

## On the Move: Constructing, Rethinking, Narrating Identities

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Citation: Castagnoli, S. and F. Raffi (2019) "On the Move: Constructing, Rethinking, Narrating Identities", *mediAzioni* 25, <http://mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it>, ISSN 1974-4382.

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Social, cultural, political, technological and economic changes, such as globalization, migratory processes and cross-border population mobility, are key forces of transformation which have affected the notions of "home", "family" and "Self". The assumption that everybody has, or owns, "one" identity is more than ever seen as a construct. As Sarup (1994: 93) notes: "identity can be displaced; it can be hybrid or multiple". Displaced from "home", identities are "on the move": they move across space and time, interact and undergo transformation. Therefore, identity formation must be seen as a process, rather than an outcome; as Powell (2012: 300) puts it: "identities are constantly being formed, implying a constant, active state".

Identities are also discursively (re)produced, transformed, and destructed (De Cillia et al. 1999: 153) and their discursive construction is often inextricably linked to the construction of difference/distinctiveness and uniqueness (Hall 1994, 1996; Martin 1995); as Benhabib (1996: 3ff) notes, "every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not". This explains the concept of "othering" (or "otherness"), by which a dominant in-group constructs one or many dominated out-groups through the binary opposition between the Self and the Other.

The essays in this collection examine the notion of identity from different angles, including its construction and narration.

The issue of national identity is at the core of **Valeria Reggi's** paper, which focuses on the dynamics of identity negotiation and group formation in institutional communication, with reference to speeches in English by the former

Italian Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi. Reggi analyses two sample videos of Renzi's speeches through the lens of multimodal and critical discourse analysis (CDA), and shows that Renzi's extensive use of verbal and non-verbal clichés, endorses and promotes a stereotypical identity of Italy and Italians, as opposed to an external Other (i.e. members of the European Union and Africa), despite his statements of intent to dismantle old habits and customs. National identity and group formation are also the focus of **Gaia Aragrande's** contribution, in which the author analyses reports by three Western news providers about the armed conflict which has affected Ukraine since 2014. Adopting a corpus-assisted discourse studies approach, Aragrande suggests that the tendency to depict two neatly distinct factions – namely separatists/rebels and Ukrainians – is part of a wider polarisation between East and West (more specifically between Russia and the West). **Ilaria Villa's** article explores "otherness" and centres upon the use of space in the British TV series *The Aliens* (2016), in which aliens from another world form an ethnic minority and live segregated in their own assigned area. Using a theoretical framework which includes border studies and semiotic approaches, Villa explores how the issue of bordering is represented in the TV series and concludes that the action of border crossing is significant for the construction of the protagonist's cultural identity (half-human, half-alien). The alien Others of the cinema screen are projected onto the immigrant Others who have begun to settle in the nation's towns and cities. Migration has always been a popular cinematic theme, going as far back as cinema's silent era and the first sound films. In her paper, **Francesca Raffi** examines the representation of linguistic diversity in migration films and discusses the difficulties in making these pictures accessible to their heterogeneous audience, without altering the representation of migrants' identities and negatively affecting audience engagement. Raffi analyses a case study based on Andrea Segre's film *Io sono Li* (2011) and the translation of its subtitles for American viewers, showing that the layers and nuances of linguistic diversity do not seem to lose their complexity in the passage to English, thus having a positive effect on audience engagement among Anglophone viewers.

Moving from audiovisual to literary texts, **Alessia Polatti** discusses the complex interrelations among identity formation, space and home, and between homeland and return, as depicted in Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (2000)

and Tariq Mehmood's *While There is Light* (2003). The exploration of one's own origins is the main focus of both novels, in which second "generationers" return to their ancestral homeland "not as rejected outsiders, but critical insiders" (Wambu 1998: 28). The culturally pervasive myth of leaving home and coming back is also addressed by **Annalisa Bonomo**, whose essay contributes to the growing field of research on Italian-Canadian writing (i.e. literature produced by writers with an Italian background living in Canada). More specifically, Bonomo's paper investigates Licia Canton's experience of writing and self-translating and demonstrates that settings and languages are inextricably linked as they mirror the multiple identities of a "writer in-between" using a "borrowed tongue" – constantly lingering on different cultural, linguistic and geographical borders. As Bonomo observes, Canton reconceptualises vivid memories of Italy and Canada through a mix of characters negotiating different languages and cultures, thanks to a literary journey into identity navigation. Remaining within the realm of literature, **Eleonora Ravizza** explores identity negotiation and the ways in which borders are drawn by addressing Caryl Phillips' travelogue *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) as an example of "fiction of metamemory" (Neumann 2008; Nünning 2007). Ravizza shows that Phillips subverts the typical approach to travel writing which is characterised by a translation of the Other into the terms of the Self: by translating a personal quest for home and identity into the language of multiple Others, *The Atlantic Sound* in fact displays a self-reflective concern about the nature and limits of representation and the way memory is actualized, relived, transmitted or even erased.

Transmission as "cultural mediation" is at the core of **Paolo Bugliani's** paper, which explores the figure of Giuseppe Baretti, arguably one of the most notable examples of early modern "literary migrants" (who moved between Italy and England). Bugliani shows how Baretti, as a go-between and cultural mediator, sought to correct a widespread and in fact strongly biased image of Italy, taking advantage of his knowledge of the English and Italian cultures to defend both countries against their detractors. Albeit from a totally different, contemporary perspective, "intercultural mediation" is also the focus of **Denise Filmer's** contribution. The author discusses the results of a survey that she conducted at ports and reception centres in Eastern Sicily which are particularly affected by the current phenomenon of migration, in order to explore the perceptions and

practices of intercultural mediation services. Based on a combination of semi-structured interviews and in situ observations, the study investigates the ways in which intercultural mediators, medical operators and migrants portray their experience of negotiating linguistic and cultural barriers, focusing on issues of (ethnic and gender) identity and trust.

Issues of gender identity are central to **Barbara Franchi's** contribution, which examines the role of nationalist rhetoric, post-imperial nostalgia and individual formation in David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green* (2006). Ideals of imperial masculinity determine the protagonist's process of personal growth and socialisation. In particular, Franchi argues that the intersection between 1980s' attitudes towards family, traditional gender roles and patriotism, and imperialistic discourses on race promoted by Margaret Thatcher's policies and style of communication, is a key locus of tension within the novel of formation. In this historical fiction, the protagonist's ambivalent stance towards the conservative attitude prevalent in his community endows him with a mobile identity, one in which his critical thinking represents a non-hegemonic, anti-imperial form of collective memory. The special issue concludes with a paper by **Maria Luigia Di Nisio** who explores an example of revisionist mythology by the Late-Victorian poet Emily Pfeiffer (1827-1890), whose sonnets turned to antiquity to expose the sexual double standards of her period, while trying out alternative models of femininity, safely displaced in a remote setting. As Di Nisio shows, the famous heroines of Greek tragedy dramatised in Pfeiffer's sonnets both challenged and deferred to current sexual stereotypes; they share stories of male violence and abuse, of transgression and punishment set in a mythical past which also disturbingly draws attention to "the woman question" that became increasingly prominent in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

All the essays within this interdisciplinary collection have articulated the challenges perceived by an individual, group, or country when their sense of "Self" is confronted by the "Other", when forced to (re)define themselves and (re)think their own concept of personal or national identity. The special issue thus closes with the notions of displacement, rethinking, and challenge, all of which are inextricably tied to "moving identities" and evoked throughout this collection.

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