

## Introduction

Browsing through the titles of this issue's contributions the reader will probably ask her/himself what apparently heterogeneous papers have in common and why they are labelled under the title *Wandering*. As it can easily be inferred, the title refers to both 'wander' and 'wonder'. As the caption *Exploring InFluxes and Cultures in Motion* suggests, by 'wander' we mean the possibility for intellectuals to explore different ways of knowledge, to be a wanderer not only– and not particularly– in the sense of moving across cultures or places, but in a deeper sense, namely taking the chance to dismantle a normative-constructed way of representing cultures to switch to a more sympathetic attitude: not writing *about*, but rather writing *with*. The different approaches used by the contributors well represent this attitude, as well as the different languages they use to express their thoughts and ideas. All the authors share a plurality of languages they live in, which makes them –in Rosi Braidotti's words– "critical nomadic beings" (Braidotti 1994: 12).

This kind of wandering is also strictly connected to 'wonder', that is the ability to read the marvellous, the strange but also to question reality. As editors of this issue in this perspective, our starting point was the idea of challenging the notions of knowledge and archive as generally understood in Social Sciences, proposing a different approach (Derrida 1995). We thought of a multidisciplinary approach able to include different investigation methods as well as to foster alternative ways of relating to research and the dissemination of its results. Being researchers hailing from southern Europe we share the feeling that it is high time to break the rigid borders that maintain consolidated disciplines disconnected and inhibit a genuine circulation of knowledge, a common problem in our academic environment. There is much talking about interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary, but in practice it is very difficult to create research groups where peers can freely work, discuss, analyze, and investigate challenging existing power relations.

'Wandering' seemed to us a very stimulating issue in this sense, offering both a physical and a conceptual perspective for this analysis. We received very different answers by researchers focusing on multifarious areas of investigation. Yet, a common thread was the idea that movement and changing is related to both knowledge and wonder, i.e. to discovery. All the contributions selected for this issue discuss the notion of identity pointing out different elements shaping a collective memory that eventually constitutes the archive. Reflecting the multiplicity of approaches of these papers we endorse the notion of a nomadic archive, rejecting the idea that knowledge is stuck in the archive once and forever. Our archive is the

repository of a collective knowledge consisting of the results of our individual investigations, our living experience as researchers, and the interactions within the research group. This is not a mere adding up of notions, but it is an enriching process involving personal relations, as well as participatory way of working (Alcoff and Potter 1992).

In this introduction, we suggest a sort of guide-map for the journey through the collected articles, written in three different languages and dealing with a very varied geographical and chronological range of topics. This will point out some of the possible intersections, leaving to the reader the task to find out further possible connecting threads.

A group of articles is related to literature, introducing works from Asia, Africa, and Europe that deal with issues of subalternity, power, and canonicity using a nomadic prism.

The authors selected by Esterino Adami for "Beyond the border and the word: wandering subjects in three anglophone texts" show different shades of nomadic. Christine Brooke-Rose moved constantly between languages, countries and identities without securing a fixed place in a literary canon or a national culture. Rupert Thomson has been writing fiction for 30 years and never won a prize, perhaps because his writing is not easily marketable and addresses the border-blurring quality of liminality. Zimbabwean writer Brian Chikwava uses a protean language to tackle the realities of life as a refugee. The article explores wandering subjects such as vagrants, homeless and migrants, who are often relegated to liminal social positions and neglected complete identities in fiction, highlighting diverse ways through which the periphery challenges the monolithic sense of order and power that lies in mainstream lifestyles and canons.

In "The Errant Philosopher: Rāhul Sāṃkṛityāyan's Art of Wandering" Alessandra Consolaro focusses on the philosophical importance the author of *Ghumakkaṛ śāstra* (A Treatise of Vagabondology) attributes to wandering, making the very goal of human life. Rāhul Sāṃkṛityāyan's learning and works are a good example of how cultural and social specificities of non-western spaces and times could be elaborated into an autonomous and methodologically challenging framework. That contemporary postcolonial studies almost totally ignore his contribution to the Indian thought is perplexing and confirms the Anglophone hegemony in postcolonial studies.

Jolanda Guardi's "Alla ricerca dell'isola delle donne" (In search of the women's island) connects the theme of migration to war and conflict, emphasizing the effort to bring together past and present notions of self. It relates the medieval myth of a nowhere island, inhabited by powerful and sexually exuberant women with a contemporary representation of it found in the short story *Maṭār wāq wāq* (Wāq wāq

airport) by Iraqi contemporary novelist Daysī al-Amīr. Here emphasis is on the possibilities offered by re-reading the myths of the past showing how the no-where island subject may still be explored, as also several recent Arab novels show. The focus is also on gender as a useful category to discuss literary canons.

This is an issue at stake also in the linguistic nomadism represented by translation, as can be seen in Anna Vanzan's "Traveling translations and Orientalism in reverse. Persian (Homo)erotic Literature and its translations into Western languages." This article points out power relations implied in the translation process, focusing on the suppression by Western translation of a huge homoerotic literature, which hindered the understanding of crucial mechanisms typical of the Persianate societies and at the same time fabricated its own erotic Orient, disclosed its bigotry and blindness by missing to grasp and articulate the profound aspects of gender dynamics in the Middle East.

Two articles in Spanish inflect an important theme in Spanish culture, viz. the theme of migration related to the theme of America as the space for the 'new man', articulating the enriched emigrant as a vigorous personality, possible agent of renovation in a devitalized society such as the Spanish one. Elena de Paz de Castro in "Hacer las Americas: el viaje sin retorno de un personaje galdosiano" focuses on a fictional character created by Benito Pérez Galdós, Agustín Caballero, who is a self-made man, but remains a perennial foreigner waiting for his life to begin.

Sergio M. Rodríguez Lorenzo's "El mar se mueve: la experiencia del viaje trasatlántico entre los pasajeros de la carrera de Indias (siglo XVI y XVII)" can be read as a sort of counterpoint to the previous article having a historical perspective. It presents a description of the daily life of passengers on their journey to the Spanish Indies during the 16th and 17th century. These people were agents of a massive migratory process, started in 1493, that changed the demographic landscape of Spain.

Two articles dealing with the issue of identity construction and shifting in two different settings conclude this collection. Maria Angelillo's "Rethinking resources: service nomadism adjusted" focuses on contemporary transformations occurring within the Kalbelia community living in the environs of Pushkar (Rajasthan, India), showing how local service nomadism is adapting to a global scale. This article emphasizes how agency does not only pertain to hybridized elites who come into direct contact with European ideas and practices, but also to the illiterate laborers and unskilled migrants, who, just as much as, if not even more than their elite fellow-citizens, practice and experience modernity on all its ambivalence and contradictions.

Estella Carpi's "Lebanon and its Linguistic Wandering: on the road to Language De-Essentialization" explores legacies of Lebanese transnationality and sheds light on

the wandering essence of language itself, as a mirror of Lebanon's identity performances and its inhabitants' mobility. It analysis the modalities through which contemporary Lebanon's linguistic variants are used, deliberately manipulated or unconsciously modified by their speakers, in a bid to express multifaceted cultural, political or merely individual egos.

Although this work is published in an international context, it reflects our being situated in the Italian academy, characterized by rigid disciplinary divisions. This experience has proved that working across disciplinary boundaries is not only a personal enriching experience for researchers, but also a way to challenge the established epistemological structures that hinder our critical inquiry.

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## References

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