reading public.

This attitude lasted until the end of the Seventies, after Gamāl ‘Abd an-Nāṣir defeat when, although remaining devoted to Egypt as a nation, he became more interested in the psychological dimension of the human being (the medical studies helped him in the observation of human personalities and empathy). This change reflects in his prose that although always addressed to a general reader becomes closer and closer to poetry, and, therefore, a bit more cryptic:

anadiplosis (repetition and duplication), synaesthesia (the use of one sense-impression to refer to another), asyndeta and parataxis (the stringing together of clauses without any joining words), onomatopoeia, inversion, rhyme, and paranomasia (punning and other wordplay) are all distinctive features of the later period. (Kurpershoek 1981, 70-75)

The shift to the psychological dimension involved a move back towards a more traditional way of writing too. In fact, Idrīs introduced spoken language in his writings – not only in the dialogues – aiming to shorten the gap between the author and the reader; while in his latest works, vernacular is once again confined to dialogues only. Nonetheless, his main features as a writer remain: the ability to move freely through the whole social spectrum, the diversity of human characters, in a word “the breadth of his fictional world.” (Sabry Hafez 2007, 148)

One of the themes Idrīs uses to convey his ideas about Egyptian society and to discuss moral and political issues is sex, which he uses to present and analyze the multifaceted aspects of love and as metaphor of social and political relations in the Egyptian society.

Idris describes specific sexual relationships between men and women from different social backgrounds in a way which shows the interrelation of their position in society with their attitude to sex, and so imposes a pattern on elusive but crucial aspects of Egyptian life and creates a starting point for thought and understanding... (Catherine Cobham 1994, 47)

As we will see, not only did Idrīs face to the issue of man-woman relationships, but he explore sexual relation between men and the issue of transgender in at least one short story. This should not astonish as Idrīs had more than once the opportunity to express his idea of literature and of the writer’s role in society

The important question is: did these millions of letters, words and pages succeed in changing people’s mentality? Is the average person so influenced by what he reads that he becomes

convinced of opinions he would otherwise never have embraced? That is, to my mind, the only valid criterion for judging the significance of one’s writings. (Kurpershoek 1981, 52)

Idrīs was perfectly aware of his role as a writer, and he can be considered among the vanguard of activist in literature. He was committed to promote social and political change using his writings, his commitment was so strong that he considers most of his critics’ attitude meaningless too:

Some turn me into a case like ‘The development of the Arabic Story in our Modern World’, ‘The Language of Yusuf Idris’, ‘The Attitude of the Author and How it Should Be’. This does not interest me in the least; these things are studied in the kindergarten of literature. (Kurpershoek 1981, 124)

Therefore, I will read *Abū ar-riġāl* starting from the perspective of a committed writer who wants to tell something through his story, and this “something” is what I am looking for.

Scholars who reviewed *Abū ar-riġāl* or wrote from a critical perspective about this short story⁸ did not even mention homosexuality. Following I will argue that Idrīs, contrary to what some scholars affirmed – when not completely avoiding the subject of homosexuality in the short story – with *Abū ar-riġāl* wants to make boundaries in which male/female concepts are defined in Egypt become blurred and wants respect and dignity to emerge as not depending on one’s sexual orientation. Moreover, he challenges the possibility to deconstruct the perception of the homosexual in Egypt, and in the Arab world in general, through literature. The writer is in some way a prophet, because he can read reality, and anticipate tendencies already present in society; he has, therefore, the moral duty to make the reader think and discuss some issues, proposing truthful pictures of his vision.

In reading *Abū ar-riġāl* I will refer to an epistemological frame I discussed elsewhere (Jolanda Guardi 2014) keeping in mind that mine is a critical reading resting on the concept of serendipity, that is, more exposed to find something I am not looking for,⁹ in the sense Joseph Allen Boone points out:

“reading between the lines” signifies, for my purposes, a *critical* sensitivity to complexity and nuance as well as a *creative* ability [...] to take the “betweenness” of the words that form the “lines” on the page as opportunities for rumination, for teasing out the latent possibilities of meaning that their choice, arrangement connotative possibilities, and placement within a larger units of structure and generic modes suggest; such a mode of reading helps us perceive the subtle ideological layerings and psychological compulsions that compel the narrative inscription in the first place. In the same vein, “reading deeply”, means to suggest the activity of paying sustained attention to the multiple discourses that comprise any narrative act, entertaining

⁸ The critical essays on *Abū ar-riġāl* are in fact quite few: Saad Elkhadem, “Preface” in Yusuf Idris, 1988, 1-2; Idris 1990, 25-28; Abu Al-Ma’ati Abu Al-Naja 1994, 97-104. Ramzi Salti, 2001, is the only one who suggests a different reading, taking into account the presence of homosexuality.

⁹ The word *serendipity* was used for the first time by Horace Walpole in a letter he addressed to the diplomat T. Mann. In his letter Walpole explains that the coin is taken from a Persian fairy tale’s title, *The three princes of Serendip*, whose heroes “were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of”. Serendipity, therefore, is to find something useful or pleasant one is not looking for. But to notice the clue, the sign which will bring to the discovery, one has to be open to search and attentive in recognizing the value of experiences that do not correspond to the original expectations (Robert K. Merton and Elinor Barber, 2004).

both the synchronic and diachronic paths that words, phrases, sentences, style, repetition, and verbal echoes and dissonances create in a text. (Joseph Allen Boone 2014, XXV. *Italic by the author*)

I am aware that such a reading could be subjected to criticism insofar as queer reading is in the end a Western construct (Samar Habib 2010, xix) but I am also aware that a text is what “let itself be read in it”.¹⁰ By applying the principles described by Boone, it is possible to read novels and short stories in a more suitable way for the XXI century. In the end if it is possible to cast light on some neglected aspects, it does not mean the author was fully conscious of it while writing but it implies the presence of these elements also without the writer’s conscious consent.

As previously mentioned, *Abū ar-riḡāl* has been read in the simplest way as possible: a man in his fifties discovers, or better comes to terms, with his latent homosexuality which means becoming a woman and this is of course seen in a negative way. In reviewing the English translation, Issa Bouallata, speaks, for example, of “unusual subject matter” (Issa Bouallata 1989, 83); Roger Allen prefers to concentrate himself on the stylistic aspect (Roger Allen 1989, 360-361) and Abu Al-Naja stops his critical essay just before the last paragraphs of the story (Abu al-Naja 1994). As correct as these readings might be, in my opinion only Ramzi Salti addresses some interesting questions, as for example: “Is Idris [...] attempting to dispel existing negative stereotypes of the homosexual in Egyptian society? [...] is Idris’ work homophobic or is it enabling to gay movements, however obscure in the Arab world?” (2001, p. 247).

The title of the short story is *Abū ar-riḡāl*. Elkhadem (1990, 25) argues that the original title was *al-kumūn* (الكمون) a word which means “latency” – especially in the psychiatric expression *marḡalat al-kumūn* (latency phase) – but then, upon request of the publisher, the author changed it. The request was motivated by the fact that *al-kumūn* in Arabic is written in the same way of *al-kammūn*, (الكمون) which means “cumin”, and this could have caused some misunderstandings. The same word, anyway, can also be read as *al-kamūn*, that is, “one who hides his real condition” (Albin de Biberstein Kazimirski 1860, 931). This reading is, according to me, more close to Idrīs original intent. As it may be, the final title is *Abū ar-riḡāl*. This late expression – where *Abū* means “father” and *riḡāl* “men” – is commonly used in Arabic to design something or someone who is the archetype, i. e., in the case of the short story, *Abū ar-riḡāl* is the archetypal man, the *Urmann*. Following this interpretation, the *Urmann* represents the model to which every man has to conform or tends to conform to; the *Urmann* is the original, the one who presages or underlies those coming later and who remains the reference for them all.

In this sense, the story refers to the characteristics which should be those of this original man, because it dismantles the idea of a manly man as represented in the imagery of the Arab world and the Egyptian culture in particular. In fact, Sulṭān, the protagonist, says at some point of his stream of consciousness:

¹⁰ As Julia Kristeva affirms: “Le texte n’est pas un ensemble d’énoncés grammaticaux ou agrammaticaux: il est ce qui se laisse lire à travers la particularité de cette mise ensemble de différentes strates de la signifiante ici présente dans la langue dont il éveille la mémoire: l’histoire” (1969, 18. *Italics by the author*).

Man is not a man because of the thickness of his beard or the harshness of his cruelty. No. Man is a man because he is witty, generous, brave, capable of sacrifice, of helping whom is in trouble and able to stand on the side of the oppressed, and the weak one until he becomes strong; and to be against the strong until he acts with justice and changes, and his strength is put at the service of justice and truth. (Idrīs 1990, 430)

Abū ar-riġāl – divided into twelve sections – begins with Sulṭān, whom the reader understands being a man of power – who starts noticing some changes in his body due to the coming of age (he is in his fifties). He looks at himself in the mirror and suddenly he does not recognize the image the mirror reflects back: “He wide opened his eyes and understood it was as if he was looking at another man’s skin. This was not his skin, not at all. Alternatively, if it was, something had happened to it” (Idrīs 1990, 411). Starting from the outer appearance Sulṭān perceives subtle changes in his body, which correspond to a slight shift in his mind and soul from being a man to being another man “Or... or... what?” (Idrīs 1990, 423).

Feeling the change in his body, Sulṭān begins to make a sort of examination of his whole life, through flashbacks and memories, starting from a piece of cloth; in fact, on this particular day he does not wear his usual Western clothes, instead he prefers to put on his white *ġallabiyya*, a traditional man-dress, which reminds him of his father. Recalling his father’s life, he remembers how he had only one *ġallabiyya* and how his own mother washed it every night with some orange blossom’s water in the laundry so the next day it seemed like a new one (Idrīs 1990, 420). The *ġallabiyya* becomes a symbol throughout the whole text: it’s white – referring to a sort of soul purity – and deeply bound to Sulṭān’s father personality:

Poverty and pride, particular to the wretched’s army, those who have got no important relatives, no big family, and confront a barren life, without caring either for a worn-out dress or for protecting their honour, they even accept begging during holidays, and if someone gives them meat for a special occasion, they thank and praise the donor... Sulṭān’s father was one of them, this is true, or on the contrary, maybe he was even poorer than some of them, but no one compared him in personal pride. He walked as if he was the mayor, and when he spoke, it was as if his words were words of wisdom. (Idrīs 1990, 420)

While Sulṭān dresses up, he screams for a boy, but he does not recognize even his voice, once more as if it was heard for the first time. That is to say, “before” the transformation, only power, violence, and killing give Sulṭān the thrill of being alive. However, the change is so complete that now he feels he is alive when he is overwhelmed by tenderness. In fact, as he looks or even thinks of aṭ-Ṭawr (the Bull), one of his subalterns, Sulṭān is besieged by consciousness. Consciousness that he was not looking at him as “a man look to another man”, but instead looking at him as a dream, a feeling which lets him exhausted like after a fever, which gives him shivers through his whole body (Idrīs 1990, 414). From this point on, the story proceeds alternating Sulṭān’s streams of consciousness, recalling his childhood and his youth searching for traces of his otherness and the developing of the plot, where Sulṭān tries to approach the young man and to ask him – although in a silent way – to have sex with him. The first line introduces the reader to another character, the one of “Šāhīn” aṭ-Ṭaḥān (Idrīs 1990, 432).

“Šāhīn” at-Ṭaḥān was one of the many phenomena that some rural villages specialize in, whether in Lower or Upper Egypt. He was a man in appearance and figure, with beard and moustache shaven; this aside, he was feminine in everything else, in the way he spoke, the way he walked, his attachment to womenfolk in the village, and even in his work. He used to sell butter, smen, and cream and would seduce the young teenage boys of the village with the amount of money he would pay. He used to have an agent among the young loafers who would bring them to him in exchange for money. He was famous and well known to people in the village. He was deplored by many prudish and religious folks, but for normal people, and due to his long history and the fame of his habits, he was seen as one of those normal phenomena that were not condemned, but became an object of ridicule to some and used as an example by mothers to warn their sons of the consequences if they acted softly, or if they grew their hair long, or wore their skullcaps in a crooked way on their heads. (Joseph Massad 2007, 330)

This passage describes an effeminate homosexual, who is well known by the whole village, but whose behaviour is not condemned. Although some mock him and others use him as a warning example, the author’s attitude is not the one of blaming, on the contrary: the name – or maybe the nickname (as it is written between inverted commas through the whole story) of at-Ṭaḥān is “Šāhīn”, a word of Persian origin which in Arabic denotes the royal hawk. That is, his nickname is a very positive one. Nicknames have a great importance in *Abū ar-riḡāl*. The title itself, which is Sulṭān’s nickname, and it means “the one who has power”. The importance of nicknames is underlined in the text by the protagonist himself when speaking by himself he states:

Why had he chosen to meet “at-Ṭawr” at that moment? He did not know that too. at-Ṭawr. at-Ṭawr. Why then “at-Ṭawr” exactly? Maybe for the rumors spreading about him and his love affairs? Because he knew women just fall at his feet when he possessed them? Or maybe because he was younger, more stupid and the heftiest of the boys? Anyway he calls him... at-Ṭawr (The Bull)... in the same way, there were “ad-Dīb” (the Wolf), “Abū al-ḡaṣāda” (the One who lacks something), “Ġurāb albīn” (the Albin crow), “al-Ġaḡṣ” (the Colt), “at-Tanbal” (the Sloth)... each of them... the biggest present he could do was exactly to give a nickname, the major castigation he inflicted was to call someone by his real name. This late would have begged him, implored him until he broke into tears, sometimes crying bitter tears, asking him to give him a nickname. When he got tired of him and his siege, he answered: “All right... go, Lamb”... or “Go away, Donkey”... And the “Lamb” or the “Donkey” would release him, and kiss his hand, with his eyes bright with gratitude. Then he would have gone happy and smiling, glad. (Idrīs 1990, 415)

Although most of these nicknames are nouns, their role is the one of adjectives, which are

mechanism born from queer, foreign places. [...] In language, adjectives occupy the place of difference: added on, as it were, not necessary for making a complete sentence yet paradoxically responsible for invoking being. Adjectives, as such, do not organize the world to render it familiar. They are the defamiliarizing devices of language. While they cannot be activated by verbs, they are in and of themselves active [...] As mechanisms, they work to attach us to non-linguistic sexed being and its queer affects. (Dina Georgis 2013, 127)

Therefore, the homosexual character is presented with a positive attitude, as his nickname suggests. Proceeding in the recalling of his life, we learn that Sulṭān is married and has three children. In a way, he then accomplished his social – heteronormative – duty by marrying and having heirs, and this frees him: he can now turn to his real sexual identity. This seems to be the opinion, for example, of another Egyptian writer, Naḡīb Maḥfūz, who describes a homosexual character in his novel *Midaq Alley* (1947). Kirša, who considers himself free to follow his orientation once he has absolved to his duty – getting married and having children.

The second line, the development of the plot, describes how Sulṭān approaches the young man to have intercourse with him. Here the focus is on what both characters think and feel. The young man understands what Sulṭān wants from him but he initially thinks he is the one who has to surrender and act like “a woman” losing his self-respect and the one of the others’, because he knows he cannot refuse to do it in front of his boss. The approaching is not immediate, because it does not develop through words but through glances, breathings, and imperceptible movements, and during all this silent approach both Sulṭān and aṭ-Ṭawr wander about the most intimate paths of the self. Once more Sulṭān recalls some episodes of his life, to detect scents of his feminine nature which he finds. For instance, he recalls an episode occurred sometime before when it was easy for him “to make decisions”. A man of his came asking for justice – or revenge – because thugs assaulted him. All the men came, and it was as if they were “thousands”; all of them were waiting for the word coming from his mouth, as they were used to, and they knew it would have been an aggressive and ferocious word., “How happened what happened?”, this time his voice was not the voice he was used to as he heard himself saying: “I think this time we should give in and surrender and then we will choose a better time and place.” That day, Sulṭān, the leader, the lion, became a mouse, and he noticed people did no more fear him (Idrīs 1990, 434-438).

Then he remembers a discussion he had with “Šāhīn” aṭ-Ṭaḥān’s nephew regarding the homosexuality of the nephew’s uncle. One day, as a group of men lead by Sulṭān met with Aḥmad – the boy’s name - they began to tease him for his family relationship with “Šāhīn” aṭ-Ṭaḥān. The boy was holding a book in his hand, and Sulṭān asked him to show what he was reading. As he saw the title of the book, *Mawwāl Adham aš-Šarqāwī*,¹¹ he began to laugh, and said: “Ah ah... your uncle is “Šāhīn” aṭ-Ṭaḥān and you read Adham aš-Šarqāwī...” (Idrīs 1990, 442), the contrast here stands in the fact that Aḥmad’s uncle was a *muḥannaṭ*,¹² as he is called throughout the text, while Adham aš-Šarqāwī was a boy who died while fighting against English colonization in Egypt and he is considered a hero, that is a “real” man.¹³ The hero, or *fidāī* as he was often called in the Seventies, is literally “the one who sacrifices himself”, and “is loaded with religious connotations. Having devoted his life to the

¹¹ The *mawwāl* is a genre of Arabic music that is usually presented before the actual song begins and it is traditionally sung in colloquial Arabic. It is a development from Arabic poetry and the performance is the occasion for the singer to demonstrate his ability with melodic improvisation.

¹² Although I translated the word with “homosexual”, due to the description the author gives of him (manly appearance) the term *muḥannaṭ* in Arabic traditionally refers to men dressed like women who performed dances and singing. Idrīs’ words choice all along the short story is clearly very shrewd.

¹³ Adham aš-Šarqāwī (1898-1921) was a young Egyptian whose opposition against the British forces is narrated in several movies and television plays as well as the subject of songs. He is often depicted as an Arab Robin Hood, taking from riches and giving to poors. He was also taken as an example by the Egyptian president Anwār as-Sadāt in his book *Al-baḥṭ ‘an ad-dāt* (In search of the Self).

sacred cause, [he] embraces the blessing of martyrdom. Accordingly, [he embodies] the idealized masculinity whose valiant and hallowed struggle against the enemy” makes him being considered “by many as a prophet” (Samira Agachy 2009, 5). Moreover, Aḥmad’s age allows a further comparison: he and the hero are young and do not submit to power. In fact, the day after this incident, Aḥmad assaults Sulṭān with a pruning knife and says he will not let him go until he admits being a “woman” (Idrīs 1990, 443). Sulṭān admits and “What threw him most into confusion was that he did not utter that to save himself or to submit to the actual situation, but he had told that as finally taking a deep restoring breath: I am a woman” (Idrīs 1990, 444). After that episode, thinking about what happened, Sulṭān says to himself: “No doubt I am not the man I used to be... no doubt that there was a Ṭaḥān inside me that this boy made come out with his deeds, but then, what’s the problem if a human being is a Ṭaḥān?” (Idrīs 1990, 446).

At the same time, we become aware of The Bull’s stream of consciousness, which flows at the same time of Sulṭān’s one. The young man understands that something is going on, and after a deep thinking, realizes what the request will be. We know this, once again, through Sulṭān’s thoughts (Idrīs 1990, 447).

The idea of submitting himself to this young man, who was awfully frightened of him and of his potency and his vigour, made him think – among other things - that Bull might be imagining the opposite, and was trembling for fear that his Uncle Sulṭān would request from him what the stronger requests from the weaker; for Sulṭān requests were sacred commands that could not be evaded or circumvented. A sacred command which is uttered by Sulṭān – oh, what a disaster! – had to be obeyed, and he would submit to his will, even if this submission would cost him his masculinity, his pride, his distinctive character, and his reputation, which had made him famous for being the only unrestrained stallion who made all men jealous, and made all women, married or unmarried, dream of him. (Elkham 1988, 9)

In the closing section of the short story, the reader understands the sexual intercourse between the two men takes place. The Bull, who after a long struggle within himself has “reconciled himself to accept” being the passive in the intercourse, is

surprised when it happened what happened. Happy. To succeed, although it happened in a different way, it was not important; important is that he came to a condition by which equate this or that. Everything ended, and his shirt was soaked with the scent of lost honour, the revolved dignity, and of a degradation he enjoyed and which he savoured – scents that can only provoke disgust together but which never made him disgusting. (Idrīs 1990, 448)

After that Sulṭān notices that acting like “a woman” means to be more reflective, to make decisions after deep thinking, to judge men and people in general not by appearance but by the way they act and are, and to feel tenderness. “As the veil of masculinity dropped from him so did the veil of shame”.

As for the majority of his short stories, Idrīs structures *Abū ar-riḡāl* in a circular form, and the action ends back to the point where it began. “This technique emphasises cyclical continuity and stresses the main action of the story as a temporary move, but at the same time one can animate and

pervade the whole cycle in a way that leaves its mark on the next revolution. Idrīs therefore deliberately avoids sudden endings and denouements” (Hafez 2007, 156). The end of *Abū ar-riḡāl* is a positive one, because Sulṭān has reconciled himself with his being “a woman” and only now, the ‘boys’ surrounding him – and who supposedly are or will be his lovers – get a name instead of a nickname: “He observes his skin and it is as wonderful, when the night comes, and he is on the balcony or at the hotel, before him Fathī “at-Ṭawr” or Ibrāhīm “al-Ġaḥš” or Sa’īd “al-Baḡal” (the Donkey) or Šabrī “al-Kalb” (the Dog). But he is still as-Sulṭān, he is still the lion” (Idrīs 1990, 449).

Concluding remarks

In another short story, *Aš-šāyḥ šāyḥa* (Idrīs no date, 16-30),¹⁴ Idrīs proposes a character who is neither a man or a woman. She/he has no name and people call her/him sometimes Šayḥ Muḥammad and sometimes Šayḥa Fāṭima, because (Idrīs 1990, 17-18):

As to his having human features, he had features all right: he had two eyes, two ears and a nose, and he walked on two feet, but the problem was that these features of his took completely inhuman shapes. [...] His short, heavy, kinky, brushlike hair brought home a problem that called for attention since there were no tokens of femininity in it, and that it was also devoid of any tokens of masculinity. His body was heavy, of average height, and solid and large like a wall, but his face bore no signs of beard or a moustache. (Denys Johnson-Davies 2009, location 3364)

Although the story ends with the protagonist’s death, this is due to the inhabitants suspicion she/he is not deaf and speechless as she/he appears and not for her/his sexual ambiguity, which is accepted by the villagers.

In both cases the protagonists refer to marginal sexualities in a cultural context that proposes a normative image of masculinity, the one of a manliness where men assert, “what they believe to be their manhood” (George L. Mosse 1996, 191). This idea of masculinity is a “horizontal comradeship” (Benedict Anderson 1983, 7) with the nation and constitutes the power that in the world of ideas will free the land. “Men are supposed to possess an unshakable commitment and a clear teleological vision and course of action that will grant them the badge of courage to regain the lost land” (Agachy 2009, 7). Whereas official discourses express a nationalistic rhetoric conceiving the nation as heterosexual and homosocial, setting men at the margins, Idrīs uncovers what in the religious and political discourse is considered shameful and deconstructs the image of Egypt as a nation composed by Muslim manly men who are guardians of the family and who live a normative, strictly defined sexuality (and sexual orientation).

Šulṭān, as other characters in his short stories, is a frustrated man, but even if failure is dominant, it is never a complete “failure, because at the lowest ebb of defeat there always appears a possibility of advancement, a reason for a special type of triumph” (Hafez 2007, 152). He defies the bourgeois nationalistic concept that homosexuals are a threaten to the middle-class existence itself

¹⁴ Quotes are taken from the English translation (*The Shaykh Shaykha*) published in Denys Johnson-Davies 2009, 203-214. Translation by Raja Fahmi and Saneya Shaarawi Lanfranchi. All quotes are taken from this translation in the kindle edition of the book.

(Mosse 1997, 27). A concept dating back to the end of the XIX century, when a new social class emerged in Egypt which defined itself in the performance of the “Effendi Masculinity” and which is linked to the attempt to free and define an Egyptian self from the colonial gaze through a matter of sex and gender (Wilson Chacko Jacob 2011, location 207).

Through the character of Sulṭān, the Egyptian male reader is confronted with an alternative manhood, which is not shameful. It is not shameful because it has some of the female features, like tenderness and a pondering attitude.

The re-reading of *Abū ar-riḡāl* – as well as the one of other “forgotten” texts in modern and contemporary Arabic literature – also contributes to a redefinition of the literary canon. In fact, considering these writings contributes in overcoming a binary analysis of Arabic literature, where the non-heteronormative discourse cannot get a foothold. This obliges to a redefinition of the concept of the canon because, as Eve Kofosky Sedgwick states (2011, 59): “To alienate conclusively, *definitionally*, from anyone on any theoretical ground the authority to describe and name their own sexual desire is a terribly consequential seizure” (Kofosky Sedgwick 1990, 26). To alienate the word, in the literary field, was the basis for homophobic violence and oppression from the nineteenth century until today, because it is through literature that we figure out Other’s image. “Reading these writings” then, “will be most useful for our analysis in way that laws, police reports, official histories, school textbooks, private letters, scholarly publications – the usual archive of the social and intellectual historian – are not” (Massad, 2007: 271).

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Jolanda Guardi's research focuses on dynamics of the intellectuals and power especially as deployed in Arabic literature and gender issues, subjects about which she has extensively published in Italian, Spanish, English, French, and Arabic. In 2010, she was awarded the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques International Award for Translation, and in 2011 she was named Theologian Honoris Causa. She contributed with entries in the two volumes *Encyclopaedia Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture* (2014), which was awarded in 2015 the RUSA Award for “Outstanding Reference Sources”. She conducts at present her research at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili of Tarragona (Spain).

Terzo momento

Etnografie

Stage Three

Ethnographies

Processes of Dis–location and Re–location of Knowledge and Power

Elena Bougleux

Abstract

Historical analysis of domination patterns identifies phases of ongoing dialectics between rich and poor world areas, claiming instances of self-determination and empowerment in international programs of cooperation. At the same time, new major imbalances in relations of power emerge between new global players, who appear to be committed in a competition towards the Western model of development, mainly characterized by the control over technologies and knowledge/. /Such practices of emulation provide examples of complicity with the hegemonic rhetoric, and help strengthen pairs of opposites (emerging/advanced, technological/intuitive, hegemonic/subaltern) increasingly polarized and less dialectical.

Abstract (Italiano)

La lettura dei processi di dominazione attraverso le fasi della storia evidenzia una persistente dialettica tra aree ricche e povere del mondo, le cui istanze di autodeterminazione ed emancipazione vengono rivendicate ora anche attraverso i programmi di cooperazione e aiuto. Allo stesso tempo nuovi forti squilibri emergono nelle relazioni di potere tra i protagonisti emergenti della scena globale che si avvicendano in una ricorsa ad un modello di sviluppo, quello occidentale, caratterizzato dalla capacità di controllo di specifiche tecnologie e sistemi di conoscenze. Tali pratiche di emulazione contribuiscono a rinforzare binomi di opposti (emergente/avanzato, tecnologico/intuitivo, egemone/subalterno) sempre più polarizzati e sempre meno dialettici.

Error/errans

The research program presently running at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry in Berlin is called Errans. An entire institute is dedicated to the investigations of the linguistic, epistemic, political, aesthetic boundaries between wandering and making mistakes, moving and mistaking, erring and erring: a powerful figuration of the double, an icastic string describing the uneasy state of people, concepts, material fluxes in motion. An error is a potentially generative phase during a transformative process, a place to stop and start again from. Or is error just a dead end, something to be cured and to be fixed, to overtake and forget, and not to repeat? Are errors stable or moving entities?

A wanderer, or flâneur, or betrayer, deliberately walks across separate spaces, creates material connections where there weren't any through his(her) physical passage. The action of moving across separate spaces, performed as a state of being, inhabited as a permanent condition, has the power to weave networks of connections, to link the improbable, to rephrase the speakable, to redefine the strategy: to fix the error? to embody the error? Uneasy positioning like those of the betrayer or the wanderer imply the complicated decision to abandon what exists, to leave the present and challenge the unorganized, risk the mistake, wander through the error.

A wandering subject is potentially an elusive activist (ICI Berlin 2014), somebody redefining the fields of legitimacy and normated correctness, a subject difficult to catch up with and to grasp, unpredictable and creative. Nomadism is a form of existence, it is an appropriated way of existing,

chosen or suffered, in order to resist hetero-directed norms. The nomadic subject is a social and epistemological errans, a s/object whose languages, desires and frameworks oscillate around the states of a transition of phase, through unstable states far from equilibrium. The errans entities -- people, concepts, material fluxes -- belong simultaneously to multiple spaces, to multiple phases, to transitory states: the previous and the following, across time.

Why should an activist be elusive? what is the advantage of an elusive attitude, recalling a pale and shadowy identity definition? Capitalism resists activism anyway, including its elusive form. Apparently. In this framework, capitalism is not only a powerful political and economic system, it is also the comprehensive concept that includes multiple and very stable categories of power, sets of norms and mechanisms of control that recursively reinforce its structure. The capitalist system may be successful/effective in enforcing its norms because it harbours, accepts and copes well with nomadic subjects, elusive or not, incorporating and metabolizing them, placing them in ever-changing, fashionable, trendy, cool categories. Capitalism mutates and devours elusive activism; it is an adaptive entity, capable of absorbing and shaping desires, transforming deliberate errors, conditions of instability, and elusive states into new, modified, adaptive norms.

Is the error of erring, the mistaken choice of wandering, a form of resistance? What place remains for the errans that does not fall into norms and resists capitalistic processes? There are multiple capitalistic norms to conform to, and multiple spaces for resistance, when exploring the error. But at the same time there are multiple duties to comply to, multiple roles to play. Therefore nomadic subjects as such are not erring/wandering enough, the nomadic condition is not strong enough as a form of global resistance. Capitalism is more skilful, always perceiving border fluctuations, and then attempting to fragment its opponents and scatter them into superpositions of incoherent elements. One more step is needed in order to enhance resistance, appropriate the concept of error, open up the potential it contains. Multiplicity is also needed. The elusive activists are to be transformed into “non-unitarian subjects”, superposition of identities, re-combinations of patterns. Nomadic subjects must become “endless arrays of possible subjects trying to map out what is happening” (ICI Berlin 2014); subjects continuously drawing their own, singular, unique, nomadic synthesis, their own non hetero-directed norms. Nomadic subjects try to sketch adequate representations of their boundaries, imagining them not as limiting spaces, but rather as spaces of error, spaces of possibility. The erring subject is capable of all this: challenging the mistaken, wandering through limits, breaking neoliberal norms.

2. Superposing conceptual fluxes

As an ethnographer, I am compelled to situate my perspective, and to investigate the present from a situated position of opposition. Like nomadism, the ethnographic attitude is a situated condition, a describing attitude changing as a function of time, developing a peculiar gaze, assembling sets of questions. Ethnography follows nomadic people and nomadic concepts. Both concepts and people, in their action of transmigrating, determine a redefinition of power networks, a re-location of the centres of power. Positioning myself on the border of different discourses, I perceive concepts travelling in a flux, in an empowering stream. The cartography of transmigrating concepts maps trajectories of new power relations, to be followed and unravelled. Transmigrating concepts are used by inadequate subjects (Borghini 2004) to re-define over and over nomadic new concepts.

In this context, I try first to situate myself at the crossing of three main geographic-political-scientific fluxes, then to intersect all three. First: the colonial/postcolonial flux, following the power and cultural patterns moving from 19th century Europe, and Britain in particular, towards the colonies, India in particular. Second: the techno-scientific-economic flux, orbiting/roaming over the entire 21st century planet, with a multiplicity of centres of power, contemporary India being surely one of these. Third: the sustainability issue and the new environmental and anthropocenic shared sensitivities it calls for. I try to follow each flux separately, before witnessing series of errors, unstable superpositions, and recording (temporary) convergences.

2.1 Colonial/postcolonial flux

The last decades of the 19th century British Raj in India were characterized by a powerful process of knowledge transfer from the centre of the Empire to its periphery (Prakash 1992, Raina 1996, Arnold 2000). A massive educational program was launched and implemented by skilful colonial administrators convinced of the necessity to “try to teach to the un-teachables”, i.e., to transfer the scientific categories and taxonomies, produced in Europe during the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution, to the native élites of India. The explicit educational goal of the program aimed to open first scientific temporary exhibitions and later permanent science museums, displaying the conquests and wonders of modern science and technology. The educational goal was surely not philanthropic, it was rather dictated by a very pragmatic plan oriented at improving and optimizing the possibilities of control over India's natural varieties and unexplored environments. In exhibitions and museums science and technology were presented as properties and distinctive achievements of modern Europe that could be useful and helpful to interpret and organize the confused (or missing) Indian descriptions of Nature. The scientific discourse developed for the colony was based on the creation of conceptual dichotomies, binary couples of opposites, that could not be merged or surpassed by any educational program: native/colonial, intuitive/rational, tentative/technological. Technology and rationality did not belong, and could not start to belong to the Indian scenario. The opening of scientific educational institutions unfolded in a condition of explicit unbalance of power that neither the colonial administrators nor scientific curators really sought to leave behind. Before dealing with science, the exhibition programs faced the need to re-structure what could be called ‘native knowledge’. Taxonomy appears to have been the main pedagogical concern of colonial administrators while the explanation of scientific principles and technological mechanisms remained in the background, and the achievements of science were presented as somewhat wondrous and magical.

The Indian public audience appreciated the 'cultural' operation; the exhibitions were a great successes in terms of visitors and duration; events were replicated in several town and cities, and eventually museums were opened in Calcutta (1875), Madras (1885) and (Prakash 1999). But the concept of 'educational goal needs to be slightly redefined here: the cultural operation in progress was a realignment of categories, a reorganization of the thinking space, a not so sudden though very powerful imposition of norms that included the need to rewrite history and to reorganize the archaeology of ideas (Foucault 1963). This thorough process of realignments enabled the natives to know for the first time about themselves and about the qualities of the artefacts and features of their

environment through colonial categories and observational tools provided by European scientific curators.

All displayed scientific and technical meanings underwent an unavoidable shift, in the course of this imperfect and partial translation; the missing technical explanations opened the way to creative processes of misunderstanding, mistakes, misuses. Nevertheless, newly founded educational institutions were financed and eventually flourished, becoming the specific contexts for cultural transfer, for attempts at multiple translations, reinterpretation, and appropriation of ideas typical of the 'west'. According to Dhruv Raina, the early educational colonial institutions were the places where the ideas of freedom and self determination were also translated and appropriated for the first time (Raina 2004); they unexpectedly became the places where the independence movement emerged and developed, acquiring most of its theoretical strength. Colonial institutions became elusive activists' hatcheries.

2.2 Techno/scientific/economic flux

(Dislocating and Relocating Multinational Corporations)

In other papers I have written detailed case studies of western multinational corporations expanding in India during the last two decades (Bougleux 2012, 2014, 2015). My thesis here is that the expansion process enacted by corporations in the emerging Indian scenario follows a trajectory similar to the opening of scientific exhibitions and museums in India during colonial times. The two historical processes show a serious commitment to realize massive transfers of knowledge from one side to the other, accurately financing and following the whole process; a permanent unbalance of power characterizing the relationships among the partners; an intense and non linear networking of hegemonic and subaltern patterns that eventually succeeds in transforming the outcomes and goals of the hegemonic dis-locating operations through a progressive re-signification and appropriation of meanings.

Through a prolonged though fragmented fieldwork, I analyzed the processes of knowledge appropriation enacted by the Indian workforce employed by the corporation at the *Research & Development Centre* in Bangalore. The corporation is a productive, economical, political subject with a high technical and scientific profile, whose mission is to transform skills into technology and profit, and vice versa. With a budget comparable to those of entire countries, multinational corporations are decisive players in the economic global scenario. The geo-economic expansion programs of multinational corporations pose serious constraints to the development politics of apparently independent governments; corporation policies shape the relations of power among the areas of the planet according to corporate aims, and transform environmental, energetic, and resource management trends of continents for decades (Stiglitz 2000). Despite the fact that a multinational corporation is an economical and political subject, it holds no social responsibilities. It is an opaque, omnivorous subject, a somehow welcoming, inclusive, always productive body. It is ambiguous, potentially dangerous, deterritorialized and extremely differentiated in its actions, a sort of multi-functional cosmos where all devices and sub-organisms converge in the final profit production, in almost any condition (Bougleux 2015: 6). The corporation I describe here acts, in many respects, as a colonial power.

The Research Centre that I have studied for several years opened in Bangalore in 2000; it functions as an exemplary operational black box programmed to transform knowledge and application skills into production processes and market products. Concepts turn there into objects, objects into profit, and knowledge is transformed into power. The massive knowledge transfer that the corporation sets up, facing high costs and not irrelevant commercial risks, consists of a large in-office training program, the so called Training-on-the-Job, where newly recruited young Indian professionals are taught how to deal with a real research task, respecting clients deadlines and fulfilling corporate standards. The young professionals work in small teams with a senior engineer accompanying their work, until they are considered reliable and autonomous: i.e., when they have become perfect corporate employees, ready to let all their expertise converge towards the construction of the corporation's comprehensive profit. It is apparently a fair exchange: on the one hand, expanding in India, the corporation gains a large available qualified workforce ready to join global competition at cheaper costs than in Europe or the States; on the other, corporation salaries are substantially higher than local ones, and the qualified job offer market in India is (still) very lively, so that the young professionals are not really tied to the first US or EU corporate context that buys their competences, but are in the position of choosing and selecting whom they prefer to work for.

This is exactly the relevant aspect for our present discourse: the knowledge developed and implemented by Indian young professional working for the western corporation, to whom does it belong? Who owns the right to exploit the follow-ups of the massive knowledge transfer that the corporation has paid for? Obviously products and applications belong to the corporation that owns the laboratories where procedures are taught and prototypes are realized; and also, despite some technical difficulties in enforcing corporate patents' security, the copyright of newly developed products belongs to the corporation. But who owns the skills of the young professionals? Who owns the ideas that emerge thanks to the skills transferred during the programs of Training-on-the-Job? Whose is the power that more or less directly derives from the capacity to master technical equipments and managing advanced problems? We might rearticulate this question better, focussing on the interferences always arising between context and content, in this case between cultural context and scientific content; we could then situate the question by asking what happens to the concepts of (western scientific) knowledge, including its high-tech, material development and disposable technology, when transferred in the emerging context of southern India.

Further context description is needed before trying to answer those points: young Indian professionals in the early stages of their scientific career for the corporation seem to take advantage of the many opportunities that the lively job market provides in the competitive scenario of the Bangalore industrial district where jobs are frequently dropped, and job changes are easy to realize. Soon after quitting a job, new good positions requiring high qualification are as easily found; western corporations replace one another as disposable work providers. The underlying strategy is that of subtracting competences and applied knowledge skills from the corporations training programs, appropriate them, and reinvest them locally and more profitably, launching independent though smaller and more fragile enterprises. A similar attitude can be (tentatively) explained only if a general rescaling of priorities and attributed values between the Indian and the western scenario is performed: to start with, working for a multinational corporation is not perceived in India as a

privilege or as a special reason of pride. Working for a large scale global corporation is a condition linked in the western imaginary to western economic history, to the long term processes of industrial development, and to the hegemonic role it anyhow recalls -- issues that cannot easily apply to an emerging and postcolonial scenario. In consequence, the voluntary quitting of a well paid job also appears as a decision much less hard to take.

As a second step, the very meaning of the technological object is to be redefined in the Indian context: its highly symbolic and pervasive metaphorical power, shared and undisputed in our social scenario, is scaled down and resized back to simple material terms. Technologies are tools for measuring, instruments with relative power, just one technical possibility to construct knowledge among many possible others. Technology is not a metaphor of success, there is no technosphere myth; nor can technology be an index of development, a flawless strategy to exert control over reality; rather, it is pushed back to its original condition of artefact, useful device to measure an effect, instrument to evaluate the efficiency of a project. Technology cannot measure welfare, nor the rate of happiness, or the increased life standards of corporate workers.

Both described cultural aspects bring us towards a plausible assembled answer: (forms of) knowledge are reshaped and changed during processes of relocation and transfer: their meanings shift, their implications mutate. (Forms of) knowledge are flexible and adaptive entities subjected to the multiple, contextual, unpredictable interferences between the original and the final socio-cultural environments they travel through, modifying their assets of power and the potentialities of the receivers.

In particular, triggering processes of transfer of knowledge in a context of power imbalance, from a presumed hegemonic to a supposed subaltern subject, implies a major redefinition of the concepts' semantics and their metaphorical implications, including scientific or techno-scientific concepts. For the Indian young professionals quitting their jobs for the western corporation, the appropriation of technical knowledge becomes the venue to claim an autonomous national recognition. Despite being owned by the corporation, knowledge is nomadic, it empowers subjects, evolving, mutating with them while drawing and redefining their dynamic, shifting boundaries.

2.3 Sustainable/environmental/anthropocenic flux

Is it actually possible to reinterpret and to appropriate scientific concepts? Does the shift in scientific meaning always make sense? And above all, who can speak for a (scientific) concept that loses its meaning, that does not maintain its epistemological promises?

If we say that concepts at large are never politically neutral, we have a consistent part of the history of philosophy supporting our statement: the persuasive power of concepts is historically tied to the capacity of speech, to the empowered position of those who support it, to the possibility of naming and addressing through its categories some recognizable matter. Concepts do not live in an abstract and empty space where they are only true or false; they are brought about by bodies and objects, they are inside and about matter, therefore they are context dependant functions of space and time. Concepts contain a dynamic dimension that makes the study of cultures a necessary undertaking, and places the metaphor of *flux* at the top of recurring cultural figurations. But what about science? Is science not "Science"? Science is expected to be a proof, to be empirically well-constructed evidence. Science is figures that do not allow ambiguities. How does the figuration of flux

coexist with a scientific concept? Here, I wish to point out that figures, as data, are not always *given*; data are constructed, they are context-dependent arrays or partial evidences, therefore they are always incomplete; data and figures transform their meaning according to fluxes of hypotheses. Data as well as figures may be misleading, being pieces of multiple truths (Cartwright 2003, Hacking 2009).

Complexity is a good example of a serious and coherent scientific theory that allows for, and actually completely relies on, the coexistence of multiple truths. It is not possible to remain neutral when facing the many choices that complexity asks us to make: each complex phenomenon requires from the reader an active interpretation, a selection among the possible paths, a series of inclusions and several exclusions.

Complexity contains bifurcations, splitting consequences from the same sets of causes; it contains the arbitrary up-scaling of small and apparently irrelevant causes, unexpected amplifications of micro effects silently unfolded over long periods of time, and eventually bursting. And, most interesting for our present discourse, complexity contains scale invariance: once a mechanism has been explained at a given (data?) dimension, it can be replicated in larger and smaller scale systems, without losing in resolution when expanding, nor requiring a filter when contracting. The fractal representation of complexity is my favourite: it is fragmented though united, it is multiple though one dimensioned, and it is scale invariant: no zooming in or out can add or take away its detailed features. Normally, a fractal is also highly coloured. In such scenario, the reader of a complex system becomes a co-author of the meaning, a co-developer of the epistemological pattern. A sort of indeterminism borrowed from the theory of quanta invests the entire structure of meanings, an indeterminism that does not talk of final uncertainties of meaning, but rather emphasises the processes and the transitory phases of the construction of meaning.

There is an immediate reason for preferring a complex approach among the scientific theories available to explain reality: the reason is that reality is complex. Science is unfortunately too simple sometimes, for it simplifies reality in order to understand it, it breaks up difficulties into pieces to be solved one by one; but the individually resolved pieces do not fit back together to assemble reality. Luckily, complexity is never simple.

In a great paper written in 2010, Lakoff points out the risks of simplification, a strategy widely adopted when the frames we can use to explain emerging concepts or phenomena appear inadequate and failing. We always need frames in order to grasp awkward problems: a set of data (data once more!) does not have meaning in itself, without a frame around it. The process of understanding can not avoid framing, which networks between previous knowledge and new information. Framing is also a generative action, because understanding requires the construction of ever new frames that refer to and rely on previous existing ones. Facing the difficulties of 'giving an explanation' is not so severe a problem as the lack of frames, in Lakoff's view: when pertinent frames are absent, data acquire no meaning, and simplified frames appear to replace the too difficult, missing ones. A simpler frame providing a temporary and partial explanation is possibly locally more effective; a simple frame is easier to describe and remember; but its dialectic and popular success risks to occupy a permanent place in the human explanatory scenarios, preventing a more complex frame to be developed or even hypothesised.

Climate change is a typical complex problem, suffering a sever lack of proper framing. It contains multiple layers of meaning, a multiplicity of non linear cause-effect relations, the

coexistence of different scales. Since the frames we might rely on in order to refer to climate change core problems are often wrong, they may induce misrepresentations, and eventually long lasting misunderstandings. Wrong or too simple frames unfortunately survive their original meaning. Lakoff is very clear in blaming the political, deliberate use by American republicans of simplified and inadequate frames to address the climate change issues. Their goal is to hide, or anyway to underestimate, the role of human choices and responsibilities in modifying global climate. Polluting activities, industrial gas emissions, soil and water extended exploitation are all studied separately, described with different and non homogeneous parameters, so that the interlinks among the consequences of these actions do not show up. The environmentalists are weaker because their multi-layered and multi-problematic thought is too complex to define. The deficit of frames that connect human activities to global environmental effects creates a problem not just in terms of the possibilities to explain the present; rejecting or not developing such frames amounts to not taking responsibility for what else will happen in the near future. A frame we may in general benefit from is that of hypo-cognition, a condition that more and more characterizes the vast majority of attempts to grasp awkward global implications.

Luckily, frames are culture-dependent. A shift in location, or a shift in context, is a potential shift in the capacity to use frames. Actually, commonly shared frames are preferable in order to deal with a global problem like climate change: the hope is that, shifting from one cultural context to another, some new frame to describe the environment and the way it is changing can be intercepted, and therefore adopted. Nomadism is a wishful frame resource.

3. Superposition of fluxes

Let us go back to India. During my fieldwork in the corporation, I started following how the roles and actions of the workers changed, especially the roles of concept workers like programmers and researchers, once they quitted their Training-on-the-Job and became active proponents of new processes and products.

Among several advanced technologies, the corporation I investigated produces solar panels for industrial use: technologically sophisticated and perfect objects, and also expensive, bulky and heavy objects, typical outcomes of large industrial production. The Research Center in Bangalore, populated by commuters originating in the rural areas of Karnataka, just one year after the beginning of its research activities with locally hired personnel, in 2001, proposed the design of small and portable solar panels: low cost, lightweight and resistant, suitable to be installed on the roofs of fragile family dwellings; designed not to light a city, nor a building, but suitable to shed light in a room and to recharge a cell phone (Bougleux 2012a). The role played by the young Indian professionals as promoters of this innovation deserves some emphasis. The researchers performed the interesting double role of local and global subjects, constructing the material mediation and realizing the practical interface between distant and irreducible contexts, using technology as a connecting thread. They translated the rural needs into sustainable corporate innovations.

The corporate management, over the years, eventually welcomed the challenge launched by its peripheral but very lively Research Center, deciding to realize, after several phases of accurate check, to redesign and test the commercial production of the small solar panel. 'Mini-low-cost-solar' was presented to the global public as the result of a main corporate investment in research for

sustainable technologies, highlighted as the core product in the green production line, advertised with proud and enthusiastic tones. But the ethnography of productions tells a different story: the 'Mini-low-cost-solar' is the result of an emerging, unexpected, and surprising compromise between local and rural needs on one side, technological expertise and market constraints on the other. In a provocative synthesis, the corporation had appropriated its Indian researchers' ideas by attributing to their product the widely advertised green program, a quite prominent purpose in the corporation's strategies of communication.

If the corporation is intended as a single unitary entity, it can certainly boast about its capability of realizing green innovation; but inside its structure the credits and recognition for the green innovation success are deliberately directed towards the wrong department: they are attributed to a spin off dedicated to develop the corporate sustainable policies, sitting in New York and totally unrelated with the Bangalore Research Center. The only real shared statement at corporate level is that the mini solar panel is realized, it only costs two hundred dollars, it bears the brand of the multinational, which means that it is recognized worldwide as an efficient and reliable product. In fact it was soon widely requested, and in a short time it turned out to be a huge commercial success, initially geographically limited, then global.

In the corporation Research Center the skills and competencies to implement the Mini-low-cost-solar for family use were certainly already available, but the pressing question that makes these skills assemble and converge towards a realized object, an exemplary case of sustainable innovation, arrives from rural settings, through the personal, unplanned mediation of the local engineers employed in R&D.

These engineers find themselves in positions of interface between two worlds: they have studied in universities organized according to western standards, they live in big cosmopolitan cities, and work for foreign multinationals; but they also belong to the rural environment where their families still reside, far from road and rail networks, without electricity, left on the edge of the economic and social macro-processes that are transforming an always increasing part of India. They have the power to articulate the needs and demands of familiar contexts which they obviously know well in terms of the combinations of the existing technology that they know equally well.

Thanks to the cultural flux and hybrid implementation they embody, the corporation finds itself in the unprecedented position of being able to take into account the requirements of small and marginal communities that would have never entered the pages of its market analyses. The quest for technology expressed by rural settings cannot be classified through the categories used to describe the so called 'customer culture': instances from this part of the 'market' can be conveyed only silently inside the corporation by the continuative embodied translation of the employees.

The answer produced by the corporation in the form of new technology represents a reinterpretation of the rural needs that implies several steps of appropriation: standard cognitive elements and verified production procedures are reassembled and become basic components of a new specifically characterized construction: the Mini-low-cost-solar is a safe, efficient, personalized little new piece of reinterpreted technology.

This exemplary case has as final beneficiaries local domestic users, but the entire process can also be considered paradigmatic from another perspective: the sort of 'double exchange' triggered locally between the R&D and its rural context, but destined to expand and modify the mechanisms of

global equilibrium between economics and research. The market success of the low cost products, initially developed for a poorer target and soon welcomed in the market worldwide, proves that research can actually require high investments, but its results may then appear from unexpected directions; more, it proves that advanced technology can be economically affordable; and more, economically affordable technologies eventually pay off. In the present case study, all these transitions are made possible by the relocation-and-dislocation of ideas and people taken place within the corporation, a sort of unintended consequence of the neo-colonial process of corporate expansion. Far from being assimilated and conformed, the techno-scientific flux passing through the Bangalore Research Centre is, in our sense, nomadic enough to be creative, elusive and at least temporarily empowering.

At this point, it is worth asking whether the whole operation of Indian design of new technologies, the related growth of awareness and capability to intercept local needs, the global commercial success of sustainable green products, is actually a success for our cultural perspective, focussed on translation and appropriation of concepts as empowering tools, or a gift in terms of increased profits for the corporation.

These question should be addressed to the corporation workers employed at the R&D: is it more rewarding to identify with the corporate official narrative, telling the story of a global shared success without any individual author, or is there a prevailing feeling of misrecognition, the impression of being in some way victims of a credit denial, and of a subtraction of intellectual property? How deep is the appropriation process, how many unrecognized results can it stand for? Once more, ethnography provides surprising answers.

My informants tell me that the success of a product developed at the R&D of the corporation is perceived as a personal matter, as an episode of significant success in the private sphere: given the little or no identification with the corporate recognized brand, there is also little illusion (and delusion) for the brand's misconducts. The official corporate narrative about shared success is of course rejected as a whole, but the disappointment potentially tied to the missing recognition is also rejected. The innovative skills of the young professionals are to be recognized among Indian colleagues, among relatives and friends. The social level of recognition exclude the corporation official discourse in all its manifestations. While the value and success of innovation belong to the individual, and in the larger picture to India, the corporation is just depicted as the background subject that only provided the context that made the processes possible.

One more interesting and ambivalent role is also emerging for the reinterpreted corporation: while its actions appear wholly hetero-determined, only responding to the profit-oriented central logic, its very presence introduces a network of widespread and well-tested communication channels, and gives access to a series of competences and skills that may escape from the mere corporate applications, and that are actually re-signified in unexpected ways. The appropriation of the Research Centre is a slow, gradual, not dramatic, process that does not generate signs of rejection, but rather recalls the development of a symbiotic relationship. The degree of success of the appropriation process is also evident in the mild reaction of acquiescence that the corporation enacts, at least on the time scale of my observation. The open question is whether this type of appropriation is epistemic, functional, emotional; whether it is occasional or structural; so far, it is certainly not an economic appropriation, and this remains, both on political and ethical sides, the most limiting

aspect of this entire discourse on a large scale. However, I see margins of success on a small, individual scale: the young engineers, researchers and technicians whom I met in the laboratories, belonging simultaneously to two distant and different worlds, despite overlaps and interdependence are effective nomadic entities: their work performs a negotiation that develops an everyday interface between languages, logic and needs, ways of being and thinking. They reassemble the meanings, translate desires, break boundaries, escape norms, elude the corporation, fluctuate as superposition of possibilities.

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Campi di genere

L'etnografia visiva come sapere nomade per studiare il lavoro delle agricoltrici di montagna

Sara Roncaglia

Abstract (Italiano)

L'intervento riflette sull'utilizzo dell'etnografia visiva come sapere nomade (in senso fisico e riflessivo) per documentare il lavoro delle donne nell'agricoltura lombarda. Un sapere tecnico e antropologico che, durante le ricerche sul campo, parte dalle definizioni che le donne danno di sé per descrivere e raccontare le proprie esperienze professionali in relazione a contesti relazionali più ampi: la famiglia, il contesto geografico, abitativo, sociale e culturale. Lo strumento dell'intervista non strutturata dall'andamento biografico ha perciò proprio lo scopo di restituire quanto più possibile il punto di vista dell'intervistata e di consentire, nell'incontro riflessivo che si viene a creare, la costruzione di un archivio "vivo".

Abstract (English)

My paper discusses the use of visual ethnography as wandering knowledge creation, where researchers move reflectively across different contexts of place and culture, to study how women work in agriculture today. Visual ethnography applied to fieldwork combines technical savvy and anthropological learning to explore the varying definitions that women give of themselves as they describe their professional experiences and how they relate to a broader relational framework, cutting across their own family, geographic, social and cultural context. Adopting the biographical in-depth interview as its main research tool, it aims to ground anthropological analysis in the subjects own chosen standpoint, while the reflective encounter between the researcher and the researched gradually takes shape as a living narrative archive of the present state of women's work in agriculture.

La ricerca

Vorrei esplicitare da subito il carattere riflessivo di questo articolo, così come i relatori e le relatrici del Workshop *Pensieri nomadi, corpi in movimento - Exploring InFluxes and Cultures in Motion* sono stati invitati a fare, per interrogare e rileggere criticamente le nozioni di conoscenza e archivio, e per affrontare la ricerca e la disseminazione dei suoi risultati.

Il progetto esposto durante il workshop, *Agricoltrici per scelta. Etnografie di lavoro tra le produttrici agricole di montagna nella provincia di Como*¹⁵, nasce nel 2013 da un incontro tra due ricercatrici, Sara Roncaglia e Bianca Pastori¹⁶, interessate all'antropologia del lavoro rurale¹⁷ e la portavoce

¹⁵ Ricerca nata nell'ambito del progetto "Sviluppare e sostenere il ruolo delle donne in agricoltura - Valorizzare il patrimonio rurale della provincia" con il sostegno della Camera di Commercio, Industria, Artigianato e Agricoltura della provincia di Como (C.C.I.A.A.). Sara Roncaglia ha coordinato la ricerca con la stretta collaborazione di Bianca Pastori. Tutte e due hanno raccolto le testimonianze e hanno svolto la ricerca sul campo con la preziosa intermediazione di Chiara Nicolosi e le riprese audiovisive di Riccardo Apuzzo. L'articolo è stato scritto da Sara Roncaglia, che ha presentato il progetto al Workshop *Pensieri nomadi, corpi in movimento - Exploring InFluxes and Cultures in Motion* con una relazione inerente al proprio percorso di ricerca in relazione alle questioni di genere. Questo scritto è dedicato a Paola Clemente, bracciante agricola, morta il 13 luglio 2015.

¹⁶ Bianca Pastori è iscritta al Dottorato di ricerca in Studi storici, geografici, antropologici (curriculum Scienze Storiche e Antropologiche) interateneo - Università di Padova, Venezia e Verona - e conduce una ricerca sulle produttrici agricole di

dell'associazione Donne in Campo Lombardia (CIA)¹⁸, Chiara Nicolosi, per studiare le pratiche delle agricoltrici di montagna della provincia di Como attraverso l'etnografia visiva. Un incontro frutto di riflessioni plurali: da un lato sugli strumenti della ricerca storica e antropologica: una riflessività rivolta quindi alla soggettività delle ricercatrici, a quella dei soggetti della ricerca e dei mezzi attraverso i quali essa si realizza; dall'altro sull'importanza di rappresentare il lavoro rurale femminile e di narrarlo dopo i profondi cambiamenti che hanno investito l'agricoltura italiana dal secondo dopo guerra a oggi.

Tra gli anni cinquanta e sessanta, infatti, si fa largo in Italia e in particolare in Lombardia il concetto di sistema agro-industriale, teorizzato originariamente negli Stati Uniti, ovvero un sistema che presenta una forte interazione tra le parti che lo compongono e reagisce in modo integrato agli stimoli che provengono dai cambiamenti economici e sociali come l'internazionalizzazione dei mercati, il cambiamento delle politiche, le nuove dinamiche dei consumi e le diverse esigenze alimentari (Romani 1963; Casati 2000; Cafagna 1989, 31-112). Muta anche la qualità del lavoro in agricoltura, dove si assiste a un ampliamento delle conoscenze tecniche di carattere manuale, meccanico e chimico richieste all'agricoltore. Vi è di pari passo, in linea con una tendenza più generale di "disincanto agricolo", un successivo allontanamento dalla conoscenza legata alla vegetazione spontanea, al calendario delle opere e dei cicli dell'attività agricola tradizionale, con le sue tecniche e le sue fasi produttive, che implica il progressivo depauperamento di un sapere implicito accumulato nel corso di secoli dalle generazioni precedenti (Camerlenghi 1999; Friedland Furnari e Pugliese 1981; Roncaglia 2014, 57-107). L'essenza dei mutamenti in atto negli anni cinquanta nell'agricoltura italiana, e in parte di quelli tuttora in fieri oggi, era effettivamente di carattere antropologico, perché si andava costituendo un blocco sociale e politico nuovo, fondato sulla media azienda capitalistica, in grado di rispondere ai legami che venivano instaurandosi tra agricoltura e industria. Questo processo ha prodotto profondi cambiamenti nei rapporti sociali, nelle conoscenze

montagna. È socia e responsabile del settore catalogazione e archiviazione dell'Associazione AVoce/etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio.

¹⁷ Elenco sinteticamente i titoli delle ricerche svolte durante gli ultimi cinque anni su tale argomento, gli anni durante i quali sono state svolte, le ricercatrici e i ricercatori coinvolti e le istituzioni promotrici dei diversi progetti:

1-*Imprenditori agricoli in Lombardia. Saperi e pratiche delle relazioni del cibo nel Parco agricolo Sud Milano* (2010-12): con Riccardo Apuzzo, Giacomo Cocetta, Umberto Gillio, Bianca Pastori, Maria Chiara Piccolo, Sara Roncaglia, Bernardo Sella, Giuliano Severino, Daniela Testa, Sara Zanisi, REIL-Registro delle eredità immateriali lombarde, AESS-Archivio di etnografia e storia sociale di Regione Lombardia, Consorzio Cuccagna, AVoce/etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio;

2-*Sulle sponde del fiume invisibile. Memorie e tradizioni intorno a mulini, agricoltura e industria della Valle Olona* (2010-12): con Giuditta Brasca, Francesca De Matteis, Bianca Pastori, Sara Roncaglia, Diego Ronzio, Andrea Strambio de Castillia, Sara Zanisi, Registro delle eredità immateriali lombarde, AESS-Archivio di etnografia e storia sociale di Regione Lombardia, Legautonomie Lombardia, Consorzio del fiume Olona, AVoce/etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio;

3-*Agricoltrici per scelta. Etnografie di lavoro delle produttrici agricole di montagna nella provincia di Como* (2013-2014): con Chiara Nicolosi, Bianca Pastori, Diego Ronzio, Sara Roncaglia, Donne in Campo (CIA – Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori), Camera di Commercio della provincia di Como, AVoce/etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio;

4-*La produzione del vino in Val Poschiavo* (2014-): con Riccardo Apuzzo, Sara Roncaglia, E.C.H.I. II, Società Storica della Val Poschiavo, AVoce/etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio;

5-*#FoodPeople* (2015-): con Riccardo Apuzzo, Simona Casonato, Elena Costantino, Umberto Gillio, Maria Chiara Piccolo, Sara Roncaglia, Fondazione Museo della scienza e della tecnologia di Milano, AVoce/etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio.

Tutto il materiale di ricerca raccolto è depositato nell'archivio di AVoce/etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio presso l'Archivio di Etnografia e Storia Sociale della Regione Lombardia (AESS).

¹⁸ Riporto dal sito di Donne in Campo: *Donne in Campo-Cia è la principale Associazione italiana di imprenditrici e donne dell'agricoltura, riconosciuta ed apprezzata nel territorio italiano, presso le Istituzioni nazionali, europee ed internazionali.[...] L'Associazione Donne in Campo, nata nel 1999, è componente della Confederazione italiana agricoltori ed è presente nel territorio italiano con gruppi attivi di imprenditrici.* Per maggiori riferimenti <http://www.donneincampo.it/donneincampo/>

tecniche, nella gestione del tempo e del lavoro. La portata antropologica del mutamento è stata talmente rilevante da indurre, in molte regioni italiane, alla raccolta spesso spontanea di una documentazione degli oggetti e delle pratiche del mondo che andava scomparendo, con la diffusione di musei etnografici in grado di testimoniare l'esistenza (e la progressiva scomparsa) della "civiltà contadina" e delle "tecnologie contadine".¹⁹

Queste brevi premesse hanno fatto emergere le domande che ci siamo poste per condurre la ricerca, ponendo da subito l'accento su "come" indagare le trasformazioni del lavoro femminile in relazione alle considerazioni delle testimoni sui cambiamenti avvenuti nel corso delle loro esperienze, e "quali" strumenti utilizzare per restituire gli aspetti performativi della cultura materiale.

Dai presupposti citati è nato il progetto di raccogliere in cinque videografie le testimonianze di Cristina Binda, delle sorelle Michela e Sonia Maldini, di Maria Ida Anghileri, di Matteo e di sua madre Marisa Del Vecchio, di Sofia Montorfano. Contadine, imprenditrici agricole e salariate, associate di Donne in Campo, interpellate al fine di mostrare l'incessante attività legata alla produzione e alla distribuzione di cibo. Le protagoniste, attraverso le loro storie di vita e di lavoro, hanno raccontato le trasformazioni dei modi di produzione agricoli, gli impatti sul territorio, le pratiche tradizionali, gli stimoli e/o gli ostacoli che provengono da un'economia alimentare globalizzata.

In cerca di una strada

La ricerca è partita dalle definizioni che le donne hanno dato di sé per descrivere e raccontare le proprie esperienze lavorative in rapporto a quadri relazionali più ampi: la famiglia, il contesto geografico, abitativo, sociale e culturale entro cui vivono (Matalucci 2012). La scelta di iniziare dalle narrazioni e dai vissuti autobiografici delle interlocutrici da subito ha permesso di mettere a fuoco alcuni passaggi classici della storia agraria: la rivoluzione verde degli anni cinquanta/sessanta, l'abbandono delle terre e l'antropizzazione della montagna come spazio di residenza e di produzione industriale, il conseguente consumo di suolo negli anni settanta/ottanta, la dipendenza dalla politica agricola comune europea (PAC) e la multifunzionalità degli anni ottanta/novanta. La ricerca si è però concentrata sull'ultimo quindicennio, ovvero dalla fine degli anni novanta a oggi, per provare a indagare le trasformazioni del lavoro agricolo, la diversificazione delle strategie produttive, dei canali di vendita e di gestione della terra.

La scelta di un'autobiografia *al femminile* è stata però anche il portato di una personale riflessione critica rispetto alla mancanza di un'attenzione precipua alle questioni di genere nel corso degli anni (Nagy Hesse-Biber 2013; Di Cori 2000). Per esporre questo processo vorrei riportare per intero un paragrafo dell'introduzione scritta da Paola Tabet al suo libro *Le dita tagliate*:

Un solo caso, quello raccontato di recente da una nota antropologa, Françoise Héritier (intervista trasmessa il 24 gennaio 2014 dalla tv ARTE, programma a cura di W. Kleiner). Françoise Héritier ha condotto a lungo ricerche in Burkina Faso. Ebbene, nel corso di anni di lavoro sul terreno, aveva visto infinite volte le bambine piccolissime chiedere da bere o cibo alla madre, ma questo veniva loro

¹⁹ Vorrei citare a titolo esemplificativo il museo agricolo "Angelo Masperi" di Albairate e il Museo Di Civiltà Contadina "Luisa Carminati" di S. Giuliano Milanese.

assai spesso rifiutato. Per i maschi questo non avveniva. E Héritier racconta di aver messo “un tempo folle”, anni e anni, prima di vedere, di accorgersi di questa differenza nell’accesso di maschi e femmine all’alimentazione. Quando finalmente si accorge di questa discriminazione e ne chiede il perché, una donna le spiega che siccome “una donna in tutta la sua vita non potrà mai soddisfare le sue necessità, tant’è che ci si abitui subito” (Tabet 2014, 17-18).

Un passaggio ripreso dalla stessa Tabet nel volume quando sottolinea l’esperienza di Héritier come “il non vedere ciò che pure si ha chiaramente davanti agli occhi” (Tabet 2014, 127 nota 6). Una visione *mozzata* emersa in modo progressivamente sempre più evidente nel constatare come non avessi mai dedicato un progetto di ricerca esclusivamente al lavoro delle donne, alla loro “conoscenza situata” (Haraway 1991), e alle specificità che emergono da una posizione ritenuta marginale. Una sottrazione già evidenziata da Amalia Signorelli quando ricordando, in un articolo del 1982, quell’importante fase dell’antropologia italiana caratterizzata da ricerche svolte prevalentemente nel Sud Italia sulle condizioni di vita delle classi subalterne contadine, afferma:

se rileggo i taccuini e le registrazioni delle ricerche sul campo che svolsi in quegli anni[...], ritrovo volti e voci di donne più che dimenticati, rimossi; [...]; di cui – ed è questo quello che mi sconcerca – non c’è traccia nelle pubblicazioni che da quelle ricerche furono ricavate (Signorelli 1982, 7; una constatazione già evidenziata da Ribeiro Corossacz e Gribaldo 2010).

Dagli anni cinquanta e sessanta però il dibattito sul ruolo delle donne nel mondo agricolo si è ampliato e ha visto, limitandoci all’ambito italiano, la partecipazione di storiche e antropologhe come Clara Gallini (1981), Giannetta Murru Corrigan (1990), Gabriella Da Re (1990), Cristina Papa (1985), Annamaria Rivera (1983). Nelle loro ricerche sono stati messi in evidenza, tra gli altri, temi specifici come l’occultamento del ruolo produttivo delle donne e il loro conseguente sfruttamento, le ripercussioni della divisione sessuale del lavoro, la fine del loro ruolo produttivo in seno alla famiglia patriarcale di autosussistenza e il loro sottostimato peso economico e morale. Un confronto con la letteratura citata mi ha spinto a formulare alcune considerazioni, in relazione al tema del genere e alla mia miopia, emerse durante la raccolta delle testimonianze. Tali considerazioni si sono coagulate intorno a due poli: uno di carattere metodologico e uno epistemologico. Il primo mette in luce l’importanza data al *come* si fa ricerca, e non al *quando* o al *dove*. Pensare l’etnografia come uno stile narrativo e un lavoro riflessivo. In tal senso, si presuppone che le soggettività delle persone coinvolte siano rilevanti e che siano inscindibili dalle narrazioni del sé: il sé dei soggetti indagati e dei soggetti che indagano. Una modalità di raccogliere ed esporre ciò che emerge dalla ricerca che tenga conto delle condizioni necessarie per accendere la riflessività delle attrici che sono oggetto della ricerca, ma che chiama in causa anche la riflessività delle ricercatrici su se stesse, concentrandole soprattutto sulle condizioni (e i condizionamenti) che hanno influito sulla ricerca.

Le considerazioni di carattere epistemologico propongono un progressivo allontanamento dalla domanda di ricerca, perché la *non* domanda, ovvero ciò che *non* si cercava, è in realtà la vera domanda, ciò che emerge come portato precipuo della ricerca stessa, una sorta di epifania in grado di far vacillare i rassicuranti schemi cognitivi di partenza. L’intervista biografica non strutturata indaga esattamente questa materializzazione con i suoi impliciti e le sue sottrazioni. Lascia che sia la testimone stessa a definire l’agenda di ricerca e quindi rinuncia, intenzionalmente, a rispondere a

domande come: “di che cosa parleremo?”; “che cosa andiamo cercando?” e “come faremo a trovarlo?”. Quello che si attende chi sceglie di lavorare attraverso questo incontro è di trovarsi a parlare di ciò che è importante per chi è ricercato e non di ciò che è importante a priori per chi cerca. Il focus stesso del lavoro di descrizione e comprensione è derivato da coloro con cui la ricercatrice entra in relazione nel campo di ricerca: il focus che gli attori e le attrici utilizzano per dare ordine alle proprie vite e alle proprie relazioni entro il contesto lavorativo.

Campi di genere

Come coniugare il nostro progetto con il dibattito contemporaneo sugli studi di genere? Per cercare di rispondere a questa domanda, riporto le parole di Chiara Nicolosi, la quale, durante uno dei nostri primi colloqui, ci ha spiegato la nascita e le finalità dell'associazione Donne in Campo:

Donne in Campo è nata nel 1999 per permettere una partecipazione più attiva delle donne al mondo dell'agricoltura, o meglio una maggiore rappresentanza perché la partecipazione attiva c'era già nelle aziende agricole, [...] per permettere di costruire un gruppo, una rete, un momento di confronto, di aggregazione al femminile. In Lombardia [l'associazione] è nata da un corso di formazione, Demetra, sul ruolo delle donne nelle aziende agricole, che è durato per parecchio tempo ed era rivolto a donne imprenditrici, titolari d'azienda e anche a donne che lavoravano come coadiuvanti. Per tutte l'obiettivo era quello di valorizzare il loro ruolo. [...] Gli anni novanta in agricoltura erano proprio gli anni in cui si iniziava a pensare, a chiedersi: “ma dobbiamo sempre produrre in questo modo?”. Si pensava alla qualità e non solo alla quantità, al rapporto con l'ambiente, alla sua difesa, si faceva più pressante la necessità di difendere il suolo agricolo. C'è un legame tra questa voglia di ripensare all'agricoltura, partendo dal proprio ruolo femminile, l'impresa, e la situazione economica.[...]

Molte nuove aziende sono fatte da donne, in particolare quelle che vengono da fuori. Poi ci sono le figlie e le mogli degli agricoltori: ci sono sia le une che le altre. Adesso i dati ci dicono che circa il 30% di titolari di imprese agricole sono donne, in alcune realtà anche di più. Il protagonismo femminile c'è in tutte le filiere ma più nell'agriturismo, nelle fattorie didattiche, nella multifunzionalità, è aumentato anche in sinergia con i nuovi orientamenti dell'agricoltura. Le donne sono più presenti dove si è introdotta un'innovazione in questo senso, nell'innovazione introdotta dalla diversificazione, che può essere nella fattoria didattica, nel biologico, nella vendita diretta.[...] La necessità più grossa è il desiderio di confronto. La questione del protagonismo femminile esiste, ecco perché torniamo a Donne in Campo, perché ci sono ma non si vedono. [...] Una cosa importante per Donne in Campo è questa assoluta sinergia sui temi che si affrontano nelle diverse realtà, si è creato un linguaggio comune. [...] Mentre ora si è tutto molto burocratizzato, lavorare con le donne per me, che faccio il mio lavoro per passione, è l'occasione per parlare di agricoltura veramente, del futuro dell'agricoltura ma non solo, anche del futuro di molte altre cose.²⁰

Dalle sue parole emerge come da subito il nostro progetto abbia adottato le questioni di genere come cardine esplicito della ricerca, benché l'assunzione di questa posizione di partenza non sia stata

²⁰ Intervista raccolta da Bianca Pastori e Sara Roncaglia.

priva di criticità.²¹ Perché, come dettagliatamente spiega Carolyn Sachs in *Gendered Fields* (1996), si è assistito negli anni a un progressivo allontanamento tra la prospettiva del femminismo (Di Cori 2000), espresso prevalentemente in contesti urbani, e gli studi sulla ruralità, e tra teoria sociale e analisi delle relazioni di genere nei contesti rurali. Una marginalità progressiva della riflessione teorica sul lavoro delle donne in agricoltura colmata spesso solo da studiose che, recentemente, hanno tentato di far emergere l'osservazione femminile sulla ruralità attraverso prospettive sull'uso della scienza, della proprietà, della divisione sociale del lavoro, del degrado ambientale, delle ristrutturazioni economiche globali che trasferiscono persone in cerca di lavoro, delle diverse forme di complicità e resistenza all'autorità (Rodda 1991; Ponts, Schminck e Spring 1988; Acosta-Belen e Bose 1990; Blumberg 1981; Harding 1986; Marglin e Marglin 1990; Chambers, Pacey e Thrupp 1989; Mohanty, Torres e Russo 1991; Faralli, Andreozzi e Tiengo 2014).

La mia proposta non è quella di reiterare l'utopia rurale né di riproporre la stereotipata dicotomia tra città e campagna: una dicotomia che nega i continui spostamenti e le interazioni di persone, creando di fatto più un continuum che una divisione, ma di ripensare il *noi* femminile in modo non normativo ed escludente, ma eterogeneo e plurale. Una posizione descritta più volte da studiose all'interno degli studi di genere, che tra gli anni ottanta e novanta hanno riconosciuto una stratificazione e una differenziazione all'interno di ciò che si considerava in precedenza una categoria unitaria (Moore 1988; Diaz Derocatez e Zavala 1985; Butler 2013; Ribeiro Corossacz e Gribaldo 2010). Una prospettiva teorica che fa dell'intersezionalità uno strumento di analisi volto non più solo a rendere visibili soggetti marginalizzati, ma in grado di esplicitare “nella molteplicità e simultaneità il carattere costitutivo delle forme di potere e dei processi di soggettivazione nelle società contemporanee” (Perilli e Ellena 2012, 135; un'ulteriore analisi in Marchetti, 2013).

Parafrasando un testo ormai classico del pensiero femminista *White Woman Listen!* (Carby 1982) le agricoltrici potrebbero scrivere: *Urban Woman Listen!* per mostrare come il mondo rurale sia diventato negli ultimi anni il fulcro di un dibattito che oltrepassa i limiti geografici e territoriali per immettersi in scenari transnazionali, dove le stesse agricoltrici si fanno portatrici di istanze ecologiche, ambientali, culturali e sociali. La loro antica posizione come soggetti fuori dalla storia mostra in tal senso tutta la sua fragilità. Il campo di studi si è modificato con la fine dello sviluppo, il crollo della distinzione tra rurale e urbano e l'influenza crescente del transnazionalismo. Le teorie sulla post-ruralità (Kearney 1996) mostrano un soggetto attraversato da una profonda intersezionalità, espressione dell'interrelazione tra coalizioni di diverse identità che intersecano le posizioni di classe, di genere, di provenienza geografica. Così le agricoltrici esprimono una tensione verso politiche agricole che ridefiniscono la questione agraria in una duplice prospettiva: da un lato vi è uno spostamento dalla terra e gli altri fattori della produzione agricola verso campi di significato più ampi

²¹ Riporto un paragrafo dal sito di Donne in Campo : L'Associazione opera per l'integrazione di genere nel settore agricolo, fattore chiave per uno sviluppo rurale sostenibile e per adeguare in tal senso la legislazione. Attraverso gruppi attivi di imprenditrici e funzionarie promuove l'imprenditorialità femminile, sostiene reti di donne, assiste e forma modelli o alleanze di imprenditrici e organizza iniziative miranti a migliorare lo spirito imprenditoriale, la professionalità e la sicurezza delle donne nelle zone rurali e favorirne l'inserimento negli organi direttivi di imprese e associazioni. Sviluppa intese e collaborazioni con le associazioni femminili del mondo agricolo, del mondo imprenditoriale, dei settori economico e sociale, con particolare riferimento a quelle delle piccole e medie imprese a livello territoriale, nazionale ed internazionale. Ma soprattutto elabora una “visione” di genere dell'agricoltura italiana e del suo sviluppo, dello stato dei territori e delle culture rurali in un'ottica di preservazione e innovazione della straordinaria cultura agro-alimentare italiana (www.donneincampo.it).

come i diritti umani dei residenti delle aree rurali e le questioni ecologiche della regione in cui vivono; dall'altro una sempre più ampia presa di consapevolezza dell'importanza del loro ruolo nei processi espressione di un'agricoltura sostenibile, che faccia un minor uso di fitofarmaci, comporti un minor sfruttamento animale e propugni un miglior utilizzo delle risorse non rinnovabili (terra e acqua). Una consapevolezza che sposa temi più ampi, come i diritti dei lavoratori e delle lavoratrici, l'eco-politica, i movimenti transnazionali di tutela della terra, il diritto al cibo, la sovranità e la sicurezza alimentare. Una tensione che, come scrive Marshall Sahlins, esprime il "rapporto tra l'azione produttiva del mondo e l'organizzazione simbolica dell'esperienza" (Sahlins 1994, 14). Questi spostamenti erodono le categorie utilizzate fino a ora per definire le agricoltrici e li riconfigurano soggetti di collettività trasversali, espandendone la definizione sociale della persona.

Donne in Campo fa incontrare le esperienze di queste collettività trasversali attraverso seminari e convegni in cui emergono le riflessioni fin qui tracciate, questioni che intrecciano genere, lavoro e ruralità in una dimensione locale e sovranazionale. Durante l'incontro nazionale "Donne e agricoltura: linfa vitale della montagna"²² organizzato a Como nel 2013 alcune voci delle associate hanno elaborato questi temi come segue.

Maria Annunziata Bizzarri, vicepresidente nazionale di Donne in Campo che gestisce l'azienda agricola "Il Lago" a Casoli Val di Lima, in Toscana, racconta così la propria esperienza:

Io vengo da un piccolo paese che si chiama Casoli in Val di Lima, che fa parte della valle del Serchio, nel Comune di Bagni di Lucca (LC) in Toscana. [...] Dalla fine della seconda guerra mondiale ad oggi questo progressivo abbandono è stato una delle cause principali dei disastri idrogeologici, l'abbiamo visto anche pochi mesi fa con frane, alluvioni, perché il bosco e i terreni sono ormai lasciati abbandonati. E sono le donne soprattutto che hanno continuato e continuano anche oggi a mantenere vive queste zone e sono fondamentali perché di fatto attraverso un'agricoltura multifunzionale c'è la possibilità di continuare a mantenere vivi questi territori e questi piccoli paesi con la salvaguardia dell'ambiente, del territorio e di tutti i servizi che ad esso sono collegati. Le donne sono la spina dorsale di queste aree montane. Nel paese dove io ho iniziato mettendo su un'azienda agricola nel '97, dal '97 ad oggi ci sono cinque donne, non del posto, che magari sono figlie, seconde o terze generazioni degli immigrati di un tempo, che sono tornate e hanno messo su a loro volta delle piccole aziende, delle aziende agricole o delle attività per far rinascere il paese. Un'azienda per vivere qui deve necessariamente essere un'azienda multifunzionale, quando siamo andati a vivere in questo paese la prima cosa che abbiamo fatto è stata vedere quello che il territorio offriva perché non potevamo introdurre cose al di fuori di quello che naturalmente nasceva. Per cui il castagno, la raccolta di funghi, la raccolta di mirtilli, la coltivazione di piccoli frutti e il recupero delle cultivar antiche. [...] L'ultima cosa a cui siamo approdati nel 2011 è stata l'agricoltura sociale e solidale, l'agriturismo è diventato un centro di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo provenienza Libia quando c'è stato lo scoppio della guerra. Molte persone che vivevano in Libia sono state allontanate, scacciate, messe sui barconi e – come dicono loro – lanciate verso l'Italia, venivano considerate delle bombe umane.

²² Incontro nazionale "Donne e agricoltura: linfa vitale della montagna" organizzato da Donne in Campo il 19/20 febbraio 2013 a Villa Gallia a Como. Gli interventi di seguito proposti sono stati tagliati per motivi di spazio, ma è possibile scaricarli integralmente sul sito www.avoce.eu.

Rosa Giovanna Castagna, vice presidente della Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori della Sicilia che gestisce l'azienda agricola "Castagna" a Tusa, in provincia di Messina, articola il proprio impegno con le seguenti parole:

Fare agricoltura – in montagna o in pianura, parlo della montagna perché io la faccio lì e per me è normale farla così – significa presidiare il territorio, ne abbiamo parlato tanto, lo diciamo tutti e quindi se lo diciamo tutti evidentemente è veramente importante; non abbandonare le terre, qui oggi si è parlato della montagna, però in Sicilia c'è stato un abbandono progressivo delle terre che non riguarda esclusivamente la montagna o la pianura, ma riguarda tutte le terre e questo ha portato alla perdita di un presidio territoriale e di una salvaguardia territoriale. [...] Il ruolo delle donne all'interno dell'attività agricola è sempre stato fondamentale, è un connubio indissolubile, mi sembra quasi superfluo doverlo ricordare. Si è parlato del ruolo della donna all'interno dell'azienda, sorvolo su questo e vorrei porre l'attenzione sul ruolo della donna in termini di conquista, nel grande movimento di conquista delle terre attraverso le lotte contadine che risale agli anni cinquanta e sessanta; nel dicembre 2012 ho avuto il privilegio di partecipare all'allestimento di una mostra, preparata ed organizzata dal Coordinamento Donne della CGIL, dal titolo "Peppina, Maria e le altre". Maria e Peppina sono due nomi molto diffusi nel nostro territorio; la mostra affrontava la vita di queste donne che si sono spese per l'emancipazione femminile. Molte di queste lotte sono state fatte in campagna perché le donne sono state protagoniste della conquista di quelle terre e di un riscatto sociale che si è voluto a tutti i costi. So molto di questo perché io sono figlia di questa cultura, sono figlia dell'agricoltura e sono figlia di una cultura di conquista, di lotta per l'affermazione, non solo di diritti, ma anche di ciò che sembra ovvio ma purtroppo non lo è.

Infine Mara Longhin, presidente nazionale di Donne in Campo, descrive il rapporto tra l'associazione e le associate e, più in generale, l'atteggiamento imprenditoriale delle agricoltrici di montagna che hanno partecipato al convegno:

Una premessa importante: capacità di rappresentare le nostre istanze. Donne in Campo nasce per questo, perché all'interno della Confederazione le imprenditrici agricole si sono rese conto che hanno una visione di genere, quindi noi facciamo agricoltura in modo diverso. Secondo punto: perché le donne in questa occasione non hanno parlato di fondi, di essere remunerate eccetera? Perché le donne partono da un progetto di vita, le donne scelgono di fare agricoltura, scelgono che loro vita sia legata ad un mondo particolare, perché nell'azienda agricola ci portano la loro famiglia, le loro capacità di conciliare tempi di vita, lavoro e attività. E quindi creano un progetto di vita e anche l'accesso ai fondi nasce in modo diverso. La donna dice: ho un progetto dove metto dinamismo e flessibilità. E poi cosa fa? Decide di vedere se c'è la disponibilità di accedere a dei fondi. Prima pensa al progetto e poi va a vedere. [...] Cioè noi facciamo business, quindi anche noi siamo imprese dove c'è per noi e per altri economia, il fatto di portare a casa un reddito, però il nostro modo di fare impresa è un momento in cui privilegiamo, perché fa parte di noi stesse, i valori. In questo nostro modo di raccontare le aziende credo che emerga moltissimo questo aspetto valoriale. All'interno delle nostre aziende portiamo sostenibilità ambientale, sostenibilità sociale, in tutti i discorsi delle donne che hanno parlato stamattina traspare l'importanza delle relazioni, che diventano elemento fondamentale ancora di più in un territorio di montagna. [...] Altra cosa che mi piace ed è venuta fuori stamattina è l'orgoglio, l'orgoglio dell'imprenditrice di appartenere

ad un mondo perché lo sceglie. Se una volta, e penso alla mia mamma, vedevi queste donne che, in un mondo agricolo com'era l'Italia di allora, erano sempre pronte a lavorare, a testa bassa, disponibili, però nel momento in cui si doveva andare ad un tavolo di discussione la donna non c'era mai, la donna stava a casa; era la forza lavoro, ma anche la forza che decideva, faceva delle scelte all'interno dell'azienda perché cercava di capire quali potevano essere i momenti giusti, come affrontare il mercato, però al momento in cui doveva portare una voce tendeva a delegare, mai una volta che la donna ha chiesto un protagonismo. Oggi siamo arrivati a questo nuovo approccio che è quello del protagonismo, ed ecco perché nasce Donne in Campo: chiediamo più protagonismo.

L'etnografia visiva

La metodologia della ricerca, che ha intrecciato tutti discorsi esposti, è l'etnografia visiva, uno strumento qualitativo di raccolta e di analisi per il lavoro sul campo (Marano 2011; Pennacini 2005). Collaborando a più mani, i dialoghi che hanno sostenuto teoricamente la ricerca, si sono intrecciati con quelli propri delle tecniche della videoripresa. L'etnografia visiva ha così intersecato riflessione epistemologica ed esperienza tecnica. Il video ha reso più evidenti le forme di costruzione del sapere, fornendo uno strumento semanticamente più pieno e ricco di documentazione e archiviazione del materiale raccolto.

Abbiamo lavorato su un duplice fronte: da un lato abbiamo cercato di restituire quanto più possibile il punto di vista dell'intervistata; dall'altro la documentazione visiva delle pratiche è nata dallo sforzo di tenere unite la dimensione narrativa a quella dell'esperienza materiale. Dalle molte ore di registrazione sono stati tratti dei brevi montaggi, pubblicati previo consenso delle intervistate, per favorire la condivisione non solo del momento etnografico, ma dell'intera riflessione svolta sulla produzione della documentazione audiovisiva e sulla sua restituzione.

L'etnografia visiva ha espresso così il proprio nomadismo: tra saperi tecnici, epistemologie, conoscenze situate, geografie disseminate e pratiche condivise. Durante la ricerca abbiamo lavorato con due operatori video, che hanno ripreso le diverse fasi del progetto: Sara Roncaglia (intervistatrice) e Bianca Pastori (operatrice²³) sono state l'ombra l'una dell'altra per raccogliere colloqui, conversazioni, pratiche con e delle testimoni; Riccardo Apuzzo (operatore) ha inserito il parlato all'interno di cornici paesaggistiche più ampie, per valorizzare la connessione tra i discorsi e gli scenari naturali.

Si potrebbe intravedere nella presenza di due videocamere una sorta di conflitto tra una visione interpretativa, autoriale e una più documentativa, "realistica". Dicotomie che ripercorrono due approcci storicamente presenti nella disciplina: l'approccio positivo, per cui la produzione di un film deve mirare solo alla documentazione nel modo più obiettivo possibile, nell'ottica propria della cosiddetta "etnografia di salvataggio". Il materiale girato deve essere rielaborato e utilizzato come prova in supporto di un ragionamento verbale; l'approccio interpretativo, per cui la costruzione del film da parte degli etnografi visivi avviene intorno a una linea narrativa che emerge dall'azione.

²³ Definisco, per esigenze di schematizzazione i nostri ruoli, con questi due termini. Nella concretezza della ricerca sul campo, tutte le fasi del lavoro sono state condivise e partecipate.

Attraverso questa prospettiva essi consentono la trasmissione del senso degli eventi filmati dal punto di vista dei protagonisti.

Le due diverse posizioni hanno percorso le traiettorie proprie dell'epistemologia antropologica divisa tra un'aspirazione verso la costruzione di una scienza naturale, che ponesse il proprio sguardo distaccato sul soggetto studiato, e gli approcci ermeneutico-interpretativi dove vi è un coinvolgimento dello studioso e dove vi è la consapevolezza delle trasformazioni sociali e culturali innescate dall'incontro tra ricercatore e soggetto studiato. In questa dicotomia si assiste alla presunzione, da parte dei ricercatori, che i soggetti ritratti non riconoscano il carattere di costruzione culturale delle immagini prodotte, una *messa in scena* a cui partecipano studiosi e studiati in modo complementare. Importante, per il nostro gruppo di ricerca, è stato da subito dichiarare questa costruzione, anche attraverso immagini di backstage, in cui si vedessero le dinamiche di produzione del resoconto filmico. Inoltre è dalle parole stesse delle testimoni che sono nate le sceneggiature dei cinque video ritratti. Attraverso questa prospettiva abbiamo voluto evidenziare il bagaglio di esperienze che ogni protagonista portava con sé: una stratificazione di saperi emersi attraverso l'incontro con il gruppo di ricerca. In conclusione, la produzione del girato è un intreccio tra le teorie antropologiche che hanno fatto da cornice al progetto, le tecnologie della videoripresa, l'esperienza del lavoro dei soggetti protagonisti, le percezioni soggettive delle ricercatrici e delle testimoni, gli stereotipi su ciò che dovesse confluire all'interno del montaggio etnografico, e non da ultimo le ideologie estetizzanti dell'immagine (Altin e Parmeggiani 2008; Artoni 1992; Calisi 1960; Canevacci 2001; Carpitella 1982; Chiozzi 2008).

Sottolineo un aspetto, particolarmente importante, utilizzato come protocollo durante la ricerca, ovvero il mutuo controllo del girato tra ricercatrice e testimone. I commenti delle protagoniste hanno fatto nascere in vari modi nuove intuizioni su fatti che in un primo momento potevano non sembrare meritevoli di commento. La visione del montato e quindi l'esperienza della oggettivazione delle esperienze, a cui prima le protagoniste potevano partecipare in modo irriflesso, hanno portato ad avanzare osservazioni e istituire correlazioni inedite.

La restituzione del girato

Il montaggio delle interviste ha tenuto conto degli obiettivi di una ricerca etnografica svolta con e per Donne in Campo, ovvero poter utilizzare il girato come spunto di riflessione e di conoscenza per la vita collettiva delle associate, diffondere le esperienze di vita e di lavoro delle agricoltrici a un pubblico più vasto, e creare un dibattito sui temi emersi.²⁴ Così abbiamo deciso di ritrarre ognuna delle nostre intervistate in un montaggio di circa cinque minuti, facendolo ruotare intorno a una tematica espressa con particolare enfasi dalla testimone. Tematica associata a una parola, spesso

²⁴ In tal senso ci siamo mosse anche per disseminare il progetto dopo la sua conclusione. Elenco alcune degli incontri realizzati: partecipazione al convegno del 23 maggio presso la Biblioteca Comunale di Como dal titolo "Le radici e il futuro. Sguardi sull'impegno delle donne nell'agricoltura dell'Alta Lombardia" organizzato da Donne in Campo Lombardia, insieme a CIA Alta Lombardia e al Comune di Como. Presentazione della ricerca presso l'università della montagna di Edolo nel modulo *Donne e imprenditoria in montagna: agricoltrici per scelta*, il 21 maggio 2014. Partecipazione al seminario "Le buone pratiche agronomiche per un'agricoltura più sostenibile e capace di garantire cibo salubre per tutti" organizzato dall'Associazione Donne in Campo Lombardia il 10 -11 Dicembre 2014 a Cislano presso la Cascina Forestina. Inoltre le interviste sono state proiettate sul Treno Verde di Legambiente il 10 e 11 aprile 2015 per le scolaresche e sono diventate parte di una mostra permanente dal titolo #FoodPeople presso il Museo della Scienza e della Tecnica di Milano.

riscontrata anche nell'ambito delle altre interviste. Questa scelta non è stata il risultato di un processo di essenzializzazione, ma un modello espositivo, di cui è stata chiesta conferma alle intervistate stesse. In tutti i casi abbiamo seguito un processo di analisi del materiale raccolto, che tenesse conto di alcuni orientamenti: trascorso qualche giorno dagli incontri con le agricoltrici abbiamo pensato, a caldo, a ciò che era emerso in modo più pregnante e tentato di individuare i frammenti dei discorsi in cui tali concetti venivano espressi con più enfasi, anche in relazione agli aspetti performativi del lavoro agricolo. Questa procedura è stata molto utile per riuscire a comunicare le diverse declinazioni attribuite dalle agricoltrici al loro lavoro, e gli incontri che le hanno stimolate a intraprendere tali percorsi, arginando la tentazione che, come etnografe, avremmo avuto di riportare per intero i ragionamenti delle nostre interlocutrici. Lavorando con il video alcuni aspetti, necessari per dare corpo e profondità ai discorsi, hanno potuto essere accennati attraverso un'immagine di copertura o un particolare. Per poter presentare su supporto cartaceo parte del girato, sono state estratte alcune immagini, così da far emergere i volti, le espressioni, la prossemica delle testimoni e la trascrizione integrale del montato.²⁵

Cristina Binda

La nostra indagine è iniziata da Rezzago, dove Cristina Binda conduce l'agriturismo Cassina Enco situato sull'altopiano di Enco (800 m); l'azienda, di cui Cristina è titolare dal 2008, ha un'impostazione multifunzionale con produzione orticola e allevamento di pecore, laboratori didattici e ristorazione.

Video:



Io faccio un lavoro di conservazione più che altro. Il lavoro è stato iniziato dai miei genitori, in realtà i miei genitori, mio padre viene da un'origine contadina quindi per questa passione che gli è rimasta dei suoi genitori vuole continuare questo tipo di attività. Mia mamma invece che viene da un mondo completamente diverso, un'educazione diversa però per stare con papà che aveva scelto questa strada, questa obbedienza al marito eccetera... lei fa con cento e lode questo lavoro. Io sto continuando il lavoro dei miei genitori. Quindi sin da piccola lavoravo nella medesima azienda e io ho ovviamente un patrimonio da conservare.

I prati

Una delle parti più belle di queste aziende di montagna è la conservazione dei prati, che è una cosa difficilissima, ci vuole tantissima energia e non sempre si riesce a ricavare un reddito per cui è veramente c'è molto lavoro. Bisogna sempre pulire le recinzioni attorno, cercare di non fare avanzare i boschi. Ho conservato una parte, una zona paludosa appositamente per conservare nel ciclo biologico le rane. Le pecore, gli asini eccetera sono molto utili per controllare in modo

²⁵ Per una visione completa dei montaggi, rimando al sito dell'associazione AVoce/etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio, www.avoce.eu.

naturale quello che è l'avanzamento del bosco, dei rovi e delle erbacce. È molto utile, quindi, noi ci teniamo a conservare moltissimo questa coda diciamo dell'allevamento degli ovini proprio per conservare anche il suolo. Quindi non è soltanto per avere delle carni, ma proprio anche per tenere fuori delle bestie e pulire, per conservare il suolo; perché avere un prato... ci vogliono degli anni per avere un prato del genere, non è facile; perché quando entrano... e comincia ad avanzare il bosco, quando avanza la foresta, iniziano i rovi poi arrivano le piante, nell'arco di pochi anni – mettiamo quindici anni – si formano i tronchi, poi per ricavare un prato ci vogliono degli anni, del lavoro; perché bisogna macinare anche le radici, perché a volte non si può accedere con delle macchine pesanti, ci vogliono per togliere le radici non si possono strappare bisogna macinarle, bisogna... è difficile ricavare dei prati così, per cui è un patrimonio.

Il castagneto

I castagneti sono, diciamo, fondamentali nella nostra... sulle nostre montagne in tutta Italia, dove ci sono i castagneti vuol dire che c'era una certa povertà e quindi dove si costituivano i castagneti sicuramente non c'erano altri tipi di proteine tipo del mais eccetera, se allo stato [attuale] servono soltanto per piccole produzioni gastronomiche eccetera, perché abbiamo così tante varietà di alimenti per soddisfare i bisogni che non necessariamente abbiamo bisogno solo della castagna, però dico: perché non fanno un programma preciso almeno per recuperare la storia? Per recuperare le radici delle persone e farlo conoscere alle future generazioni? Perché se no si perdono dei pezzi di storia; invece adesso pretendiamo che stiano lì da soli, anzi, cioè invece le piante ci danno del cibo quindi vanno curate.

Fare agricoltura in una zona svantaggiata

Io vivo in una zona svantaggiata, cioè io sto conservando un'azienda praticamente in un posto che è veramente è difficile, cioè ci verrebbero pochissime persone a vivere in una casa del genere. Tutta l'agricoltura va bene, chiaramente, cioè bisogna tenere conto che noi dobbiamo sfamare il mondo: gli agricoltori nel mondo devono sfamare il mondo; bisogna produrre, produrre, produrre possibilmente bene. Quello che si crea all'interno di un'azienda contadina è diciamo qualcosa di micro ma che funziona perché comunque tu produci quello che serve per la tua famiglia, produci una parte di reddito. Speriamo che questo modo che abbiamo noi – io che sono contadina – di agire serva alla società anche per far capire all'[l'agricoltore] convenzionale che si può produrre reddito anche senza distruggere l'universo.

Per Cristina Binda abbiamo pensato di lavorare intorno al concetto di *conservazione*, un termine che lei ha ripetuto spesso nel corso dell'intervista e che ha declinato su diversi piani: la **valorizzazione dei luoghi e del lavoro** ereditati dai genitori, la conservazione di una zona in cui nessuno vorrebbe vivere perché ritenuta svantaggiata, operazione possibile grazie in primo luogo alla presenza della sua famiglia e alla scelta di abitare quel luogo con tutti i vantaggi e gli svantaggi che questo comporta. La **rivitalizzazione di pratiche marginali ma fondamentali** come il mantenimento dell'equilibrio tra prati e bosco, della zona umida e paludosa, della ricostruzione dei muretti a secco. Una **filologia conservativa** messa in atto per il restauro della cascina e degli spazi dove soggiornano gli ospiti dell'agriturismo, per il rispetto della stagionalità dei prodotti usati nelle ricette di famiglia.

Michela e Sonia Maldini

A San Siro, nella frazione montana di San Martino, abbiamo incontrato le sorelle Michela e Sonia Maldini che, nella loro Azienda agricola San Martino, nata nel 2000, allevano capre di razza Camosciata delle Alpi e Saanen, producono latte, formaggi, yogurth e vendono capretti da latte.

Video:



Michela:

Facevo l'agente immobiliare e un mio amico, lui lavorava in una fabbrica, ha detto: "No dobbiamo cambiare, basta con sta vita!". Abbiamo deciso di cambiare lavoro, siamo andati in una stalla a vedere, perché qualcuno mi aveva detto: "No guarda le capre che bello, il latte è molto ricercato" e siamo andati, abbiamo cercato e abbiamo comprato venti capre. La passione mi è venuta, perché praticamente non sapevo neanche da che parte è girata una capra.

La gestione della stalla

Si sente un belato provenire dall'interno della stalla.

Sonia:

Chi è che si lamenta?

Cerchiamo di avere i parti in un dato momento, perché commercialmente parlando i capretti si vendono a Pasqua, in minima parte si vendono anche a Natale; noi riusciamo a fare il latte per tutto l'anno perché dividiamo un po' i gruppi di capre, un gruppo partorisce in anticipo partorisce ad ottobre, si anticipa tutto il calore e a maggio viene inserito il maschio. Così cinque mesi dopo, a ottobre, partoriscono e questi capretti vengono venduti a Natale. I maschi vengono aiutati con la melatonina, che è un ormone naturale, e gli si lascia la luce accesa così invece che maggio gli sembra di essere ad agosto, alla fine di agosto che è il momento che vanno naturalmente in calore. Così riusciamo ad avere il latte per i mesi invernali che normalmente le capre non hanno. Perché la lattazione dura nove mesi, normalmente vanno in calore a fine agosto partoriscono gennaio/febbraio quei mesi lì, hanno il capretto e vanno avanti a fare latte fino a settembre. Saremmo scoperti fino a gennaio quando partoriscono un'altra volta; facciamo con questo sistema così riusciamo ad avere il prodotto tutto l'anno e riusciamo ad accontentare i negozi che se no si aprirebbero a mercati diversi.

La mungitura

Sonia:

Più la capra va fuori più si stressa a cercare da mangiare e meno produce; anche qui andiamo sul discorso della commercializzazione. Tenendo gli animali in stalla, dandogli un foraggio controllato, il mangime, i sali minerali a disposizione si ha un tipo di latte abbastanza costante. Se vendo ai negozi e facendo dei mercati fissi si cerca di avere un prodotto più o meno uguale.

I prodotti e la vendita

Sonia:

Adesso vi faccio vedere a fare lo Zincarlin. Ogni posto, qua in giro nella provincia di Como e nel Ticino, ogni posto ha il suo Zincarlin, però ognuno lo fa in modo diverso; io lo faccio con la ricetta dell'alto lago. È nato per conservare la ricotta, l'ultima ricotta fatta in alpeggio veniva lavorata con il sale e poi cosparsa di pepe per mantenerla poi e mangiarla a Natale. Per esempio la richiesta che ho io è di un Zincarlin fresco, bisogna anche bilanciare un po' il prodotto alla richiesta delle persone. Sono dieci anni che facciamo questo lavoro e più o meno i gusti si sanno: abbiamo una decina di negozi che serviamo settimanalmente e io durante la settimana faccio le varie preparazioni per i loro prodotti. Al mercato la maggior parte vuole roba fresca, la gran parte del formaggio che faccio può anche stagionare quindi l'invenduto diventa formaggio stagionato. Ho cercato di trovare dei tipi di formaggio che hanno una vita lunga ecco; fino all'anno scorso facevamo dei mercati domenicali, tutti associati a fiere agricole così, però erano proprio diventati dei mercati della domenica, la gente compra poco e ha già fatto la spesa al sabato. L'occasione del mercato coperto ci ha dato uno sprint, nuovo entusiasmo per andare avanti perché certe volte si arriva a fine mese e si fa fatica ecco.

Michela:

Abbiamo conosciuto altre realtà che se no non ne eravamo a conoscenza perché siamo abbastanza chiusi devo dire, chi fa parte del mercato, di questo consorzio... si è creato un bell'ambiente, perché c'è chi vende la verdura chi vende la carne, tutti produttori locali della provincia di Como che devono proprio avere l'attività nella provincia di Como.

Il breve video dedicato alle sorelle Maldini ruota intorno ai termini *prodotto* e *mercato* declinati in modo plurale come: **formazione, invenzione e innovazione** attraverso corsi per allevatori proposti dall'associazione degli allevatori, riattualizzazione di ricette del formaggio Zincarlin di capra con preparazioni apprese da canali diversificati, rinnovando il prodotto con una fattura fresca e non stagionata. **Rapporto dinamico con la tradizione** perché, come allevatrici di prima generazione, pongono la sperimentazione come cardine del proprio lavoro. **Mercato locale e mercato globale** condensati nel rapporto che l'azienda ha con i clienti, un rapporto orientato dai gusti e dalle esigenze di quest'ultimi (con la presenza anche di molti turisti provenienti da tutta Europa), valorizzando i canali di vendita locali e cercando di offrire un prodotto in modo quanto più possibile continuativo sia dal punto di vista della stagionalità che delle proprietà organolettiche.

Maria Ida Anghileri

Il nostro percorso di ricerca è proseguito con una deviazione dal territorio comasco, un'azienda agrituristica di Garlate, in provincia di Lecco; si tratta de Il Ronco di Maria Ida Anghileri, azienda attiva da dieci anni in cui si coltivano ulivi, castagni, piccoli frutti, ortaggi, piante da frutto e si allevano maiali di Cinta Senese, pecore di razza Brianzola, asini e animali di bassa corte.

Video:



Nella mia vita precedente facevo la fotografa, facevo fotografie industriali, sono comunque nata a Garlate, ho fatto il liceo artistico a Lecco e dopo successivamente l'Istituto Europeo di design a Milano nel quale ho seguito il ramo della fotografia. Era molto faticoso trovare clienti, nessuno che ... ti trattavano come una poveretta e allora c'è stato questo ritorno, questa voglia di dire: ma dai proviamo a cambiare a fare qualcosa che magari che sei apprezzato che magari vieni apprezzato comunque dalle persone senza dover pregarle senza dovere in qualche modo dover strisciare per trovare un lavoro.

La mia famiglia non è una famiglia di agricoltori quindi si sono buttati anche loro in questa mia nuova esperienza, però attraverso la comunità montana, i corsi che facevano, ci siamo un pochino informati, ci siamo messi a leggere, a studiare. Mia madre ha sempre fatto, per passione sua, confetture, andava a venderle nelle fiere o per volontariato e allora siamo partiti da lì, e allora: "Perché non facciamo l'agriturismo? Una cosa piccola, così ci divertiamo anche". Ci divertiamo ancora comunque però è diventato veramente un lavoro anche impegnativo.

L'avvio dell'azienda e le scelte produttive

Abbiamo visto che cosa c'era anticamente sul territorio e cosa la comunità montana o le varie associazioni del territorio proponevano o volevano valorizzare e da qui allora l'idea di allevare la pecora brianzola e di mettere l'ulivo in queste zone. E' da dieci anni a questa parte che sta proprio aumentando la produzione, ci sono tante aziende che iniziano a piantare e quindi nei prossimi anni potrà essere anche un'alternativa per questo territorio; i primi ulivi che abbiamo piantato hanno circa dieci anni che è quando siamo arrivati qua. Abbiamo iniziato con una pulizia totale dei terreni perché ormai erano invasi dai rovi, erano completamente abbandonati, abbiamo deciso di piantare ulivi perché era comunque un tipo di coltura della nostra zona, del lago e che comunque resiste bene sia al clima mite dato dal lago e agli inverni che non sono proprio rigidissimi.

[La pecora brianzola] è una razza che in antichità si allevava nella nostra zona, tipo quella bergamasca però la stazza è grossa è una pecora da carne, qui abbiamo i maiali e poi abbiamo un allevamento di polli, circa trecento polli tra anatre, faraone e galletti.

Il metodo: procedere un passo alla volta

Abbiamo dei terreni in piano per il pascolo degli animali ma quelli non sono di nostra proprietà, li abbiamo in comodato d'uso, sono agricoli però i proprietari credono sempre che un giorno o l'altro diventerà edificabile quindi o non te li vendono o se no vogliono venderteli a prezzi assurdi. E invece tutta l'altra parte dell'azienda che è quella di nostra proprietà è in montagna, collina montagna, ed è fatta sui dei ronchi [terrazzamenti], che dà il nome alla nostra azienda "Il Ronco". E' sempre stata chiamata così in origine, abbiamo mantenuto questo nome, di cui una parte è coltivazioni, quella più accessibile, di frutta, ulivi, dopo c'è un pezzetto di selva che era un castagneto vecchio che anche

qui... che con l'aiuto della comunità montana e dei progetti INTERREG stiamo cercando di ripiantumare, di salvare le piante mezze malandate; dopo il castagneto c'è il bosco.

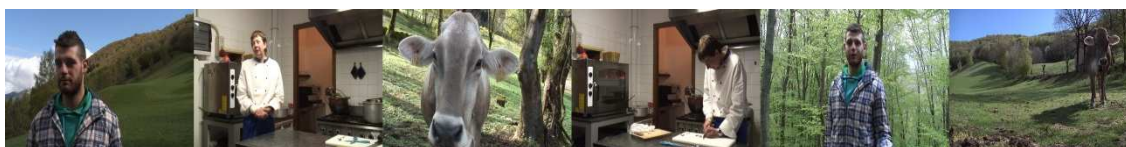
Ogni anno decidiamo di sistemarne un pezzetto, di pulirlo però è lunga e dura, perché non abbiamo mezzi per poter arrivare. Abbiamo una piccola motocarriola ed è l'unico mezzo che riesce a salire sul bosco perché non ci sono più sentieri, è stato abbandonato ormai da diversi anni. Di anno in anno l'azienda cresce perché, devi vedere, non riesci a vedere il tutto perché ti sembra tutto troppo, una cosa troppo immensa e quindi un passo alla volta si arriva a fare tutto. Da quando noi siamo venuti qua, in questo posto, questa zona è tornata a vivere. Prima era un luogo dimenticato di Garlate. Abbiamo recuperato un territorio che prima era lasciato al bosco, però non veniva nessuno, neanche per passeggiare, non si raccoglievano più neanche le castagne così, invece adesso queste cose stanno tornando, ma è perché comunque noi ci lavoriamo, crediamo in questa cosa qui.

L'esperienza di Maria Ida Anghileri ci ha spinto a mettere in luce il concetto di *progetto*: la progettualità di questa agricoltrice è riscontrabile nella ricerca di un'**autonomia professionale** dopo aver lavorato come fotografa industriale senza particolari soddisfazioni. L'avvio dell'azienda agricola è un **progetto complessivo** attuato da tutta la famiglia, quella di provenienza e quella costruita con il compagno, nel quale si procede con il **metodo "dei piccoli passi"**, fissandosi piccoli obiettivi per non farsi scoraggiare dal carico di lavoro relativo alla ricostruzione della cascina e alle coltivazioni annesse. Infine il progetto personale e familiare diventa **stimolo per il territorio** circostante perché la ricostruzione dell'agriturismo, e dell'ambiente rurale, ha fatto rivivere una zona abbandonata, permettendone la frequentazione come luogo di attività agricola e come spazio ricreativo.

Matteo Bianchi e la madre Marisa Del Vecchio

A Schignano abbiamo incontrato la famiglia Bianchi: Matteo e la madre Marisa Del Vecchio gestiscono un alpeggio di proprietà dell'ERSAF con vacche di razza bruna e capre, producono formaggi e salumi e conducono l'agriturismo La Pratolina.

Video:



Per prendere in concessione questi stabili che sono dell'ERSAF che è l'ente regionale per le foreste, abbiamo dovuto presentare un progetto, perché c'era proprio una gara, una gara pubblica, e ci volevano un tot di bestie, un tot di capre, e un tot di tutto; con un minimo di vacche brune in alpeggio per conservare la razza tipica.

L'alpeggio e la razza bruna

Matteo:

[Le vacche brune] sono una razza tipicamente rustica, quelle che ci sono adesso non sono proprio quelle di una volta, adesso c'è la Brown che è più una vacca da stalla, però si adatta molto all'alpeggio e il latte non è tantissimo, una decina di litri a monta di solito, però è molto buona per la

classificazione. Ne abbiamo comprate tre per il momento, proprio il primo anno che abbiamo cominciato, e siamo andati, abbiamo cercato di alzare un po' il livello e andare a prendere delle mucche un po' buone e siamo andati fino a Bergamo; in base al pascolo che abbiamo, dobbiamo caricare un tot di bestie che sono venti, venti mucche che poi possono diventare quaranta capre che sono più piccole. Sono ventuno ettari, circa la metà sono pascolativi e la metà sono boschivi; poi abbiamo due stabili e qualcuno più piccolo però i principali sono questo d'inverno e l'agriturismo con stalle e ristorante.

L'agriturismo

Marisa:

La mia vita è un po' strana, perché io prima di sposarmi lavoravo in una tintoria di seta, ho lavorato per diciotto anni, dopodiché ho avuto i figli e ho dovuto abbandonare il lavoro. I figli dopo sono andati a scuola e io facevo l'ambulante al mercato. E l'ho fatto fino a cinque anni fa che abbiamo preso questa decisione e ho smesso.

Devo essere sincera, lavoro il triplo però ho più soddisfazione, forse perché lo facciamo per noi però sono più soddisfatta e poi mi piace il contatto con la gente. Cucino io, in sala mi aiuta la figlia e il figlio. E il sabato e la domenica quando abbiamo parecchia gente c'è mio marito e mia cognata, la sorella di mio marito, e mio cognato. Facciamo soprattutto una cucina di montagna, soprattutto a base di polente, brasati, salsiccia con le cipolle che è la specialità della casa, e pizzoccheri, e tutto con i nostri antipasti della casa, con insaccati nostri. E il formaggio che fa il Matteo.

Una scelta condivisa

Marisa:

Ci ha stimolato più che altro il figlio con la sua scelta, è stata una sua scelta, una sua convinzione soprattutto con il nostro appoggio. Sia io che mio marito abbiamo fatto un cambiamento totale della nostra vita.

Matteo: I miei nonni, da parte di mia mamma, hanno sempre avuto le mucche, ho cugini che hanno gli alpeggi. Da piccolo mio papà a quattro anni mi ha regalato le prime caprette e mi hanno fatto crescere con la passione; poi io andavo a trovare gli zii, ai miei cugini gli piacciono le capre, hanno le capre, c'è sempre stata nell'aria questa cosa non è nata dal nulla. E' capitata questa occasione e abbiamo deciso di buttarci, abbiamo detto: proviamo e poi vediamo se va bene, se non va bene ci abbiamo provato. E adesso sta andando bene.

Tra imprenditore agricolo professionale e paesàn

Matteo:

Io sono perito agrario zootecnico, non sono iscritto all'albo degli imprenditori agricoli professionali e tutto, ho studiato ho fatto degli sforzi. Non è che andavo a scuola per niente, però se uno mi chiede che lavoro fai, io gli dico che faccio il paesàn, uno che va in alpeggio è un paesàn.

Durante la settimana – perché la domenica, il sabato e la domenica è diverso soprattutto perché c'è aperto l'agriturismo e allora io faccio il cameriere diciamo –mi alzo vado in stalla, c'è da spazzare a mano, mungo, faccio tutto quello che bisogna fare, dò il fieno, dò l'acqua, devo finire per le otto, perché poi alle otto e mezza comincia la mia giornata, vado a fare il boscaiolo.

Diciamo che quello che fanno gli agricoltori, quello che fanno i boscaioli o quelli che fanno un lavoro che riguarda la natura è una cosa abbastanza personale, che non ce l'hanno tutti; noi adesso siamo abituati a vivere in città, la natura non ce ne frega niente e va bè c'è il bosco il bosco, il prato se diventa bosco chi se ne frega, è quasi la concezione di tutti, invece il boscaiolo e l'agricoltore non hanno questa concezione, devi anche guardare al futuro, devi pensare appunto: magari mio figlio farà il boscaiolo e tra trent'anni arriverà lui a tagliare il bosco.

Il titolo del progetto di ricerca cui fanno riferimento gli stralci dell'intervista qui citati è "Agricoltrici per scelta" e proprio scelta è stato il termine che abbiamo individuato per raccontare l'attività di Marisa del Vecchio e del figlio Matteo. Per la madre, il coinvolgimento nell'attività di gestione dell'agriturismo e nella prospettiva di una nuova vita è una **scelta della maturità**, intrapresa dopo altre esperienze lavorative e la nascita dei figli. Per l'intera famiglia la **scelta individuale** di Matteo diventa una **scelta familiare** con il coinvolgimento dei genitori, della sorella, degli zii. Dunque anche una **scelta condivisa e coinvolgente**, che comporta una diversa prospettiva sul lavoro: un'attività svolta per se stessi, ma che implica una relazione a stretto contatto con la stagionalità e una continua ridefinizione e trasformazione delle pratiche.

Sofia Montorfano

Dall'alta quota ci siamo spostati in un contesto urbano, a Cantù, dove Sofia Montorfano conduce l'azienda biologica San Damiano. L'azienda produce piccoli frutti (lamponi, mirtilli, more e ribes), amarene, fragole, kiwi e orticole. Inoltre propone iniziative didattiche e formative per bambini e adulti.

Video:



Noi abbiamo ereditato già l'azienda così, ereditato nel senso acquistato l'attività già in essere quindi già produttrice di lamponi e mirtilli. Io lavoravo qua come stagista, e per quattro anni ho lavorato per loro e poi con il mio compagno abbiamo cercato per due anni in giro per tutto il nord Italia, un'azienda agricola, un qualcosa di simile a questo da poter gestire, con questa duplice faccia, cioè agricoltura e fattoria didattica. Perché noi abbiamo queste specializzazioni, e quando ci hanno detto di comprare, in tre giorni gli abbiamo detto di sì.

Da dipendente a titolare

Mi son trovata una realtà che io vivevo da dipendente, quindi vivevo con i canoni di una dipendente, quindi vedevo il bello del fare la dipendente e anche il risvolto negativo. Quando ho iniziato a essere imprenditrice, perché purtroppo io sono imprenditrice agricola non posso definirmi contadina, quando ho iniziato a essere imprenditrice agricola, mi sono accorta di tutti i retroscena che ci sono e di tutto quello che grava su una persona che fa una scelta di vita del genere. Quindi io ho iniziato a

vedere anche l'agricoltura in un modo diverso, il prezzo del cibo in un modo diverso, dare valore a delle cose cui prima dicevo: Cavolo ma sarà veramente? Sarà veramente sì... Fare l'imprenditore agricolo, o l'imprenditore in generale ti cambia, perché devi essere più rigido, io proprio sono cambiata, sono stata appesantita da tutto quello che è la preoccupazione dell'essere responsabile di tante persone, di un posto, di tanti bambini, perché ogni volta che io mi invento di fare qualcosa mi accolgo delle responsabilità.

Differenziare e innovarsi

Ogni anno anche la gente ha delle richieste diverse, il mercato cambia, cambiano le esigenze. Io posso anche vedere il centro estivo come un forziere per me, ma se l'anno prossimo mi esce la moda del centro sportivo, o c'è qualcuno qua vicino che apre una cosa migliore della mia e io faccio solo quello non campo. Allora c'è sempre una ricerca nel nuovo, nell'innovazione, in qualcosa che gli altri non danno, e però per fare questo ci vogliono strutture, ci vogliono preparazioni, attrezzature, personale, soldi. Mi sto proponendo perché la gente cerca, cerca di stare qua, e di stare qua nell'agio e nei servizi. Cioè bisogna un po' mediare e dare un po' alla gente quello che cerca e nello stesso tempo però rendere accattivante un posto che magari loro non avrebbero mai vissuto e mai neanche cercato.

La proposta didattica: l'ambiente e le persone

Apprezzo moltissimo il fatto di aver... di essere riuscita a creare un posto dove dare opportunità alle persone di sperimentare quanto io sto sperimentando purtroppo e per fortuna sulla mia pelle; quindi il fatto di avere persone che dicono: "Ma posso venire a provare a raccogliere i mirtilli?". "Vieni e prova, vieni e prova. Così quando vieni a comprarmi il mirtillo capisci, capisci davvero qual è il valore di questo prodotto e il valore dell'altro prodotto e soprattutto capendo il mio metodo di agricoltura, capisci anche quanto vale il mio lavoro all'interno dell'ambiente e quindi quanto vale il mio lavoro anche per te persona che vieni qua poi una domenica a mangiare su questa terrazza con i tuoi figli". Dò alle persone un'opportunità di vivere un'esperienza, un altro ambiente, un'altra soluzione di passare magari il pomeriggio, la giornata con la propria famiglia, quindi mi piace proprio che il mio lavoro sia fonte di benessere anche per le altre persone, per l'ambiente in primis e poi anche per altre persone.

La produzione, la vendita e il sistema di garanzia partecipata

Noi stiamo partecipando a un sistema di garanzia partecipata, è un SPG: siamo controllati da un'altra azienda agricola che produce uguale a noi e oltre a questo produttore viene un tecnico e poi ci sono dei consumatori che sono o privati cittadini che si avvicinano al consumo di prodotti delle aziende agricole dirette oppure sono dei facenti parte dei GAS o facenti parte dei mercati agricoli. Questa cosa ci porta, che chi comprerà poi il nostro prodotto sa che è un prodotto che è stato garantito da persone che come loro lo comprano. C'è proprio dietro anche una garanzia che l'azienda lavora sulla società e non soltanto come produttore, ma a tanti livelli perché comunque l'agricoltore consapevole ha veramente un grande, un grande potere nei confronti del mantenimento dell'ambiente. Noi siamo alla base della piramide alimentare, qualsiasi cosa ci sia nella piramide alimentare, da vegano a vegetariano a carnivoro: noi come agricoltori siamo alla base.

Per Sofia Montorfano abbiamo ragionato intorno al concetto di *partecipazione* intesa come: **apertura** dell'azienda agricola a persone che vogliono fare esperienza della terra e della raccolta dei piccoli frutti. Il lavoro come fonte di benessere per l'ambiente e per gli ospiti che visitano l'azienda. **Percorsi didattici** per i bambini delle scuole elementari e medie con soggiorni di carattere formativo sui temi dell'agricoltura, del rispetto della natura e del gioco in essa. **Sistema di garanzia partecipata**, ovvero il controllo incrociato della qualità dei prodotti da parte di un'altra azienda con produzioni simili, di un tecnico e di privati cittadini che utilizzano i mercati agricoli, i GAS e la vendita diretta dagli agricoltori.

Conclusioni

Quali sfide pone la montagna agli studi di genere? Quali stereotipi sono prodotti dalla sua presunta marginalità? Le associate intervistate durante la ricerca sul campo, e quelle che hanno partecipato al convegno "Donne e agricoltura: linfa vitale della montagna" hanno risposto contraddicendo i modelli sulla modernizzazione e sui rapporti centro-periferia, che teorizzano le opportunità del mercato lavorativo e del lavoro salariato come sole spinte emancipatrici femminili, introducendo l'inadeguatezza del binomio "marginalità-discriminazione femminile" (Valsangiacomo e Lorenzetti 2010). Anche nei contesti montani le donne, intervenute al convegno e intervistate durante la ricerca, hanno mostrato specifiche peculiarità professionali, integrate all'interno di sistemi di mercato e informali, senza che quest'ultimi siano da intendersi come "lembi di arcaismo sociale" (Valsangiacomo e Lorenzetti 2010, 11; Viazzo 2001, 6-11). Profili che si muovono a cavallo tra famiglia, mercato, regole comunitarie, ma anche diritti, rappresentanza sociale, scelta, protagonismo imprenditoriale e culturale. Un lavoro, che come Chiara Nicolosi ha evidenziato, rinegozia una serie di modelli e apre al mondo, sovvertendo l'immagine della montagna come di un mondo chiuso. Anche la terra diventa parte di un ecosistema più ampio, un *frame* che trascende l'ambito montano. In una conclusione provvisoria, nata dopo la fine del lavoro di ricerca, ho riflettuto sul tema del genere e sul significato processuale che ha assunto nel nostro progetto, trovandomi in accordo con Alice Bellagamba, Paola di Cori e Marco Pustianaz nel loro volume *Generi di traverso*, quanto affermano a proposito del genere che:

non esiste il consenso su quali possano essere gli elementi essenziali a definire lo spettro di significati di questa parola : [...]può esser una dimensione del corpo, il punto di intersezione fra l'universo culturale e sociale e la biologia; ma la parola evoca anche dei progetti metodologici, delle aspirazioni etiche e politiche. Serve a parlare dei corpi, e della loro sessualità, ma è anche uno strumento potente per costruire delle forme di riflessione trasversali, progettuali e in alcuni casi addirittura utopiche. (10)

Il nostro progetto, in relazione ai temi esplorati, apre domande e riflessioni sulla contemporaneità che travalicano l'ambito agricolo: le stratificazioni delle diverse agricolture, dei modi di gestione aziendale, delle diverse generazioni e la riflessività che i soggetti attuano rispetto alle scelte che modificano e orientano il proprio lavoro sono parte di un percorso di ricerca e di confronto tra etnografie e fonti di diverso genere sul lavoro agricolo femminile. Il campo che emerge è interdisciplinare e il lavoro ne può diventare il comune denominatore per comprendere le

connessioni tra prospettive diverse (Besky e Brown 2015). Ciò in virtù del fatto che il lavoro, e in particolare il lavoro agricolo, riflette quel rapporto di interdipendenza tra natura e cultura segnato tanto dalla sua complementarietà quanto dalla conflittualità e che diventa il riparo contro la vulnerabilità alimentare ancestrale²⁶, esperienza in grado di muovere verso l'azione e la conseguente costruzione del mondo.

L'utilizzo del video può far emergere tutti i discorsi fin qui esplorati? Cosa aggiunge o sottrae alla ricerca etnografica? Che tipo di sapere ha prodotto nell'ambito del progetto? E quale rapporto si instaura tra le testimonianze e le loro rappresentazioni?

L'esperienza visiva delle pratiche e delle voci in questo progetto ha tentato di superare il logocentrismo e restituire la rotondità della comunicazione umana e la natura polisensoriale dei processi conoscitivi (Finnegan 2009). Nella riflessione personale condotta sulla raccolta delle videografie, in relazione anche alla pluralità dei saperi e dei punti di vista delle ricercatrici, dell'associazione Donne in Campo e del film maker, è emerso che l'attribuzione di "etnograficità" dell'immagine è un processo arbitrario (quello dei ricercatori), contingente (dipende dalla destinazione d'uso), e il suo valore di documento visivo risulta dalla collaborazione che si instaura tra tutti i soggetti della ricerca.

Se quest'ultimo aspetto è stato ampiamente studiato dagli antropologi visivi (Chiozzi 2013), la destinazione d'uso del materiale raccolto, la sua catalogazione e archiviazione sono forse aspetti ritenuti meno rilevanti. Ma sono invece, dal mio punto di vista, fondamentali per permettere alle testimonianze di avere *sempre* un controllo sulla propria immagine. La destinazione finale del materiale raccolto, e i canali attraverso cui si diffonde, può avere effetti a catena di riappropriazione o negazione delle rappresentazioni, rivendicazione culturale e/o reinterpretazione nel corso degli anni. Dire chiaramente alle testimonianze dove andranno a finire i girati grezzi, i montati e l'uso che di volta in volta ne viene fatto, è un protocollo della ricerca che permette la co-autorialità delle immagini e delle riprese da parte di tutti i soggetti coinvolti. Lavorare in gruppo presuppone che questi protocolli siano condivisi, e che si rispettino le procedure. Quest'ultime devono essere stabilite *prima* di iniziare la ricerca per evitare usi e abusi del materiale raccolto collettivamente.

L'apparente semplicità con cui è possibile oggi fare ricerca visiva, la possibilità di rimontare il girato e di renderlo "immediatamente" disponibile per scopi diversi, è più di una questione tecnica, è una questione che ha a che fare con l'etica stessa della ricerca. Nel nostro lavoro abbiamo ragionato per realizzare videografie che potessero avere un utilizzo *concreto* per le associate di Donne in Campo, di rappresentanza e di valorizzazione, ma anche di emersione del loro ruolo rispetto a un discorso dominante che spesso le marginalizza. Il sapere che nasce dalla ricerca sul campo è scientificamente rilevante per l'antropologia del lavoro rurale, e la disseminazione dei suoi risultati diventa anche politicamente rilevante per oltrepassare i limiti della comunità antropologica e diventare vettore per una valorizzazione pubblica del lavoro agricolo femminile in zone marginali.

²⁶ Mi ispiro al lavoro di Fischler (1992), quando spiega che per comprendere il mangiatore contemporaneo bisogna considerare il *mangiatore immemoriale*, quello che ha sempre dovuto far fronte alla penuria di cibo nel corso della storia. La gestione della scarsità di cibo per secoli ha programmato il nostro corpo a rispondere ad alcuni stimoli in modo quasi automatico, mentre ora, nell'abbondanza alimentare che caratterizza le società affluenti contemporanee e in certa misura anche buona parte di quelle meno ricche, nasce invece il sospetto e il bisogno di rifiutare il superfluo. L'angoscia quindi riguarda sia gli eccessi della modernità, sia la scelta dell'alimento, scelta connaturata alla condizione di onnivoro.

I discorsi delle agricoltrici montati in brevi video hanno un riscontro immediato da parte delle protagoniste, e il loro linguaggio diretto permette l'accessibilità a dati raccolti durante la ricerca per un pubblico non specialistico. Il linguaggio delle intervistate inoltre ha anche la funzione di costruire una "contro-storia" dell'agricoltura italiana oggi, partendo da percorsi non ortodossi, inusuali, che sovrappongono esperienze di lavoro diverse. L'età delle protagoniste, a cavallo tra i trenta e cinquant'anni, fa emergere una pluralità di lavori svolti nel corso del tempo, da cui si evince come la scelta di un impegno a tempo pieno nell'agricoltura di montagna non sia causale, ma ponderata durante la maturità anagrafica. I video rilevano e nel contempo celano tutte queste prospettive, spesso accolte in modo inconsapevole da chi guarda. Credo quindi che durante la loro visione sia utile il ruolo di accompagnamento delle ricercatrici, e anche la stesura di un resoconto scritto in grado di scindere criticamente i discorsi e smontare le retoriche e i tranelli delle rappresentazioni della *vita delle altre*.

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Quarto momento

In dialogo con...

Stage Four

In conversation with...

Pierre Rabhi

L'agro-ecologia, il femminile e la Śakti*

Carola Benedetto

Abstract (Italiano)

Nato in Algeria, in una tradizione musulmana, da adolescente Pierre Rabhi si converte al Cristianesimo e a vent'anni approda a Parigi per lavorare come operaio specializzato. Dopo tre anni di una vita "in scatola" abbandona la capitale per installarsi nel Sud Est della Francia. Diventato operaio agricolo, si oppone però ben presto alla logica di produttività intensiva e innaturale dell'agricoltura industriale. Da autodidatta studia l'agricoltura biodinamica e biologica applicandone con successo i metodi fino a creare quella che lui ama definire un'oasi di vita. Da anni ormai Pierre Rabhi è incessantemente impegnato a promuovere un nuovo paradigma di vita basato sul rispetto dell'uomo e della terra

Abstract (English)

Born in Algeria, Muslim, Pierre Rabhi, became a Christian when adolescent; at the age of twenty, he moved to Paris to be an artisan. After experiencing the modern box-like lifestyle, he let the French capital to settle in the South East of France. As a farm-worker, he soon opposed the intensive and against-nature industrial cultivation and production logics. Autodidact, he learnt biodynamical and biological agriculture, by employing their methods successfully, until he was able to create what he loves to define an oasis of life. For years, Pierre Rabhi has been constantly engaged to promote a new paradigm of life, based on the respect for humans and the earth.

L'uomo ha bisogno della bellezza come di un nutrimento profondo dell'anima; la nostra anima ha bisogno della bellezza e questa bellezza fa parte di quella cosa che chiamo agro-ecologia.[...] Affinché gli alberi e le piante si schiudano, affinché gli animali che se ne nutrono prosperino, affinché gli uomini vivano, la terra deve essere onorata.²⁷

Queste parole sintetizzano perfettamente la forza del pensiero di Pierre Rabhi, un uomo minuto che sta cambiando il mondo con la sua rivoluzione agro-ecologica.

Agricoltore, scrittore e pensatore, Pierre Rabhi nasce nel 1938 nell'oasi sufi di Kenadsa, nel Sud dell'Algeria, dove suo padre è fabbro, ma anche musicista e poeta. In seguito alla morte della madre, Pierre è affidato a una coppia francese. Cresciuto in una doppia cultura - musulmana e araba prima, e cristiana ed europea poi - allo scoppio della Guerra d'Algeria lascia il Paese per trasferirsi a Parigi dove trova lavoro come operaio specializzato. Qui inizia a mettere in discussione i valori e i ritmi violenti della modernità. Con la giovane moglie Michèle, Pierre si trasferisce quindi in Ardèche dove

* Il presente articolo prende spunto dal mio contributo intitolato *Pierre Rabhi. Un uomo in armonia con la sinfonia del creato* (Fargione e Iovino 2015, 49-59).

²⁷ Da *Pierre Rabhi. Il mio corpo è la terra* (Benedetto e Piumetti 2012). Per vedere un breve promo si può consultare il link www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReDXQCfz-10.

studia l'agricoltura e la biodinamica; in particolare legge i libri di Ehrenfried Pfeiffer²⁸ e di Rudolf Steiner, applica con successo le loro teorie nella sua piccola fattoria e crea così quella che lui ama definire un'oasi di vita.

A poco a poco, Rabhi inizia la sua attività di uomo pubblico, diffondendo l'agro-ecologia: una forma di agricoltura che permette di gestire in modo naturale l'acqua, la terra e l'ambiente nel suo complesso, nel rispetto della biodiversità e di quella sinfonia perfetta che risuona in armonia con il creato. I suoi principi si rivelano anche molto efficaci contro l'impoverimento del suolo e la desertificazione (della terra ma anche dello spirito, come ama ribadire egli stesso), tanto che tra la fine degli anni '70 e gli anni '80, Rabhi avvia numerosi programmi di formazione in Francia, Europa e Africa e prende parte ai programmi internazionali dell'ONU. Dal 1981, viene chiamato a trasmettere il proprio sapere in Africa al fine di restituire autonomia alimentare alle popolazioni locali e di salvaguardare il loro "patrimoine nourricier"²⁹ attraverso la lotta alla desertificazione. Invitato poi in Burkina Faso, dove i contadini soffrono per le ripetute siccità e per i prezzi alti dei concimi e dei pesticidi, Pierre sviluppa la sua prima complessa azione agro-ecologica. Nel 1985 fonda il primo *Centre africain de Formation à l'Agroécologie de Gorom-Gorom*.

Nel 1989 fonda il *Carrefour International d'Echanges et de Pratiques Appliquées au Développement* (CIEPAD) per realizzare programmi di sensibilizzazione e formazione; avvia inoltre azioni di sviluppo in molti Paesi fra i quali Marocco, Palestina, Algeria e Tunisia. In quegli anni supporta anche le monache ortodosse del Monastero di Solan nel loro intento di sviluppare un progetto agro-ecologico per il sostentamento della comunità: saranno le prime religiose al mondo impegnate nell'ecologia con l'intento pratico e spirituale di ricostruire l'armonia e la fecondità della terra in cui vivono.³⁰ Nel 1995 Pierre Rabhi avvia *le Mouvement pour des Oasis en Tous Lieux*, fondando luoghi che mirano all'autonomia alimentare e che si adoperano per la riduzione dell'impatto ambientale a favore della ricostruzione di una rete sociale.

Nel 1998 l'ONU lo invita a formulare un progetto concreto di intervento per l'elaborazione della *Convention de lutte contre la désertification* (CCD). Nel 2000 fonda *Terre et Humanisme* una nuova struttura destinata a sostenere le azioni che favoriscono le pratiche ecologiche autonome e la solidarietà internazionale. Parallelamente porta avanti nuove azioni di sviluppo in Niger, Mali e Marocco. Due anni più tardi, in Francia, Rabhi lancia una campagna elettorale presidenziale parallela non convenzionale e si candida, proponendo di mettere l'Uomo e la Natura al centro di tutte le logiche di sviluppo. La sua campagna in pochissimo tempo suscita una mobilitazione eccezionale e vede la nascita di ottanta comitati di sostegno dislocati nei vari dipartimenti: nascono i primi Colibrì.

Sulla scia di questa rinnovata spinta di coscienze, il 2003 segna la creazione del Movimento *Appel pour une insurrection des consciences* che tre anni più tardi vedrà la nascita del *Colibris, Mouvement pour la*

²⁸ Il libro a cui ci si riferisce s'intitola *La fertilità della terra*, nel quale lo scienziato tratta l'applicazione dei principi della biodinamica teorizzati dal filosofo Rudolf Steiner, uno fra i primi pensatori a mettere in discussione, nei primi anni del Novecento, i metodi agricoli basati sui fertilizzanti chimici e sul lavoro meccanizzato. Sul rapporto fra Pierre Rabhi e il pensiero biodinamico si veda Rabhi e Hulot (2005).

²⁹ Cfr. <http://www.colibris-lemouvement.org/colibris/pierre-rabhi>

³⁰ Durante la realizzazione del documentario, le monache ci confidarono che Pierre fu il primo, ma anche il solo, a credere che avrebbero potuto vivere della loro terra, senza dedicarsi ad attività estranee alla loro natura contemplativa, come ad esempio il turismo, consigliato invece fortemente da altri.

Terre et l'Humanisme con lo scopo di aiutare ciascuno a costruire, secondo le proprie possibilità, nuovi modelli di società fondati sull'autonomia, sull'ecologia e su un nuovo umanesimo.

Per incontrare personalmente Pierre Rabhi, le colleghe del Gruppo del Cerchio ed io, nel 2011 andammo a Béziers, nel sud della Francia, dove teneva una conferenza in cui oltre cinquecento spettatori lo ascoltavano in sala. Arrivammo a conferenza già iniziata e non trovammo posti che fuori, dove quasi altrettante persone lo ascoltavano in silenzio, sedute per terra, attraverso un maxi-schermo. Ci sedemmo anche noi. La sua voce era calda, pacata, un richiamo arcaico e lento che dalle porte del deserto attraversava quella notte nel Midi per arrivare chissà dove.

Pierre stava raccontando del suo periodo parigino e della necessità di lasciare quella vita spietata per trovare un posto adatto a “gioire del senso profondo della vita”. Le sue parole ricordavano quelle di un grande maestro del nostro tempo, il teologo e filosofo Raimon Panikkar, il quale nel libro *La dimora della saggezza* traccia la figura dei saggi come di coloro che reggono il mondo, invitando ognuno a intraprendere la strada fragrante della felicità.

Fu con questi pensieri che il mattino seguente prendemmo parte all'incontro privato con Rabhi. Egli ci accolse con gentilezza e non nascose lo stupore all'idea che fossimo partite in macchina da Torino per nessun altro motivo che quell'incontro. Poi ci dimenticammo di tutto il resto ed entrammo nel suo mondo, quello dei Colibrì, di cui Pierre ci raccontò la storia.

Secondo un'antica leggenda – che per qualcuno ha origini sudamericane, mentre per altri troverebbe in Africa la sua genesi – un giorno la foresta fu sconvolta da un incendio spaventoso e tutti gli animali si diedero alla fuga, compreso il rinoceronte. Solo un piccolo colibrì, il più piccolo e delicato degli uccelli, volava avanti e indietro per raccogliere col minuscolo becco delle gocce d'acqua nel fiume e gettarle sul fuoco. Dopo un po' che lo osservava, il rinoceronte, infastidito da tanta agitazione iniziò a deriderlo: “Colibrì, cosa pensi di fare? Sei pazzo ad andare in mezzo a quelle fiamme! Non è con queste gocce d'acqua che riuscirai a spegnere il fuoco!” E il colibrì gli rispose: “Lo so, ma faccio la mia parte.”

Proprio da questa leggenda ha preso il nome *Le Mouvement Colibris*³¹, fondato da Pierre con un piccolo gruppo di collaboratori e che ormai ha raggiunto moltissimi Paesi in Europa e nel mondo, partendo dal principio che “Les Colibris, ce sont tous ces individus qui inventent, expérimentent et coopèrent concrètement, pour bâtir des modèles de vie en commun, respectueux de la nature et de l'être humain”³².

Salutandoci, Pierre ci confidò che gli sarebbe piaciuto venire un giorno al Festival che organizzavamo a Torino³³, ma bisognava che quell'incontro seminasse il terreno, che fosse l'inizio di un viaggio e non la sua conclusione. Capimmo subito che per quell'anno non ci saremmo riuscite e così gli proponemmo di realizzare una video-intervista che raccontasse di lui e della sua rivoluzione. Pierre accettò e, in capo a qualche mese, partimmo per l'Ardèche, dove tuttora egli vive con la sua famiglia. L'intervista avrebbe dovuto durare non più di mezz'ora invece girammo per oltre due ore.

³¹ Per maggiori informazioni sul movimento, consultare www.colibris-lemouvement.org.

³² I colibrì sono tutti quegli individui che inventano, sperimentano e cooperano concretamente per costruire dei modelli di vita comunitaria, rispettosi della natura e dell'essere umano (www.colibris-lemouvement.org).

³³ Si tratta di *Per sentieri e remiganti. Il festival dei viaggiatori extra-ordinari*, progetto che il Gruppo del Cerchio organizza a partire dal 2007 (www.persentiereremiganti.it e www.gruppodelcerchio.it).

Pierre raccontò della necessità di ritrovare l'humus, il fertilizzante fatto di umanità, umidità e umiltà che ristora la terra e le coscienze, ma parlò anche della necessità di riscoprire il femminile, quella forza femminile e generante che le società patriarcali hanno ostinatamente combattuto e offeso. Capimmo che quell'intervista sarebbe diventata qualcosa di più, che nessuna parola di questo saggio figlio del deserto e della terra doveva andare perduta.

Nei giorni successivi fummo ricevuti dalle monache ortodosse del monastero di Solan che, dal 1992, applicano le tecniche di Rabhi³⁴.

Se si ha la capacità di meravigliarsi, se si ha uno sguardo disinteressato verso la Creazione, si vede quanto essa sia bella, magnifica e armoniosa ed è molto più naturale preservarla. Ma questa ammirazione è l'atteggiamento contrario a quello che aveva Adamo che, invece di meravigliarsi per la bellezza dell'Eden, ha cercato di appropriarsi del frutto. (Suor Iossifia 2012, Monastero di Solan)

Di lì risalimmo in Savoia, dove il centro buddhista Karma Ling ha realizzato un eco-sito volto a incrementare "l'ecologia interiore e l'ecologia esteriore [...]: l'armonia che c'è in noi"³⁵ in sintonia con il Movimento del Colibrì. Parlando con le monache ortodosse e intervistando gli studiosi buddhisti ci accorgemmo che la meraviglia per il creato e la necessità di rispettarlo e proteggerlo erano solidi elementi comuni in tradizioni spirituali tanto distanti. Ci fu chiaro allora che sarebbe stato proprio quell'aspetto, quella spiritualità, a guidarci nel realizzare *Pierre Rabhi. Il mio corpo è la terra*, il documentario che stava nascendo.

A queste testimonianze si aggiunse presto anche il contributo di Vandana Shiva, una delle più autorevoli voci mondiali in difesa della natura e della sua biodiversità. che Igor Piumetti avrebbe intervistato a Bergamo poche settimane dopo, ritrovando sostanziali consonanze con il pensiero e l'esperienza di Pierre:

Il legame con il lavoro che Rabhi promuove e il lavoro che noi svolgiamo a Navdanya è innanzitutto riconoscere che la terra è violata e questa violenza sta facendo soffrire l'umanità attraverso la fame, la disoccupazione, i profughi, la migrazione. Il focus di Rabhi è in Africa, il nostro in India.

Ma non c'è solo questo. Vandana Shiva, sostenitrice come lo stesso Rabhi della necessità di riscoprire il principio del femminile per ribaltare il "malsviluppo" nel quale l'umanità versa, si fa portavoce anch'ella della necessità urgente di riconoscere tale principio nell'umanità e nella natura, perché dice infatti:

Non può esserci una vera crescita in questa crescita economica che sta distruggendo ogni cosa e che non lascia prosperare né il suolo, né i bambini, né le persone, Riconoscere il femminile è

³⁴ Durante la realizzazione del documentario, le monache ci confidarono che Pierre fu il primo, ma anche il solo, a credere che avrebbero potuto vivere della loro terra, senza dedicarsi ad attività estranee alla loro natura contemplativa, come avrebbe potuto essere il turismo, consigliato fortemente da altri

³⁵ Estratto dall'intervista a Lama Lhundroup (Benedetto e Piumetti 2012).

vitale per riscoprire la capacità della terra di provvedere a noi e per riscoprire la nostra capacità di vivere in armonia con la Terra e di provvedere a Lei e a noi. (Benedetto e Piumetti 2012)

Per comprendere appieno il significato del pensiero di Vandana Shiva occorre tenere presente che la *Śakti* (la Dea), nella tradizione *hindū* dalla quale l'ambientalista proviene, e in particolare nella religione *śākta*, riveste un ruolo centrale: è l'aspetto dinamico del divino. È l'energia creatrice, la potenza stessa di Dio (Piano 2006, 110-115).

Girato fra febbraio e marzo 2012, *Pierre Rabhi. Il mio corpo è la terra* è il primo documentario italiano dedicato a Pierre Rabhi e al suo impegno per ripristinare l'armonia fra uomo e natura, elemento imprescindibile – come dice lui stesso – per salvare la vita nostra e del nostro pianeta.



Foto di Pier Ilario Benedetto

Fu a quel punto che incontrammo Roberto Moncalvo, all'epoca Presidente di Coldiretti Piemonte, ora presidente nazionale di Coldiretti, che partecipò alla prima proiezione nel corso del Festival 2012 dedicato quell'anno alla *Gentilezza*. Con Moncalvo arrivarono anche i compagni di viaggio necessari per preparare un buon terreno, come a suo tempo aveva chiesto Rabhi. Conoscemmo infatti le socie di AiCARE (Agenzia Italiana per la Campagna e l'Agricoltura Responsabile ed Etica) e della cooperativa agricola-sociale Cavoli Nostri e decidemmo di andare tutte insieme in Ardèche per invitare ufficialmente Pierre per la prima volta in Italia.

Otto donne tenaci e molto diverse fra loro – tre del Gruppo del Cerchio, due di AiCARE e tre di Cavoli Nostri – si erano raccolte in un gruppo nuovo, dall'animo terroso e visionario, decise a partire insieme per fare la loro parte, portare in Italia Pierre Rabhi. Era febbraio e Pierre ci accolse nella sua casa. Tutti e nove intorno a un tavolo di legno, a riflettere sulla necessità di avviare un nuovo paradigma esistenziale e sociale. Ancora una volta mi tornò in mente Panikkar quando, parlando della crisi, individuava nell'attitudine femminile la via di uscita. E per atteggiamento femminile non

intendeva certo e soltanto l'essere biologicamente donne, quanto piuttosto la capacità di accogliere, accettare realisticamente una situazione disarmonica per trasformarla, per dare vita a un nuovo stile di vita. Ecco che otto anime femminili stavano facendo la loro parte per provare a generare una "ritrovata" – perché molto antica – felicità. A quel punto Pierre disse "sì": il viaggio che aveva intuito a Béziers, più di un anno prima, adesso si stava concretizzando e noi tutti saremmo partiti insieme. E così è stato. Il viaggio è iniziato. Pierre è stato a Torino, ospite del Festival *Per sentieri e remiganti 2013*, dedicato quella volta alla *Forza. Pierre Rabhi. Il mio corpo è la terra* è stato presentato al Festival Cinemambiente 2013, alla presenza di Rabhi stesso e di una tavola rotonda di studiosi e religiosi riuniti per confrontarsi su ecologia, spirito e società. Fra questi, il professor Andrea Segrè, il professor Stefano Piano, la giornalista Paola Emilia Cicerone e la monaca *hindū* Hamsananda Giri.

La venuta di Pierre Rabhi a Torino ha visto inoltre un coinvolgimento straordinario da parte di persone di ogni contesto ed età: dai bambini della scuola elementare agli appassionati di cinema, dai nuovi agricoltori alle amministrazioni pubbliche e ognuno ha fatto parte di un piccolo miracolo. Dopo ogni incontro, dopo ogni conversazione pubblica o privata con Pierre, non restava infatti la sensazione della fine, ma si sperimentava un senso di inizio. L'inizio di una nuova possibilità per riprenderci la felicità. Quest'uomo esile, così in pace con se stesso e con l'universo, porta infatti una tangibile forma di armonia che ognuno di noi ha sperimentato almeno una volta nella vita e che, nel silenzio di un campo, ai piedi di un albero, nell'esperienza diretta della bellezza eterna della creazione ci rende miliardari e, finalmente, paghi.

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Laureata in Indologia presso la Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia di Torino, insegna Storia delle Religioni Orientali all'Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose di Alessandria. È autrice e regista. Per il Gruppo del Cerchio ha realizzato, insieme con Igor Piumetti, *Il mio corpo è la terra* (2012), il primo documentario italiano dedicato a Pierre Rabhi; nel 2014 ha diretto lo spettacolo *Song of the earth*, fra i primi 30 selezionati tra 3200 spettacoli per il Fringe Sustainable Practice Award di Edimburgo. Ha pubblicato *Storie di Avatār e altri Dei* (Lakshmi Editrice). È in corso di pubblicazione *Il Mahabharata cinematografico di Peter Brook* (Value. Università Ricerca Innovazione).