

Migration and Art. Introductory Remarks

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This special issue seeks to bring together cross-discipline articles exploring the relationship between migration and art. The current migration discourse is dominated by political and economic issues, whereas not enough attention is being paid to cultural aspects. Moreover, research and reflections on migration and art are carried out rather within particular disciplines (literature, film studies, musicology, cultural studies, etc.) than in the field of migration studies. In particular, a significant body of literature emerged in the realm of postcolonial studies and literary studies. A growing interest in literary texts written by authors with migrant background (first- or second-generation migrants)³ as well as in works dealing with themes of migration, exile, integration, multiculturalism, to name just a few, provoked a vigorous debate on the terminology and definitions. As a result scholars have shifted from using the term “migrant literature” to broader and more inclusive “migration literature”, understood as a literature on the topic of migration (Frank 2008, Vlasta 2015)⁴.

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³ There has been a long tradition of investigation into the literary text authored by second-generation immigrants with a mixed linguistic and cultural background.

⁴ Also other terms are being employed: multicultural literature, transnational literature, world literature although their definitions differ. For instance, Roy Sommer (2001) distinguished two general categories – multicultural and transcultural novel dividing them further into several categories.

Sten Pultz Moslund (2010: 4) perceives hybridity as a key feature of the contemporary migration literature, which “manifests itself as tropes and thematizations of the experience of cultural in-betweenness, process of intermixture, fusions or doublings of two or more cultures or two or more systems of signification”.

One of the questions constantly raised by scholars was that of a purpose of investigation into migrant writings and whether to look for their literary value or for “sociological” knowledge of migrant experience (Kwapisz Williams 2016: 115). Migrant writers and artists themselves do not necessarily embrace the label, considering it to be marginal type of literature, and try to avoid any migrant or ethnic categorization. Both in the past and in the present, writers have made different choices and developed various strategies. Some of them, inspired by a place of origin and heritage language, have focused in their works on ethnic/migrant themes, while others have been strongly engaged in the ethnic communities fulfilling the function of cultural intermediaries, and still others consciously rejected their ethnic and/or migrant background.

Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (2008: 394) noted that for many migrants “writing itself provides a home: the stories they tell offer cohesion for their fragmented identities”. Writing can be also the voice of the *Other*, the way to express feelings, emotions, and recount their experiences. As Pap Khouma, one of the first migrant-writers in Italy, said: “I did not start writing because I wanted to demonstrate something. What I wanted to do was take the floor. Because Italians were talking about us, but they were asking questions and answering them, all by themselves. That’s why we took the floor: to interrupt their monologue and establish a dialogue. This was the goal of my book” (Di Maio 2009: 126). Khouma was referring to the art of writing and to the power of word, but his statement is true also for other forms of artistic expression, be it music, painting, film, photography, theatrical performance or street art. Art can foster immigrants’ empowerment by giving them the opportunity to speak for themselves, their community and other migrants, whose voices are less heard.

Unlike in social and cultural studies, scholars of art history and visual studies have only recently begun thematizing the problem of migration and mobility. At the same time the issue of migration has also sparked the imagination and critical engagement of contemporary artists and attracted the attention of professionals from ‘the art world’ (Petersen 2017: 26).

Our aim in this special issue is to contribute to a greater inclusion of art in the migration studies by covering a number of questions and themes: What is the relationship between migrant artists, places, and communities they live in? How are migratory and/or exile experiences expressed in literature, music and art? How are migrants’ perceptions of both sending and receiving societies articulated in the narratives and artistic works (music, film)? How does migration change and reconfigure

Authors represent various disciplines such as sociology, cultural studies, educational studies, film and literary studies. In consequence, theoretical and methodological approaches adopted by each of them as well as the ways they address and problematize migration differ significantly.

Anna Fiń explores the intersection of ethnic and artistic worlds, taking as an example Polish and Ukrainian communities in East Village in New York. The author shows how ethnicity can intermingle with the artistic and intellectual culture and what the consequences of such a phenomenon for the transformation of the ethnic neighborhood and its status among the diaspora can be. By examining the narratives of the Polish artists, **Tomasz Ferenc** discusses different variants of making decisions to emigrate from Poland following the imposition of the martial law in 1981. Moreover, the author calls for extending the definition of forced emigration by including an aspect of internal coercion generating a strong push impulse. **Justyna Budzik** focuses on the artistic works on Elżbieta Wittlin Lipton – a Polish *émigré* artist, costume and set designer and the daughter of an eminent *émigré* writer Józef Wittlin. Biographical facts have been presented along with the most characteristic features of Wittlin Lipton’s artistic style, marked by the immigrant experience and by living on two continents – America and Europe. **Elżbieta Wiącek** analyses the works of Iranian film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf who emigrated from Iran in 2005 shortly after the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The artist underwent a multiphase evolution away from the supporter of Islamic regime in the early 1980s to a cosmopolitan internationally acclaimed film director, editor and producer. The author argues that all of Makhmalbaf’s movies made abroad can be described as the example of “accented cinema”, a concept developed by Hamid Haficy to refer to the emergent genre of exilic and diasporic filmmaking. **Milena Gammaitoni** examines the social action of female composers, often obliged to migrate, for long or short periods, in search of greater freedom and affirmation of their musical talent. **Katiuscia Carnà** presents findings from the study conducted in the Bangladeshi community in Rome. The author investigates whether music and dance can act as a tool capable of favouring social integration within modern intercultural and multi-religious social contexts. The author uses a qualitative methodological approach consisting of interviews and participant observation of social and political Bangladeshi events in Rome, as well as in the lessons in singing, instrumental music and private dancing lessons conducted by the *Sanchari Sangeetayan School*. The essay by **Karolina Golemo**, based on existing works originating from different national settings, aims to describe the relationship between migrants’ musical expression and different manifestations of cultural belonging. Its main focus lies in how hybrid transnational identities may be expressed through music. Finally, **Ksenia Prosyukova** presents the findings of a qualitative study conducted among the Syrian refugees and migrants. The project aimed at analyzing the potential of artwork as a mode of communication.

The selection of papers can only but give a flavour of richness and complexities of the intermingling of migration and art.

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