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**INTRODUCTION.
SUBJECTIVITY, MEMORY AND THE BODY
IN A DIASPORIC CONTEXT:
A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE**

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'Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, 'Race'' started as a conference series coordinated under the aegis of EMMA (University Paul-Valéry Montpellier). The first gathering of scholars in Montpellier in June 2011 was an attempt to assess how much ground had been covered over the past twenty years during which the concept of 'diaspora' has kept evolving. In the auspicious presence of Khachig Tölölyan and Robin Cohen, scholars had tried to take stock of the different acceptations of the term and how it intersects with other concepts such as 'creolization', 'métissage', 'transmigration', 'exile', 'transnationalism' and 'cosmopolitanism', as well as terms like 'branchements' or 'rhizomes' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980; Glissant, 1981). A first volume of essays, *Diasporas and Cultures of Migration*, co-edited by Judith Misrahi-Barak and Claudine Raynaud, provides a reflection of the debates scholars were engaged in as well as an extensive theoretical introduction.¹ The second event held at Wake Forest University (North Carolina) in October 2012 focused specifically on the articulations of diasporas and 'race', how one impacts the other and plugs in with geographic space and place, religious

1. See volume 1 of the series *Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, 'Race'*, entitled *Diasporas and Cultures of Migration*, Judith MISRAHI-BARAK and Claudine RAYNAUD, eds. (Montpellier: Pulm, 2013).

beliefs and gender relations. The third event was held at the Department for Continuing Education at the University of Oxford in June 2013, in conjunction with the annual conference of COMPAS and in collaboration with the Oxford Diaspora Program, the International Migration Institute and the Refugee Studies Center. Among the other partners of this series of events were MIGRINTER (University of Poitiers), IRIEC (University Paul-Valéry Montpellier) and the CRLHOI (University of La Réunion). It focused specifically on the complexities of the interplay between diaspora, often perceived as a collective phenomenon, and individual subjectivity, on the frictions between diaspora and the realms of intimacy and personal memory. The editors of this volume want to express their heartfelt thanks to all the partners who made such a series of events at all possible. Our thanks also go to David Howard from the Department for Continuing Education at the University of Oxford who, even if he does not sign this introduction, participated in the elaboration and implementation of this series while also giving his time to the editing of this volume.

While this present collection of essays includes several articles that were not originally delivered at the conferences, it draws on the gatherings at Wake Forest University and at Oxford. The volume adds to existing scholarship by exploring from a multidisciplinary perspective the incorporation and subjectification of the diasporic condition, an aspect that is not often foregrounded. It endeavours to address the multiple complexities of the diasporic experience and to unravel the subjective perceptions of the self through its interplay with the Other once it is affected by the experience of de-territorialization. It targets the many spheres of intimacy, the individual and collective memorial processes. On such a topic, it seemed essential to be able to draw comparisons between different geographic areas, cultures and linguistic zones instead of focusing only on the Anglophone world. The wide range covered by the articles is also reflected in the many geographic origins of the contributors. They come from Brazil, Denmark, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, and this list only mentions the places where they live, which do not necessarily coincide with the places they come from.

The body is the first vector of physical de-territorialization. Diaspora is first enacted through the body and the stages it goes through, changing place, leaving behind one's identity, one's image of oneself, one's physical appearance, one's mental scape, one's language or part of it. The body is what is *translated* first (from the Latin *translatatus*,

carried across). One will remember Salman Rushdie's conceptualization of such *translations*: 'Having been borne across the world, we are *translated men*' (17). The body is what is first engaged in *transgression* (*trans*/across; *gres*/go, walk). One often forgets that diaspora starts with the deceptively simple body movement of stepping out of one's country and into another one. Yet, in the eyes of the Other, the diasporic body bears the mark of this distance, of this *translation*. The actors remain suspended into a liminal state, between here and there, between now and then. If the de-territorializing movement comes first, the 'becoming diasporan' engraves in the body the spatial and cultural difference that, paradoxically, impedes a full re-territorialization at the destination. The body ushers actors into their diasporic condition. While diasporans bodily traverse borders and spaces, they linguistically enter new mental universes and the norms, codes and power relations that run through them. Language, as a physical and psychological attribute, is the vector of re-territorialization into a foreign world. As migrants enter this new social and cultural sphere, they are confronted with postcolonial frameworks that define their diasporic condition from outside. In doing so, their body becomes a signified imbued with a web of signifiers.

The volume breaks into three different sections. Papers in the first of these sections, **Questions of Theory, History and Memory**, present key concepts that help us explore this web of signifiers: 'diaspora' as it is used over time to describe the realities of people of African descent worldwide (Morehouse), and as its use can misrepresent the fluidity of the constitution of the diasporic subject (Stefani); 'exile' revealed as a multifaceted present by Iranians abroad (Pénicaud) and as a multifaceted past by Spanish immigrants to France (Ribert). Papers in the second section, **Intersecting Identities**, tease apart the strands of these complexities by examining diasporic contexts as an intersection of systems of meaning in which identities are constituted, specifically, concepts of nation that intersect with concepts of race in the case of Japanese immigrants to Brazil (Capuano) and of Lebanese migrants returning from Africa (Hayek), and concepts of belonging and 'unbelonging' (Vogt-William) and of self and other (Scafe) that shift according to geographies and communities. Papers in the third section, **Bodies in Motion**, focus on the body both de-territorialized and re-territorialized: the body expressed through dance as both 'a critical form of embodied cartography' that represents 'the complex emplacement of African-Caribbean diasporic mobilities' (Noxolo), and as a practice of 'cultural

identification and assignation' (Condevaux); the queer body crossing borders which invites us to 'turn our attention towards re-inventions and re-negotiations of sexualities in new places and new territories' (Pecic); the object as embodiment of cultural heritage and of bi-cultural identity (Drayton).

Reflecting on the different contributions, one understands better how multifaceted forms of hegemonies place the black body under surveillance. The language of religious sin is a first instance: the black body and its sexual potency are once again under close scrutiny by the Church authorities in Lawrence Scott's *Aelred's Sin* (Pecic). Aelred's affair with a white blond young monk introduces both queerness and blackness in a religious community. The line between whiteness and blackness, heterosexual and homosexual is restored when Aelred's black body is feminized through sexual violence. The language of nationalism is a second one: the *dekassegui*, people of Japanese descent who live in Brazil and returned to Japan in the nineties, suffer from a double discrimination by being excluded from both national models (Capuano). In Brazil, the racist nationalism forged in the thirties grounds the national identity at the crossroads of three ethnic groups (the Caucasian Portuguese colonizers, the native indigenous people and the African slaves) and therefore three skin colours (brown, white, black). Japanese (as other Asian groups) were de facto excluded from this framework. In the late eighties, a return movement to Japan started in the wake of the economic crisis that affected Brazil. The Brazilian-Japanese community, up until now, due to their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness (and despite their absence of objective physical difference), are perceived as 'typically Brazilian' immigrants by the host society.

In response to these power constraints, actors engage in an array of possible responses and strategies. The first form of agency is to stand outside of the Other's language. Stefani, in her work on Vietnamese-American fictions, presents characters who decide not to learn the language of the colonizer or who transform its meaning in order to resist its hegemonic force but she underscores the ambivalence of 'not speaking the language of the Other'. In *The Book of Salt*, Binh's refusal to learn French is an act of refusing to make a place in the colonial political space. However it soon becomes a factor of submission vis-à-vis the colonizer when his lack of command of French leaves him defenceless to his employers' injunction both in France and Viet-Nam. The same ambivalence prevails in Lin Dinh' short novel *Prisoner of a Dictionary*

in which the main character perverts the English language to create a sphere of resistance to the invader. Nevertheless this sphere remains a poor defence as the meaningless language forsakes communication and therefore resistance.

Another way of circumventing the power relations encapsulated by language is to establish non-verbal communication with the Other. Chief among this type of behaviour, is sexuality. Through different examples taken from American-Vietnamese (Stefani), Lebanese (Hayek), queer (Pecic) literatures, the contributions in this book evoke love relationships as a possibility to take the Other for who s/he is and to suspend, even temporarily, social and linguistic hierarchies: 'the tonalities of sex are, like those of desperation, easily recognizable and instantly understood, no matter the language, no matter the age' (Truong 2003: 123, quoted by Stephani). Given the subversive power of sex, one can understand the reason why the black body can be an object of focus for hegemonic institutions (see Pecic in this volume).

Similarly, non-verbal interaction cannot always escape from post-colonial and nationalistic linguistic frameworks, as Aurélie Condevaux discusses in her study of the dance performance of Pacific Islanders at the Te Papa Museum of Wellington. New Zealand, as a bi-national country, is based on the recognition of two ethnic and cultural groups, the *Pakehas* of European decent and the Maoris. The Pacific Island cultures have taken a growing place in the country in the wake of the Islanders labour migration waves in the sixties and seventies. Today, this culture is represented in the national museum, but maintains ambiguous relations with the two dominant cultural corpuses. The dance performances, that took place in 2007 and 2008, mixed dances from various Islands and Maori rituals. The author shows that the organisers' intent was to present aspects of the Islanders' culture while reasserting the Maori cultural prevalence, 'as indigenous people of New Zealand' and 'the legitimate hosts of the evening'. The introduction in Maori language presenting the dances, in particular, asserts the status of the Maori culture over the 'silent' Pacific Islands performances.

Geographer Pat Noxolo offers a counter example, however, of African-Caribbean diasporic bodies that enact reterritorialization through dance. Resisting colonial uses and definitions of cartography, Noxolo draws on 'multimodal *formal* features, the *performativity*, and the connective and orientating *functions* of indigenous African and Caribbean cartography' to analyse the performative dance 'Ina di Wildanis' and

to reimagine it as 'a form of embodied mapping', an 'emplacement' in a European landscape where black bodies are often perceived as 'out of place'.

Drayton creates a completely different mapping by carving out a chessboard as a way of creating a public and permanent space for egalitarian recognition. In doing so, she shows that some objects can be endowed with the capacity to establish communication with the Other beyond temporal, spatial and cultural boundaries. As a *Pakeha* (white) New Zealander, the author replicated and transformed the so-called 'Lewis chessboard' from the 12th century that has been discovered in Outer Hebrides as a way to explore the Maori mental universe and the customary belief that certain objects are inhabited by the spirit of ancestors.

The quest for the (de-territorialised) self in a diasporic context is nevertheless a spatially and temporally situated endeavour. Actors face in this process the difficulty to create a home abroad, to situate 'selves and communities in new matrices far from natal spaces' (Vogt-William). In this quest, the body projects actors in a world of encounters. '[S]pace itself is', Scafe argues, 'in such encounters, constituted by affects'. The diasporic space of everyday experiences is an affective space of commitment. And yet, this endeavour to carve out a place to be is always worked from within by long distance belongings. Even the place called home can be populated by 'characters that inhabit different worlds'. Thereby Scafe reminds us that even the idealised domestic place cannot be kept free from the 'outside'.

Finally, faced with daily power interactions, actors find refuge in the narratives of the past to reconnect the bits of their disrupted existence. Memory of exile, as shown through the Iranian example, confronts individuals with the impossibility to move back, both in space (to the place of origin) and in time (to a lost past) (Pénicaud). The nostalgia of exile delimits the contours of a liminal temporality that gives meaning to the spatial, social or corporal liminality of the diasporic condition. The memory of de-territorialisation may open the possibility to accommodate a space of re-territorializing one's own existence: exile and isolation leads diasporans to find in themselves the resources and the creativity to build up a better life. Day after day, as the trauma of de-territorialization is overcome by the small victories of daily existence; the memory of exile is superseded by a diasporic memory of a transnational re-territorialization (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013). In this tension between both types of memories dwells the dialectic movement

between 'classical' and 'postmodern' forms of diaspora: whether it is a traumatic experience of a loss or the post-migration stories of settlement that are collectively incorporated, the social experience of being diasporan takes different meanings. A crucial moment is when the torch of the diasporic condition is passed on to the following generation. In her comparative study of two Spanish immigrant groups in France, Ribert shows that actors leave but a small place to their travel abroad in their narratives of the past: the events that precede their migration to France, especially for political refugees and their settlement once they arrived (for labour migrants) that is brought to the fore. In doing so, each group builds a distinct ethos of collective belonging: an ethos of political engagement on the one hand, an ethos of morality and labour values on the other.

Studies and stories of the diasporic condition are a way of addressing the liminality of daily existences. Behind diasporan human beings, is the intrinsic, multifaceted reality of the construction identity and subjectivity, whether one is a migrant or not. As mentioned by Hassan Hage, '(if) the village as home is present in the diaspora in the world, the world of the diaspora is present in the village' (Hage 2005 quoted by Hayek, 5). Diaspora literature and studies offer counter-narratives of the political subject as a unitary entity and of nation building as a homogeneous process. The human condition is marked by the singular plurality of individuals (Nancy 1996). Identity, in that regard, is but a narrative that attempts to forge a sense of unity and temporal linearity where there is an accumulation of roles and stories. It is a narrative that is to be constantly reformulated to incorporate new trajectories and encounters. The diasporic condition, in this respect, is a magnifying mirror of the daily condition of social beings.

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