

LINGON

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**POSTMIGRANT NORWAY
THROUGH LITERATURE**
CRITIQUES AND REWRITINGS
OF NORWEGIANNESS



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I.1. Theory, method, objectives

I.1.1. Globalization and migration

For several decades now, migration has become an unavoidable phenomenon that affects all European societies and occupies a central place in daily public debate. Globalization has enabled the expansion and acceleration of travel through substantial technological, transportation, and communication developments. In fact, the migrant has perhaps become the most representative figure of this new era, in which the concepts of identity, belonging, and the nation-state are constantly renegotiated: “the production of personal identity is characterized by a new order of flux, performativity and instability. We live in an era in which maps, real and symbolic, are constantly redrawn: people pass borders, but borders also pass people” (Frank 2010: 42). While migration has indeed always occupied a central position in human history, today, due to the magnitude

and speed of the process, this phenomenon has assumed far greater proportions than in the past.

In the introduction to *Globalizing Art: Negotiating Place, Identity, and Nation in Contemporary Nordic Art* (Reestorff et al. 2011: 9–33), an interesting definition of *globalization* is provided. Here, globalization is understood as the interplay between *detritorialization* – the relative independence of culture from national boundaries – and *reterritorialization* – the construction of common ideas and rituals in a certain place, since people and culture are always tied to territory. At the same time, globalization's cultural processes cannot be reduced to concepts such as 'global village', cultural homogenization, clash of civilizations, and cultural imperialism.

We may perceive that we live in a world in which the number of people migrating from one country to another is growing exponentially, far surpassing any previous migration flows. However, we often forget that, as Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas, and Mark J. Miller (2014: 5) point out, from 1846 to 1939, approximately 59 million people left Europe, primarily settling in South and North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. In fact, some scholars, such as Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffrey G. Williamson (1998), refer to this period as the *era of mass migration*, estimating that the numbers are even larger than today's. Unlike past migration flows, those that have occurred since World War II are increasingly international, involving all states worldwide. International migration is thus one of the key dynamics of globalization. The widespread adoption of advanced communication technologies has strengthened transnational ties, enabling individuals to maintain close connections with their countries of origin (Castles, de Haas, & Miller 2014: 5).

International migration undermines national sovereignty for at least two reasons. First, states face difficulties in regulating the movement of people across borders. Tightening immigration rules has not solved this problem; on the contrary, it has merely produced more irregular migration. Second, *transnationalization* – the affiliation of more and more individuals with multiple societies, territories, and nations – undermines the stability that comes from a sense of belonging to a single nation-state (Castles, de Haas, & Miller 2014: 5). Considering that nation-states are traditionally conceived as political units based on territorial sovereignty and cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious homogeneity, Søren Frank argues that they must be rethought in an age marked by hybridity: “verden på én og samme tid accelererer og kontrakterer, [...] det globale infiltrerer det lokale samtidig med, at det lokale dissiperer ud i det globale, og at gamle nation-stater imploderer, mens nye til gengæld opstår” (the world accelerates and contracts at the same time, [...] the global infiltrates the local just as the local dissipates into the global, and old nation-states implode, while new ones are born in their place; Frank 2012: 2)⁽¹⁾.

The migration of people and their subsequent settlement within new national borders have led to a radical transformation of European societies in social, cultural, economic, and political terms. An increasing number of states are experiencing contrasting forces arising from migration, which is a source of complex conflicts, ambivalences, and negotiations. While increased hostility toward immigration has fueled the rise of right-wing and far-right political parties, immigrants and their descendants are protesting

(1) Translations are mine where not otherwise stated.

systemic discrimination and exclusion in their home countries. In the Nordic context, Massimo Ciaravolo's perspective is relevant:

La migrazione sta cambiando il volto delle società e sfida quotidianamente i concetti, cari alla democrazia nordica, di inclusione, apertura e accessibilità. Si è come posti di fronte a spinte opposte perché, mentre si compie un lento ma inesorabile processo di integrazione, aumentano anche le differenze sociali e la segregazione. (Ciaravolo 2019: 885)

Migration is changing the face of societies and challenging the concepts of inclusion, openness, and accessibility that are dear to Nordic democracy. It's as if we're facing opposing forces because, while integration is slowly but surely happening, social differences and segregation are also growing.

The increasing attention paid to migration, along with its politicization in many nation-states, has led Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas, and Mark J. Miller to refer to the current historical period as the *age of migration*. They identify migration as a primary and foundational force of our time. Anthropologist Steven Vertovec (2010: 86–87) notes that migration phenomena have become more complex in recent decades due to increasing numbers of individuals with diverse migration backgrounds and experiences moving from, through, and to more places. This makes their welcome by receiving countries more complex. Vertovec defines this condition of contemporaneity as *superdiversity*:

a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade. (Vertovec 2007: 1024)

Today, the concept of superdiversity is used in reference to the redefinition of immigrants in a new country and the societies affected by a recent history of immigration. As pedagogist Cristina Balloi reminds us:

Una caratteristica dell'immigrazione odierna è, infatti, rappresentata dalla rimodulazione costante del panorama sociale all'interno dei confini nazionali, risultando piuttosto differente dal passato poiché i flussi di migrazione sono diventati sempre più fluidi, dinamici, intensi e modificati in modo particolare dalla dimensione dei media e dei social network e dalla precarietà del mercato economico globale. Tutte queste variabili tendono così a far mutare rapidamente sia lo statuto identitario di chi emigra sia quello delle società ospitanti [...]. (Balloi 2021: 48)

Indeed, one characteristic of today's immigration is the constant reshaping of the social landscape within national borders. This is quite different from the past, as migration flows have become increasingly fluid, dynamic, and intense. They are also modified by the dimensions of the media, social networks, and the precariousness of the global economic market. These variables tend to rapidly change the identity status of migrants and host societies. [...].

In her book *Stranieri residenti. Una filosofia della migrazione* (Resident Strangers: A Philosophy of Migration), philosopher Donatella Di Cesare (2017) argues for adopting a politics that starts with foreigners, whom she considers the foundation of community. Di Cesare (2017: 21) identifies migration as a subversive force that undermines the foundations of the nation-state. The nation-state is constituted by the practice of defining and discriminating between citizens and foreigners, a definition which directly opposes mobility. Borders are the main tool states use to obstruct the right to migrate and represent the idea that inhabiting and migrating are opposing elements. Regarding citizenship, Di Cesare (2017: 12) joins the call for a *ius migrandi* as an alternative to *ius sanguinis* and *ius soli*. The cardinal principles of the *ius migrandi* are welcome and hospitality. Di Cesare proposes a vision in which we are all *resident strangers*. This juxtaposition of words emphasizes that the land we inhabit belongs to no one, and therefore, we all have the same right to reside there:

A indicare la via è lo straniero residente che abita nel solco della separazione dalla terra, riconosciuta inappropriabile, e nel vincolo al cittadino che, a sua volta, scopre di essere straniero residente. Nella Città degli stranieri la cittadinanza coincide con l'ospitalità. (Di Cesare 2017: 13)

Pointing the way is the resident stranger who dwells in the furrow of separation from the land, recognized as inappropriate, and in the bond to the citizen who, in turn, discovers that he or she is a resident stranger. In the City of foreigners, citizenship coincides with hospitality.

This work focuses on Norway, which lends itself well to demonstrating the dynamism of society triggered by migration, a phenomenon that began affecting the country in the second half of the 1960s and continues to this day. Indeed, a change in European culture can be observed from the 20th century to the present, as a result of migration, globalization, transnational processes, and cultural exchanges, manifesting in new forms that are worth analyzing. Due to the interaction and exchange between different cultures, the redefinition of both Norwegian culture and the concept of *Norwegianness* (*norskhet*) fits into a transnational dimension, as a special case of the more general process of redefinition of European culture:

Viviamo in un'epoca transnazionale, all'interno della quale tutte le geografie e le culture non possono essere più definite da limiti precisi. I confini sono diventati di diversa natura: la ricerca dell'identità non può più identificarsi solo con la nazione, con l'appartenenza a un paese, con la specificità di una cultura. È necessario attraversare i contesti, le relazioni, gli scambi. Le frontiere non sono più le stesse: negli ultimi tre decenni esse si sono aperte, trasformate, estese o se pur rimanendo le stesse, sono state attraversate e modificate. (Sinopoli, Subrizi & Combi 2017: 1)

We live in a transnational age, within which all geographies and cultures can no longer be defined by precise limits. Boundaries have become of a different nature: the search for identity can no longer coincide only with the nation, with belonging to a country, with the specificity of a culture. It is necessary to cross contexts, relationships, and ex-

changes. Frontiers are no longer the same: in the last three decades, they have opened, transformed, extended, or remained the same while being crossed and changed.

In the first phase, at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, most immigrants came to Norway seeking unskilled manual jobs. However, in 1975, the state imposed a blockade favoring skilled workers in the booming oil industry, following the recent discovery of large deposits of black gold. Pakistanis were among the first workers to arrive as laborers and represent the largest group today, which is reflected in the social fabric of the country. More generally, it can be observed that Norway is undergoing a phase of great transformation, partly as a consequence of ongoing migration. Until the late 1960s, emigration was the dominant phenomenon in Norway, and the number of immigrants was small. Today, 19.9 percent of the total population consists of immigrants and children of immigrants. Beyond the figures, Norway's dynamic character in relation to migration is evident when considering events affecting society at multiple levels. These events include the introduction of a law to prevent forced marriages, the election of more Norwegian representatives with a migration background to the Storting (Parliament), the organization of multicultural festivals, the inclusion of foreign vocabulary in official dictionaries, the building of mosques to facilitate the practice of Islam, and the state's widespread recognition that we now live in a *superdiverse* society (Vertovec 2007), with all the challenges that might bring.

The effects of migration are also reflected in literature. However, several years passed before the publication of

Pakkis (*Pakkis*),⁽²⁾ the first work of fiction focusing on migration and its consequences in society. As Anna Maria Segala and Francesca Terrenato state in their study, which examines texts belonging to Scandinavian and Dutch migration literature,

In Danimarca, Svezia, Norvegia, così come nei Paesi Bassi e nelle Fiandre, l'emergere di una letteratura con caratteristiche transnazionali, transculturali e translinguistiche è evoluzione degli ultimi anni, e legata alla trasformazione culturale e antropologica subita dalle comunità metropolitane di queste aree. (Segala & Terrenato 2016: 1)

In Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, and Flanders, literature with transnational, transcultural, and translinguistic characteristics has emerged in recent years. This development is linked to the cultural and anthropological transformation of metropolitan communities in these areas.

In recent years, one of the most innovative and challenging concepts for understanding this new era of migrations and hybridities, which are redefining societies from the ground up, is *postmigration*. Initially coined in sociology and anthropology, the term was adopted by a Berlin theater, and then it reappeared in academia, making it fertile ground for various conceptualizations in many fields of knowledge. Among other things, the new concept of postmigration proposes considering the entire society as post-migrant, since migration has greatly influenced the social fabric and identity of European countries. The number of

(2) The title is written in Roman type when the work has not been translated into English, and in italics when an English translation exists.

individuals with a migration background has grown, and they have gained more space in public spheres such as politics, culture, and the arts (Petersen, Schramm, & Wiegand 2019a: 6)⁽³⁾. The central idea is not to relegate minorities to a 'them' as opposed to the majority but to consider them as integral and active parts of an ideal 'us', that is, an integral part of society. However, this does not detract from the fact that problems related to racism, discrimination, inequality, and the exclusion of minorities from society persist. In fact, some keywords of the *postmigrant condition* are negotiation, antagonism, and ambivalence (Petersen & Schramm 2016: 185; Vitting-Seerup 2017: 48-50).

Before proceeding, an outline of the structure of this work is provided, briefly mentioning the content of each section. Chapter 1 is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to theory, research method and objectives. The second part presents the postmigrant condition in Norway. The third part describes postmigration literature and introduces the chosen authors and works to be analyzed. Chapter 2 focuses on a comparative analysis of two texts to demonstrate how themes and styles change from migration literature to postmigration literature in response to migration-related social transformations in Norway. Chapter 3 discusses multiethnic suburbs near Oslo and the stigmatizing discourses they are subject to. Chapter 4 investigates the correlation between social class and migration background for descendants of immigrants, focusing on processes of social mobility. Chapter 5 discusses Muslim Norwegians, Islamophobia, and their counter-narratives to combat stereotypes and establish their presence in society. Chapter 6 focuses on racialization and whiteness and

(3) See also: Petersen, Schramm & Wiegand 2019b and Espahangizi 2021.

attempts to shed light on the processes of marginalization related to racial categorizations and the life experiences of non-white people in Norway⁽⁴⁾. In the conclusion, the various chapters are tied together to demonstrate how they connect to the concept of Norwegianness and, in particular, the parameters of inclusion and exclusion from it in today's Norwegian collective imagination.

1.1.2. *The postmigrant theater*

Although the concept of *postmigration* had already appeared sporadically in academic works in the second half of the 1990s (Baumann & Sunier 1995; Modood 1999), it attracted public attention in Germany in an extra-academic context in the early 2000s. Initially, it referred to the theatrical production of individuals whose art was labeled as 'migrant' as opposed to German art. In 2008, Shermin Langhoff became the artistic director of the independent theater Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin's multiethnic district of Kreuzberg,⁽⁵⁾ and in 2013 of the Maxim Gorki Theater. She is credited with designating the artistic and cultural work carried out within these theaters as 'postmigrant' (*Postmigrantisches Theater*), with the aim of both allowing artists to define themselves and their creative production and voicing the protests of those who no longer want to be excluded from contemporary German art and culture as

(4) Here, the expression 'non-white' is used deliberately to analyze the concept of 'whiteness' as the default social norm and to highlight how power is, and has historically been, concentrated in the 'white' group. The use is therefore analytical and serves to highlight the power structure, not to define the positive identity of individuals.

(5) For a comprehensive overview of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße theater, see: Carvalho & Larsson 2022.

immigrants or children of immigrants (Petersen, Schramm & Wiegand 2019a: 3-4). Langhoff thus understands the term 'postmigrant' as a *Kampfbegriff* (Shaper 2012), i.e., a militant concept with which to fight for social recognition and inclusion. Therefore, it is far more relevant for its potential transformative impact on society than for its descriptive use of artistic production itself (Stewart 2017: 56).

Similarly, Erol Yildiz (2014: 22) refers to it as a *Kampfbegriff*, a term intended to counteract *migrantization* – the undue assignment of labels such as 'migrant' and 'foreigner' – and the subsequent marginalization of individuals who reject the subordinate position of second-class citizens. Ballhaus Naunynstraße's artistic activity is distinguished by its critical and political nature, serving as a platform to give voice to the experiences of marginalized individuals and groups. As Azadeh Sharifi and Lisa Skwirblies state:

Wir behaupten dabei weder, dass das postmigrantische Theater als dekoloniales Theater zu verstehen ist, noch, dass eine Dekolonisierung des Theaters auf institutioneller Ebene bereits stattgefunden hat. Wir wollen aber das postmigrantische Theater als Impulsgeber*in für die Sichtbarmachung von bereits existierenden dekolonialen Diskursen und Wissensformierungen, von rassifizierten und marginalisierten Subjekten und Gruppen in der deutschen Theaterlandschaft verstehen. (Sharifi & Skwirblies 2022: 40)

We do not claim that postmigrant theater should be understood as decolonial theater, nor do we claim that theater has been decolonized at the institutional level. However, we intend to use postmigrant theater as a source of impulses to highlight the existing decolonial discourses and knowledge formations of racialized and marginalized groups and individuals in the German theater scene.