

Introduction Literature and Migration

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In an article titled “Sopravvissuti” that recently appeared in the Italian weekly magazine *L'Espresso*, Igiaba Scego (2020) called for the decolonization of Italian literature while lamenting the many obstacles migrant/immigrant writers in Italy face in trying to get their work published. Referring to the clamorous, decades-long biopolitical crisis of immigration linking not only countries of postcolonial Africa and the Middle East to Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Spain, Italy, and Malta and the northern reaches of the European Union but also poor to rich nations around the world, Scego mentions a combative coterie of writers who have drawn largely on their own lives to recount the harsh and at times unspeakable realities of the migrant experience: Cristina Ali Farah, Gabriella Kuruvilla, Laila Wadia, and Ingy Mubiayi.¹ For both existential and cultural reasons, Scego calls these writers “survivors”².

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¹ See Sangiorgi 1996; Parati 1999; Matteo 2001; Capitani, Coen 2005.

² See also Mengozzi 2015.

Of course there are many other writers who have contributed to the new Italian literature, often in the form of life-writing – one could mention Salah Methnani, Pap Khouma, Yvan Sagnet, Mbacke Gadjji, Kossi Komla Ebri, Bay Mademba, Valentina Acava Mmaka, Christina de Caldas Brito, Fatou N'Diaye, and Amara Lakous, among others.³ All together, their body of works provides richly detailed and often moving testimony about what it means today to cross borders, flee in the night from violence, leave loved ones behind, and experience the anxieties of detention and life as an undocumented alien.⁴ Needless to say, the all-devouring matter of migration presents difficulties that go well beyond those of publication, as the writers themselves are the first to affirm. So ubiquitous and overwhelming has the movement of peoples around the globe now become that writer and performing artist Shailaja Patel was inspired to coin the term “migmatude” to weave the single thread of her personal story (as a South Asian growing up in Kenya, a South Asian student in England, and a ‘woman of color’ in the United States) into the border-transcending fabric of political and collective history embracing the whole round world (2010, 128, 145).

In a September 8, 2020, Brown University report on the “Costs of War”, anthropologist David Vine and his team estimated conservatively that America’s war on terror since September 11, 2001, has alone displaced at least 37 million people (Vine 2020). According to Vine, a more likely figure would be anywhere from 48 to 59 million. The nations affected by this war on terror are Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria. The report does not include countries where the United States is (or has been) involved in smaller counterterrorism operations. These include countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and Niger. But war is hardly the only cause pushing people to flee for better shores. There are also economic, religious, political, ethnic, sexual, and climate factors that leave whole groups of people with no choice but to seek asylum elsewhere. The alternative is often torture or death. Since the US invaded Iraq, thousands of Iraqi women and girls have simply disappeared. As Shailja Patel notes, “When societies are blown apart, women become prey” (2010, 20). In his important immigrant manifesto, Suketu Mehta observes that as of 2017 more than 17 million Indians now live abroad (2019, 216).

The moral Mehta draws from this startling data regarding his homeland seems more axiomatic than descriptive: “mobility is surviv-

³ On the importance of life-writing as a major discursive genre of African Italian literature, see Boelhower 2001 and 2017.

⁴ See Sossi 2006; Liberti 2008; Di Maio 2016.

al" (2019, 217). At the very outset of his book he provides us with an ineluctable historical truth, "[W]e've become a planet on the move. [...] Mass migration is *the* defining human phenomenon of the twenty-first century" (9). In his book of essays *A New World Order*, Caryll Phillips adds an important corollary to Mehta's observations, noting that "whether we liked it or not we were all, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, becoming multicultural individuals" (2011, 314). Across Europe and the United States populist politicians on the right have used this fact to raise the wall of national identity. In effect, more than ever Europe's major capitals are now being transformed by waves of postcolonial immigrants and migrants who, in Mehta's words, have come to collect all the wealth that was extracted from their countries for decades if not centuries. And many of these migrants are forced to live invisibly, without documents verifying their existence.

As the anthropologist Jason Hickel reminds us, "Europe didn't develop the colonies. The colonies developed Europe" (2015). In truth, far from being an economic burden these migrants are actually Europe's creditors.⁵ According to figures provided by the Berlin-based Global Migration Data Analysis Centre for 2018, well over three percent of the world's population are migrants (see GMI 2018). The report breaks these figures down as follows. There are 258 million international migrants overall, of which 124.8 million are women and 36.1 million are children. Of this total, 25.4 million are registered refugees, while 150.3 million are migrant workers. To complete the picture, there are also 4.8 million international students (GMI 2018, 9). In Italy, the influx of migrants has led to a political backlash fomented by fear-mongering parties of the populist right. But the statistics do not indicate invading hordes. In 2018 only 23,400 migrants arrived in Italy, 80 percent less than the 119,400 that arrived in 2017 (Saviano 2019, 21). According to data provided by Istat (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) for the year 2019, resident foreigners make up 8.8 percent of the population or 5,259,483 out of a total population of 60,244,639 (Istat 2020). This means that 91.2 percent of the population is Italian. For the year 2018 it is estimated that there were around 533,000 undocumented migrants in the country (Saviano 2019, 8).

However remarkable in themselves, the above statistics remain cold and abstract if not tethered to the personal and collective dramas of the migrants themselves. For while multinational corporations move in a border-free world, migrants do not. Much depends on what

⁵ As Suketu Mehta's Indian grandfather, who worked much of his life in colonial Kenya, said in reply to an elderly British man who aggressively asked him why he was 'here' in England, "You took all our wealth, our diamonds. Now we have come to collect" (Mehta 2019, 3).

documents they are carrying, what country they are from, what religion they profess, and what their reasons are for crossing borders. It is worth noting that the word ‘migrant’ itself confusingly embraces a wide range of conditions and profiles, each having their own legal and cultural implications and their own set of existential scripts. Let’s see if we can unpack this generic term into its several provinces: asylum seekers, guest workers, political refugees, economic refugees, clandestine, undocumented (or illegal) aliens, disaster migrants, displaced persons, climate refugees, students, trafficking victims, stateless persons, domestic workers, caretakers, itinerants, and expatriates. Some of these labels are prevalently used by government organizations, others by scholars, human-aid workers, and journalists.

The supposedly descriptive “clandestine”, for example, has been used by some politicians in Italy to criminalize all refugees arriving by boat from across the Mediterranean. Many of these same migrants arrive without documents (or throw them away at sea), having fled from war zones, and literally belong to no country.⁶ In other words, they are stateless. A special group of persons, like students and expatriates, are voluntary migrants, but most of those who migrate do so involuntarily, in order to survive. It is often difficult, if not futile, to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary migrants. Climate refugees, who for the most part tend to be internal or intranational migrants, choose or are forced to move because of flooding, hurricanes and typhoons, fire storms, or industrial disasters. None of the terms mentioned above help to appreciate intersectional features such as gender, religious affiliation, ethnicity, geographical origin, skin color, or mother tongue. Often these pivotal features (say, being a Catholic in Iran or a Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar) need to be acknowledged intersectionally, as a constellation of several contributing characteristics. Particularly in the case of women migrants, the body often becomes a form of currency. Rape in detention camps and at border crossings has become a frequent crime (see Nayeri 2019, 234, 254, 258). As Suketu Mehta notes, “When you move countries, your greatest – sometimes only – asset is your body, which also becomes your greatest vulnerability” (2019, 11).

Apart from the above semantic mosaic, migrants invariably move in order to survive or create a better life for themselves. But we can not forget that the right to flee for one’s life remains a sacred law for cultures the world over. In his prologue to the recent Afro-Italian poetry collection *Migrazioni Migrations*, Wole Soyinka observes, “In the

⁶ In north African dialects, especially Morocco, the clandestine migrant is called *Harraag*, meaning the one who burnt his identity papers. The verb coined to signify ‘to emigrate’ is *H’rag*, meaning ‘to burn’, because when crossing the sea, many migrants choose to burn their documents so that no one can prove where they come from.

Orunmila myth, or in the considerateness of the Christian god... is established a foundation of ethical injunctions that would, aeons of time later, be enshrined as a principle of obligations in the Charter of Universal Human Rights - Article 14: 'Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution' (Soyinka 2016, 19). Would that it were true in practice. The Philippine-American journalist and film maker Jose Antonio Vargas wrote his prize-winning memoir *Dear America, Notes of an Undocumented Citizen* on the run, without a fixed residence, address or job, having received from the Department of Homeland Security a "Warrant for Arrest of Alien" (2018, xi). In his own words, "After twenty-five years of living illegally in a country that does not consider me one of its own, this book is the closest thing I have to freedom" (xiii). His memoir is a searing indictment against the Trump administration's crackdown on migrants as well as a fact-driven argument demonstrating that the country's estimated 11 million undocumented 'aliens' contribute enormously to its economic well-being. And they do so while living haphazardly, on the margins, and subject to all kinds of bribery and abuse. What Vargas's clandestine condition ultimately means is rendered starkly by Truman Capote: "The problem with living outside the law is that you no longer have the law's protection" (Vargas 2018, 73).

Once having reached an outlying island belonging to a European Union country - say, Lesbos or Lampedusa - the Mediterranean's hapless boat people are then packed away in holding pens, barbed-wire camps, or, as in Italy, one of thirteen CIEs (Centers for Identification and Expulsion) until they pass the gauntlet of a grueling interview process and are assigned a working permit or expulsion papers. But if we look at the history of these centers, whether they be in London or Amsterdam or Lampedusa, asylum hardly seems like an offer of sanctuary. On September 8, in the Greek island of Lesbos, the camp of Moria caught fire and was completely burned down. Thousands remained unsheltered and left with nothing but the sky over their heads. Built to contain three thousand migrants, there were twelve thousand detained there at the time, making it Europe's largest holding center. The camp was not only overcrowded, it also had terrible sanitary conditions. Due to the Covid-19 virus, the camp was put on lockdown and the local police would not let the refugees out.⁷ Besides the barbed wire of the camps, there are also border walls of various kinds that have sprung up across Europe and elsewhere, supposedly to stave off the 'invading hordes.' The most famous of them all is undoubtedly the Trump administration's insane attempt to build a 1,900-mile *cordon sanitaire* between the US and Mexico.

⁷ Fabbrini, S., "La miscela esplosiva di Covid-19 e rifugiati", *Il Sole 24 Ore*, September 13, 2020.

Without further comment we might cite here a Spanish proverb which warns against the folly of such an undertaking: "You can't cover the sun with a hand".⁸

Any number of scandals could be recounted about the camp in Lampedusa (Sossi 2006, 53-65) or the Schiphol Detention Centre outside Amsterdam (Nayeri 2019, 204-16). But beyond the humiliating physical conditions of many of southern Europe's camps (the food-lines, the dirty toilets, the exposed bathing and sleeping conditions, the crowding, the food, the waiting, the youth gangs), there is something even more basic at stake, namely the loss of personal dignity. Evidently, camp and government officials often forget that migrants are not just migrants; they are human beings. As Dina Nayeri recounts in her memoir *The Ungrateful Refugee*, "I used to talk about the irony of so many of the world's refugees coming from the Middle East - we are such prideful people, and a refugee is the most abject creature of all, stateless, homeless, without control over her own food, education, or health" (2019, 118). On top of it all, there is the sheer anxiety of waiting to learn of one's fate. This climactic moment is condensed in the interview process itself, for it is here, usually in the presence of a translator, that one's future is at stake. Will they be understood? Believed? Will they be offered asylum or will they be sent back for having failed to convince an often tired, poorly paid immigration officer? And if their story is accepted, which country will they be sent to?

At one point in her memoir Dina Nayeri asks an immigration lawyer in London how long the interview process usually takes. It depends, he replies: "When they're satisfied. Hours. Days. Often after they find enough contradictions". Nayeri then steps in to explain the point, "[T]hey're not looking to rescue. They're looking to reject" (2019, 224). In short, it all comes down to the stories the immigrants tell about themselves. Unfortunately, there is also context to consider, for over the last couple of decades, as Nayeri the collector of migrant stories notes, the world has turned its back on refugees (131). Jose Antonio Vargas makes a further point when he explains, "[Y]ou cannot change the politics of immigration until you change the culture in which immigrants are seen. Storytelling is central to our strategy: collecting stories of immigrants from all walks of life..." (2018, 122). In effect, it is through storytelling that migrants have often found some vindication or regained a sense of lost agency. In Vargas's case, "As the years passed, as I kept on passing as an American, sharing my story was a compulsion, a way of relieving myself of the burden of lies I had to tell so I could exist" (91). In turn, Suketu Mehta observes, "Wherever there are immigrants there are stories; be-

⁸ De Santis, R., "Così connessi e così diseguali", *La Repubblica*, September 12, 2020.
For a further reflection on borders, see Lalami 2020, 48-71.

cause of their dislocation, they have need of recollection" (2019, 32).

Although the current migrant crisis leads us to focus on the present, we can not forget the vast migrations that led to settler colonies in the Americas and the incredible wealth that countries such as Spain, Portugal, England, France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United States generated by shipping millions upon millions of bonded African laborers to work its tobacco, indigo, rice, coffee, and cotton plantations as slaves. Today, the literatures of the African diaspora have deeply shaped and enriched the literatures of the above nations and their colonies. At first sight, it may seem miraculous that African Americans, who for centuries were denied the right to express a culture of their own let alone the right to have books or practice writing of any kind, could produce such an overflowing cornucopia of stories and songs. But for the writers and songsters themselves, it is not about miracles at all. As M. NourbeSe Philip writes in her stunning book of poetry *Zong!* (the name of the infamous ship whose captain threw some 140 slaves overboard during a storm in order to collect the insurance on them), "There is no telling this story; it must be told" (2008, 189).

In a very real sense, migrant writing provides us with the best means to break through the crust of labels, commonplaces, and stereotypes that populist politicians continue to wield in order to stir fear in people and rally them around a hypothetical, purist notion of national identity. In the words of Dohra Ahmad, the editor of *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature*, "Just as there is no singular migrant experience, there are myriad ways of writing about migration" (2019, xxiii). As the interview process in the detention centers suggests, migrants and refugees live or die by their stories. Indeed, Sekutu Mehta may startle us when he notes, "The first thing that a new migrant sends to his family back home isn't money; it's a story" (2019, 32). Although migrants are compelled to move across borders and live in internment camps with little baggage, as if only things and places defined them, they carry with them their stories – stories in which they use their migrant self to put things and places in perspective. When written down or told to others, these stories invariably introduce the reader or listener to deep histories. In his groundbreaking memoir *Io, venditore di elefanti*, Pap Khouma explains, "This is the story of a Senegalese, the life I have known for what seems a long time now, but at bottom fortunate because, as we say in my country, if you can recount something it means it brought you good luck (1990, 143; Authors' transl.).

In our special issue on migration literature we bring together contributions from different countries and scholarly disciplines. The range

of topics is wide, from Italian travel and migrant writing in Mexico in the years 1890-1932 (Savarino Roggero and Zuccala) to recent refugee tales. Among these nine contributions four of them deal with authors currently living in Germany. Given the rather distinct profile of migration history in Germany, some preliminary remarks are needed to better place these contributions in a broader transnational context. While in disciplinary areas such as English and Romance Studies the topic of migration is closely linked to postcolonial studies, the situation in German Studies is quite different due to the country's distinct colonial history. Germany only became a colonial power in the mid-1880s and lost its colonies after the First World War through the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. There are therefore no voices from the former colonies to speak of nor any noticeable migration from the colonies to Germany. If colonial history is the subject of discussion, then it is invariably by German authors such as Uwe Timm in his novel *Morenga* (1978) or scholars in historical studies. During the Third Reich, however, the East was regarded as a colonial area that is now studied within the context of coming to terms with Nazi history. Migration literature, on the other hand, embraces narratives written mainly by the offspring of guest workers who came to Germany in different waves from Turkey, Greece and Italy and is the result of relatively recent incoming waves of refugees. According to official figures from the Federal Statistical Office, twenty-six per cent of the German population today have a migration background. Given this framework, the separation of migration literature from "German" literature has now become moot.

Currently in German literary studies (in Germany) there is a clear separation between migration literature, intercultural literature, and postcolonial studies. One is more likely to find postcolonial studies in tandem with cultural studies, while the first two areas of scholarship tend to be cultivated at certain universities having corresponding focuses, such as Flensburg and Bamberg. Scholarship dealing with migration and intercultural literatures evidently has not satisfied everybody if we consider the fact that leading journals in German literary studies such as *Euphorion* or the *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* (DvjS) rarely or never include topics related to these thematic areas. The reason for this is apparently due to a deep and widespread scepticism towards a largely content-related political interpretation of literature, which ignores its aesthetic dimension. According to the basic understanding of many representatives of German literary studies, the latter should be primarily concerned with explaining how an aesthetic text differs from a common text, i.e. with working out and explaining the aesthetic *surplus*. As Walter Benjamin observed in his famous essay "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (1921), it was "the incomprehensible, mysterious, poetic" dimension and not its simple contents that make a literary text a work of art - in short, all those

things that elude an exclusively semantic agenda. This is a position that most scholars in German studies still subscribe to today.

Recently scholars in Germany – particularly those in comparative literature – have tended to look at the consequences of major migratory movements from a transnational, “world literature” perspective (Ezli, Kimmich, Werberger 2009). One now speaks of migration literature as a generic focus to make it clear that the cultural changes resulting from the migration of peoples, ideas, and languages can no longer be adequately described from a national perspective alone. Recent discourses on migration, on the other hand, have sought to illuminate a specific minority culture in order to appreciate more fully its models of self-representation. As a result, this literature also provides an aesthetic reflection not only on problems of cultural integration but also on various forms of individual, social, and linguistic disintegration.

Much of this problematic is reflected in the four contributions dealing with authors writing in Germany. Of the four, only Martina Kofer deals with texts which are related to the recent waves of refugees in Germany and which could also be placed under the transnational heading of ‘Refugee tales.’ Current migrations, mostly due to war and expulsion, lead not least to identity problems springing from gender roles, as Kofer demonstrates in her discussion of the novels of Olga Grjasnowa (*Gott ist nicht schüchtern*) and Shida Bazyar (*Nachts ist es leise in Teheran*). Sandro Moraldo, on the other hand, examines the crime novels of Jakob Arjouni, which indirectly address the theme of labour migration. Arjouni, of course, is a German author. His hero is a German Turk who, as Moraldo shows in detail, is given a background story typical of a migrant in Germany. Faced with such a *mis-en-scene*, the reader might be tempted to ask whether we are dealing with migration literature *per se* simply because a German writer chooses a migrant for his protagonist. Moraldo’s essay raises an intriguing issue involving not only problems of critical labeling but also deeper ones related to creative empathy and ethnographic mimesis.

That this matter may seem somewhat skewed is made clear by Gabriella Pelloni’s essay on the German Turkish author Zafer Senocak. In his work Senocak forthrightly deals with the current debates on identity theory, but above all, he breaks away from the demand for ‘authentic’ descriptions of the fate of migrants by opting for the invention of family history. For German literature scholars, this may represent a step towards treating the family history of migrants in the same way, say, as Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*. In this light, Senocak’s work (and migration or ethnic literature *tout court*) may be appreciated from not only a cultural studies but also an aesthetic point of view. Of course this assumes that migration literature has already fully entered the canon of German literature and is treated on equal terms with traditionally canonical texts.

Beatrice Occhini's essay on the German poet Uljana Wolf embraces some of the same issues as Pelloni. Occhini points out the importance of the Chamisso Prize in Germany for authors with a migration background. Originally, the prize was introduced to honor writers who came to Germany and began writing in German. Later, however, the prize was also awarded to second-generation writers who were already born in Germany, such as Zsuzsa Bánk (born in Frankfurt in 1965), and even to authors without a migration background, such as Esther Kinsky and Uljana Wolf. Along the way, the prize seemed to have lost its meaning as it was overtaken by historical developments. For the migrants now had arrived on the German literary scene in some force, and many of the old segregating distinctions had become meaningless. The prize was abolished after thirty-two years "because of [its] success", it was said. In effect, today the themes of migration, visa permits, refugee status, ethnicity, and the border are no longer divided up according to authors who are or are not migrants but are negotiated in a more inclusive way. Indeed, Occhini situates Uljana Wolf's poetic thematisation of borders and foreignness as poetry in a *postmigrantische Gesellschaft* (a post-migrant society).

Needless to say, many of the themes dealt with in the above essays are not exclusive to Germany, although geocultural context remains a crucial factor in dealing with them. Elena Sbrojavacca's and Lucio De Capitani's contribution, which is also dedicated to the compelling topic of refugee tales, discusses the Serbian writer Elvira Mujčić's fifth novel, *Consigli per essere un bravo immigrato* (2019) (Tips for being a good immigrant), Alessandro Leogrande's *La frontiera* (The border), and a short story anthology *Refugee Tales*. Sbrojavacca and De Capitani deal with a pivotal aspect of the migrant experience: namely, what stories do refugees have to tell about themselves in order to be believed and be granted asylum. The essay focuses on the narrative patterns that lend credibility to refugee stories and also the 'trading zone' that has to be created for the sharing of migrant stories. Indeed, it is not simply a matter of authentically reporting the drama of suffering and violence that one experienced – of testifying to what actually happened – or simply of claiming that one is a victim. Rather, one must tell the right kind of stories in order to be given refugee status. In their important essay De Capitani and Sbrojavacca not only sensitize us to all the ambiguities that arise when someone – for example, a translator – recounts another person's story but also asks us to reflect on how one might tell such a story without appropriating it. In short, the challenge is to respect the way in which the refugees want their story to be told.

Simona Bertacco's theoretically ambitious essay discusses the Palestinian-American Emily Jacir's art installation *Via Crucis* (2016) and Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017), in which the author examines the often absurd screening pro-

cess of child asylum seekers after they have crossed the US-Mexico border. Luisella's book is based on her role as a volunteer translator-interpreter for these children, and it is by leveraging this latter role (also informing Jacir's installation through a process of juxtaposition) that Bertacco aims to elaborate a reading hermeneutic not only for current migrant literatures but also for navigating multicultural and multiethnic textualities in a globalized context. Bertacco calls for a new (ethical) sense of cultural and literary responsibility which she designates a form of "translation literacy".

Enrico Davanzo introduces us to the Bosnian American writer Aleksandar Hemon, who a year ago appeared in the spotlight for his criticism of the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Peter Handke. In his work Hemon insists on fictionalizing his own life story by underlining the unreliability of memory and the transforming effects of narration of any kind. In this respect, Davanzo raises comparisons to Pelloni's discussion of the discursive maneuverings of Zafer Senocak. But contrary to the latter, rather than questioning Bosnia and his childhood in Sarajevo as sites of memory *per se*, Hemon uses these sites for his own literary production by thematizing his youthful experiences of strangeness through the fate of his failing anti-heroes. Davanzo describes Hemon's particular mixture of fictional invention and autobiographical sincerity as a form of autofiction, which inevitably becomes a self-reflexive strategy expressed through linguistic markers, such as puns and intentional grammatical errors. A closer look at Hemon's more recent novels leads Davanzo to view the writer's use of autofiction more as 'allofiction.' Thus he fruitfully examines how the writer's condition of otherness both in the USA and postwar Bosnia has shaped his style and his themes.

In her essay on the Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Circle K Cycles* (2001), Grazia Micheli focuses on second-generation Japanese Brazilians' return migration to Japan in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This return to a basically romanticized Japan and their failure to fit in leads them to long for their former homeland. Micheli explores this largely unstudied instance of a form of counter- or dual-diaspora through the elusive concept of nostalgia and a range of accompanying notions (homeland, cultural hybridity, liminality). Having spent some time both in Brazil and Japan, Yamashita decided to convert her research experiences into what she calls a creative autoethnography. It is this discursive and generic quest to find an appropriate form of representation that filters the Japanese Brazilians' drama of return. The result is her multi-generic effort *Circle K Cycles*.

Finally, Franco Roggero Savarino and Brian Zuccala examine a comprehensive corpus of Italian travelogues, studies, and memoirs written about and in Mexico from before and after 1900. In fact, their comparative study (of Italy and Mexico) discusses some of the hitherto

to overlooked and forgotten roots of what Edward Said famously labeled Western culture's distorting lens of Orientalism. Many of the texts, ranging from Luigi Bruni's *Attraverso il Messico* (1890) to Emilio Cecchi's *Messico* (1932), are largely unknown. But, as the authors show, they shed important light on how, during the period of nation-building, ideas of Orientalism emerged which had long been present in European cultures. These ideas also helped to shape the connection between racialisation and nation-making in the Italian *fin de siècle* and then in the emerging fascist cultures of the 1920s and 1930s. Savarino and Zuccala also mention "the way in which an often latent Orientalism is displayed by these Italian travellers and their texts to reflect and counter a national and international discourse, which was orientalising their own country". Scholars will be indebted to Savarino and Zuccala for providing a sweeping overview and bibliography of a migrant text-type that offers extremely fertile ground for studying a number of intercultural and transnational political intersections defining today's agenda.

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