

---

## Introduction

The papers in this volume provide differing answers to the question of why the notion of 'exile' has become not only a so-called hot topic, but also a metaphor dominating critical debate. Three papers refer explicitly to the topicality which questions of 'being away from home' have acquired in the form of racism and anti-immigrant legislation in France, Germany and Italy. The articles cannot be accused of celebrating displacement and 'exile as redemptive authorial practice' for the critical intellectual nor do they turn a blind eye to the 'absence of women writers from the discussion of exile' as Caren Kaplan puts it in her critique of Edward W. Said.<sup>1</sup>

Dealing with the very complexity of discourses of displacement, nearly all the contributions differentiate between enforced and voluntary exile, between political, psychic and linguistic exile, between present and culturally remembered exile. In all articles, the question is raised as to *whose* exile we are talking about: be it that of women authors writing in German; a young generation in the Italy of the 1980s and 1990s; a Greek immigrant community in France; a French regional community, subject to a Northern French cultural identity or Italian and German intellectuals of the 1930s who broke away from party politics in Switzerland.

Insisting on the historical specificity and 'situatedness' of 'exile', does not mean seeing no links between them. The attempt to locate exile inevitably leads to a variety of answers: whether nostalgia for a lost past is something positive or negative; whether traumatic memory can be overcome or not; whether writing should be seen as a privileged home of the exiled; whether women's entry into linguistic exile is to be seen as a response to 'invisible' violence or whether exile is a mythic construction - all these questions are critically debated.

The myth of exile and the Albigensian crusade of the Middle Ages is the subject of Catherine Léglu's article. Exile in her article is analysed in the light of discussions surrounding the notion of a specific Occitan identity, developed in literary and cultural terms by the Félibrige movement of the nineteenth century and associated with an

---

'exile' consciousness transmitted by the medieval troubadour lyric of the region.

Léglu works with the poetry and ethics of three medieval troubadours lyrics examining how they construct the region and its historical heritage. The importance of place names and their real and symbolic resonance indicate how the Albigensian Crusade, a series of wars which resulted in the King of France becoming the count of Toulouse, effectively absorbing the Languedoc and Provence into France, was not in fact the act which destroyed a constituted Occitan nation, but rather the founding moment of subsequent myths about 'Occitania'. Léglu reveals that a mythical vision of Occitan regions 'colonised' by the Northern French cannot be born out with careful rereadings of twelfth and thirteenth-century troubadour manuscripts, many of which were compiled in exile in Northern Italy. The troubadour poets and their compilers demonstrate a more ambiguous attitude towards the loss of land and castles and towards questions of allegiance and religion than is generally supposed, raising issues of the selective and political use made of 'myths of exile'.

Reflecting the complexity of the very term 'exile' and its metaphorical use in contemporary Italian literature, Claudia Bernardi historicises the change in literary concepts which are concerned with displacement and estrangement. Following Rosa Braidotti's distinction between the 'exile', the 'emigrant' and the 'nomad', Bernardi identifies the turn to the 'nomadic' in 1990s texts, firstly, as a departure from the main narrative trends of the 1980s and, secondly, as a 'return to more traditional narrative modes'. In general, the 'situated nomadic subject' is characterised by a constant awareness of tension and the reflection of constantly changing (subject) positions in opposition to the 'exiled' or 'emigrant'.

In the 1980s, seeking 'voluntary exile' included the break with inherited traditions; it signalled an 'exit', from the 'canon', its inscribed languages, genres, modes of writing and a growing distance from a given national culture. Bernardi draws a line between these moves into voluntary (artistic) exile and the later, postmodern (and than of course ironic) attempts to seek acclaim for the position of a 'nomadic subject'. The former position (mainly represented in the works of Tondelli) still 'mourns' - in a romantic or nostalgic manner

---

- the metaphorical loss of home/place/language/identity. The latter position finds itself in a constant irresolvable tension that is created by both an engagement with and a resistance to surrounding dominant cultures. In looking at texts by Silvia Ballestra, Bernardi argues that texts of the 1990s take issue with the 'traditional' flight/journey pattern in order to reveal it not only as a cultural construction but as a myth. Voluntary 'exile' is now seen as a 'restrictive metaphor'. The very tension between 'home' and 'away', is presented as a state of mind that permeates the characters themselves and is irresolvable.

Often (and particularly in texts by male authors) it is left to the female characters - as Bernardi shows - to cope with more sophistication with 'in-betweenness', with shifting and unstable (national) identities. Here, of course, the question remains, as to whether these glorified female nomads do not have, in fact, to embody another (now postmodern) nostalgic (narrative) hope. In addition, if, as Bernardi shows, these Italian texts of the 1990s present history as a space beyond 'engagement and control', and if the very concept of involvement is - of course ironically - seen as an idealistic venture, then the question arises: What is going to happen, when these young, well off, travelling Italian nomads meet the displaced involuntarily 'exiled' immigrant? Will this encounter provide the chance for a committed dialogue or is it up to a new body of immigrant literature alone to deconstruct - yet again - the myths of their 'predecessors'?

Sarah Colvin also pays attention to 'fictional subjects' and reflects the very specificity of one's 'exiled' position. While Bernardi refers to issues of generation, gender, class and country of origin, Sarah Colvin's contribution concentrates not on externally enforced 'tangible' forms of exile, but rather the 'insecure spaces' of bodies, names and language as explored by Judith Butler. With such models in mind, Colvin focuses on women's writing in German which tries to resist 'non visible' forms of violence.

This form of 'exile' can be found in the 'in-between' existence of the 'double creature' who is 'caught between dual cultural/linguistic positions'. Thus Colvin analyses texts by the Turkish immigrant author, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and the Afro-German author, May Ayim. Both try to resist the cultural 'pressure towards linguistic exile'; Ayim's poems, however, explicitly testify to a failed Afro-German-German dialogue.

---

In addressing texts by the (canonised) Austrian writers, Elfriede Jelinek and Ingeborg Bachmann, Colvin focuses on spaces which fictitious female characters inhabit and reads the fantasised transgression into lesbian sexuality as 'analogous' to the attempted exit from a 'normed, named existence in language'. Writing which exceeds the boundaries of the social spaces women writers and their fictitious female characters find themselves 'caught' in, brings to the fore a danger which this very 'excess' implies. When in Jelinek's and Bachmann's texts the female characters transgress the margins of their social spaces by choosing 'forbidden' pleasure, they, at the same time, risk - as Colvin argues - their 'ultimate social exile'.

From Colvin's assumption that positions of speech and silence are 'hierarchically' organised, being part of a 'gendered social power play', it follows that this very hierarchy provides (insecure) spaces for transition - which one might even call a space for change.

Sarah Blowen's contribution focuses on notions of exile and community as presented in the exhibition 'Des Grecs', mounted and conceived of by the Greek community of Grenoble at the Musée Dauphinois. Blowen examines the ways in which the museological space and the experiences it displays can be used as a privileged site for exploring an emigrant community's memories of exile; in this case the expulsion of a large Greek community from Asia Minor in 1922 as a result of the Greco-Turkish conflict and their assimilation into French life in Grenoble.

The stages of researching and mounting the exhibition are examined, as well as local, national and international reactions to the exhibition which had as its central point images of the displacement and trauma of the expelled Greek community. The emphasis throughout the article is on the ethos of the Musée Dauphinois, one of a number of 'musées de société' which aim to encourage community participation in their exhibitions and to empower groups and communities to act as the subject and guiding voice of displays rather than as the object of curatorial decisions. Exile here is figured in physical, sociological and psychological terms through objects, oral testimonies and reconstructions of pivotal moments in a community's collective history.

Deborah Holmes approaches the question of exile from a somewhat different angle. She calls into question a narrow definition of political

---

exile by drawing attention to the commonly overlooked 'Zurich School' which, in the 1930s, brought together a small number of Italian, German, French and Swiss writers. By discussing their journals and books, in particular novels written by Ignazio Silone and Bernard von Brentano, she establishes the anti-totalitarian, liberal credentials of these (in some cases, former communist) writers. 'Exile' here is conceptualised as a privileged space for nonconformism, independence and neutrality.

Taking a critical stance towards much 'exile research' in East and West Germany, Denmark, Britain and the USA, Holmes' argument is based on a methodological equation of fascism, nazism and communism which identifies antifascism with anticommunism. It is this equation that allows the author to argue for an 'uncodifiable political' situation that is seen to counter a 'black and white' approach. Such an approach for instance is represented, in Holmes' view, in the writings of the Italian literary historian and theorist Asor Rosa, who understood exile as effective political resistance. In a controversial move, Holmes' article excludes communist exiled writers from the project of antifascism because they did not conform to anti-totalitarianism.

Volume 5 of New Readings will focus on the theme of 'Travelling the Urban Space' and will include contributions from Fiona Littlejohn from Nottingham University on Berlin novels of the 1930s and J. B. Priestley's, Angel Pavement, Charles Burdett from Bristol University on visiting other spaces in Italian literature of the 1930s, as well as an article on representations of the city in French literature. The editors would like to thank all those who have supported the New Readings series, both staff and Masters students at Cardiff, who, with lively questions and debates, have made the research seminar series and its publication such a stimulating venture.

**Franziska Meyer and Claire Gorrara**

---

## NOTES

1. Caren Kaplan, Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement (Durham/London, Duke University Press, 1996), p.119.