IDENTITY(IES)
A MULTICULTURAL AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

ANA PAULA ARNAUT
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FOREWORD

This collection of essays on the theme of Identity(ies) is one aspect of an initiative of the Social Sciences and Humanities Working Group, one of several task forces operating under the aegis of the Coimbra Group. Although the word "identit(y)ies" is and has been for some time in vogue, it demarcates an important and stimulating area of concern for those of us involved with the Social Sciences and Humanities, in particular, and in higher education, generally. This volume brings together scholars and teachers from six countries and seven of the most well known and highly regarded universities in Europe.

The theme is a broad and inclusive one and the contributions reflect this. While the essays are drawn from a range of areas including History, Literary and Cultural Studies and Linguistics, all are brought together in what is an essentially multidisciplinary effort. All the contributors to this volume are active in teaching and research. They operate on a daily basis between the classroom and the library or archive, recognizing that these sites should not be kept apart; indeed higher education by its very nature requires that there should be a significant relationship between them. It is also the case that, today, the classroom, the library and the archive cannot be defined as geographically or institutionally limited locations. Rather we must recognize that our teaching and research take place in the wider European, and indeed global, higher educational space. It is

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in this spirit that this collection of essays is presented. This initiative (open, international, operating areas of study and interest) is thus an appropriate reflection of the work and ethos of the Coimbra Group.

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"Whoever is not Greek is a Barbarian"

Juan Luis García Alonso
University of Salamanca

Abstract: In this presentation I will look at the central role played in Ancient Greek identity formation by the duality Greek / Barbarian, originally constructed on linguistic grounds, but eventually evolving into other significant cultural areas. *Bárbaroi* was how the Ancient Greeks referred to all the foreign peoples around them whose language was not understandable. It was, of course, an onomatopoeia that allowed them to imitate the apparent stammer of those who were speaking so "strangely". Interestingly enough the word, particularly with its passage through Latin, became to be the base of something different, to be perceived in the concept of *barbaric*. And so, those who could not or did not speak your language became uncivilized. People(s) not knowing the Greek language, not participating in Greek civilization, religion or literature started to be perceived not only as "different" but as somehow "inferior". One of the legacies of Ancient Greece is then the word "barbarian", still used today in English and many modern languages. This question has been studied extensively, as it says a lot about Greek and Roman culture in general. However, what has been not so much looked at is

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the extent of negativity in the attitudes towards immigrants and foreigners in Greek and Roman society. I will reflect in all these questions, and on how this is echoed in more recent times.

Keywords: *Polis* and Barbarian, Identity formation, Classical Greece, Language Identity, Cultural Identity, Political Science, Greek History, Greek Philosophy.

> "Youths of… all the Hellenic peoples, join your fellow-soldiers and entrust yourselves to me, so that we can move against the barbarians and liberate ourselves from the Persian bondage, for as Greeks we should not be slaves to barbarians".
>
> Alexander the Great
> ('Pseudo-Callisthenes' 1.15.1-4)[1]

"πᾶς μὴ Ἕλλην βάρβαρος" ("whoever is not Greek is a Barbarian") is a very old Greek idiom[2] that speaks for itself at several levels, as I will try to show in these pages.

But, first of all, I would like to thank our Portuguese hosts for the opportunity to be here with you. It is very Greek both to offer this hospitality (this is the concept of *xenia*[3] in Greek) and for us, who

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[1] Callisthenes of Olynthus (c. 360 – 328 BC) was a Greek historian. He was the great nephew of Aristotle, who, in his turn, was Alexander the Great's tutor. Callisthenes was appointed to assist Alexander on his trips to Asia. But this is not the author reporting this sentence. His work is actually lost. However, in the centuries following his death, some materials attributed to him gave form to a text, the so--called *Alexander Romance*, from the 3rd century AD, more than half a millennium after Callisthenes' death. Its author is usually known as Pseudo-Callisthenes.

[2] The origin of this saying, in any case, is not known, and it does not appear on any extant ancient Greek text.

[3] See Chirino, 2007 on this, with recent bibliographical references on the question.

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regulation of these periods continued the general aims of earlier innovative language normativity: the search for national identity and common purpose. During the Soviet period, language regulation was one way to work within the system to protect the language, the most important symbolic carrier of Estonian identity. In the early 2000s, the conservative policies supported ethnic feeling, reacting to (1) an imported value system of multicultural tolerance seen to be imposed from the European Union, and (2) the continued Russophone presence within Estonia, which constituted a language community separated physically, due to the demographic inheritance of the USSR, and cognitively, thanks to the separate information spaces and discourses supported by Estonian and Russian-language media (cf Ehala, 2014). The late 1990s was a honeymoon period for integration but in the early 2000s, ethnic relations became restless.

We might conclude from this that the language planning pendulum, swaying between radical reforms and reactionary rigidity, has currently found a happy balance. That balance, if it lasts, suits language attitudes at large, deriving from the sense of an independent Estonian identity within the framework of a stable Europe. That stability allows for openness and freedom, paired with responsibility, and that independence supports the need for a certain amount of planning and prescriptivism to maintain a strong, standard language and safeguard its usage.

In 2010, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves revived a tradition of word coinage, dating back to the 1930s, reinstating a word competition also organised in 1972. The President's neologism competition was announced in order to stimulate the creation of good, simple Estonian words for complex, tongue-twisting loans borrowed from international and European lingo. Some very apt words have been invented through this scheme, and have even entered general usage, supported by their implementation by news anchors and other language popularisers. Foreign words such as 'infrastructure',

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‘sustainability’ and ‘humanitarian aid’ have been given viable, compact, homegrown alternatives with Estonian equivalents *taristu, kestlikkus* and *toimeabi*.

Interestingly, in the discourse surrounding the word competitions of the 2010s, no explicit mention is usually made of Aavik’s principles of “good” Estonian language, yet the competition entries reveal that perhaps Aavik’s deepest influence can be seen in the ways ordinary speakers think of “good language”: it is self-evident that “good” Estonian words should be simple, clear and beautiful. Beauty may be in the ears of the listener, but Estonian boasts an astonishing amount of neologisms based on aesthetic principles which have stood the test of time and remained in fashion.

Language planning imposes values, but it also reflects cultural values of the times. It both mirrors and shapes ethnic identity in various ways. At different points in the development of the Estonian language and nation, forward-looking and back-facing ideologies have supported language planning, while leaving intact the fundamental insight underlying language reforms, renewal, planning and policy throughout the past two centuries: for the relatively small Estonian population, language and national identity cannot but go hand in hand.

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History as Identity: the Adriatic Sea

Egidio Ivetic
University of Padova

Abstract: The Adriatic is a homogeneous sea as far as its form is concerned, and at the same time a complex one when its cultural stratifications are considered, stratifications particularly evident along the eastern littoral, a border zone between civilization models, between Western and Eastern Europe, Central Europe and the Mediterranean. The Adriatic as a region does not have a common historiography, there is not a single version of its past accepted by all the nations that make part of it. Recent trans-frontier policies impose a new political vision of the Adriatic, a regionalization of this sea. This tendency will have, sooner or later, a cultural implication, involving the way we look at the Adriatic past.

Keywords: The Adriatic Sea; History and Historiography; Transnational History.

The Adriatic shares a central position in the Mediterranean with Italy and it is one of the characteristic faces of Mediterranean Europe. It was the South for anyone crossing the Alps and the Latin West

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for those landing in Puglia from the Byzantine and then Ottoman Levant. The Adriatic could be a conceptual tool for a transnational approach to study and research the past of a sea. The sea has the advantage in narrational terms that it escapes the ideological straitjackets inherent in nation state categories. The Adriatic is a closed sea, a sea of passage, a frontier between East and West. It is a minor Mediterranean (Anselmi, 1991: 13-36; Cabanes, 2001: 7-26)[34]. A zone where multiple borders of political, cultural, religious and finally national nature have for centuries been interlaced and overlapped. The Adriatic is a homogeneous sea as far as its form is concerned, and at the same time a complex one when its cultural stratifications are considered, stratifications particularly evident along the eastern shore of the sea, a border zone between people, languages, civilization models, but also a border zone between Western and Eastern Europe, between Central Europe and the Mediterranean (Sivignon, 2001, 13-22)[35].

In the Mediterranean context the Adriatic has always had a very pronounced individuality.[36] From 15th to 19th century the Mediterranean sea was roughly considered as the whole of three maritime units-regions, divided by an imaginary line placed between Tunisia, eastern Sicily, Salento (Apulia) and the Ionian Islands: the region to the west of such line was known as the Western Mediterranean, the one to the east the Eastern Mediterranean or the Levant, and the Adriatic sea to the north of the line, the most inland

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[34] See also: Turri, 1999; 2000; Turri, Zumiani, 2001. Meanings of the Adriatic: Matvejević, 1995; Falaschini, Graciotti, Sconocchia; Fiori, 2005; Cocco, Minardi, 2007.

[35] See also: Kayser, 1996; Bosetti, 2006.

[36] The Mediterranean as a historical region: Carpentier, 1998; Horden, 2000; Marino, 2002; Morris, 2003; Abulafia, 2003; Harris, 2005; Tabak, 2008; Abulafia, 2011. See also: Barbero, 2006-2010. Cultural meanings of the Mediterranean: Matvejević, 1999; Chambers, 2008; Cassano, 2011. The sea as cultural and historical topic: Peron, Rieucau, 1996; Bentley, Bridenthal, Wigen, 2007; Klein, Mackenthun, 2004; Corbin, Richard, 2004; Frascani, 2008.

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regarding Europe (Braudel, 1966: 7-145). Since the 19th century, this particular significance and central role of the Adriatic has been decreasing. Today the Adriatic is divided among six states: Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania. That number would be seven if we also count Greece, considering that northern part of the island of Corfu is bathed by the Adriatic. It is notable that the Western Mediterranean includes six states, while the Eastern Mediterranean is shared by ten states (Lacoste, 2006).

The Adriatic does not have a common historiography, there is not a single version of its past accepted by all the nations that make part of it. Instead of that there are various, sometimes conflicting, national historical visions that reflect current political situation.[37] As if the national states possessed the sovereignty on the past of the Adriatic territories pertaining to them. This vision of the past is communicated under nationalistic rules of interpretation. According to such theories, the long-lasting Venetian or Ottoman domination is represented as an occupation and an economic exploitation of the populations on either side of the Adriatic that have created today's nations in the region (Novak, 1962: 39-107)[38]. Generally, the foreign political factor is introduced as dominating owner or landlord, a recurrent *topos* in the historiography of the Eastern Adriatic as is also often found in the rest of South-East Europe. The foreign dominations are those represented by the Hungarian kingdom, Venice, the Habsburg and the Ottoman empire, but also by fascist Italy. These historical entities have developed and imposed imperial systems in order to control the regions situated next to the Adriatic, the Alps and the Danube, dominating the western Balkans; such systems were almost always considered as imperialistic entities

[37] As examples of conflicting visions of the adriatic past, see: Cassi, 1915; Randi, 1914; Tamaro, 1918-19 ; Novak, 1932; Novak, 1962.

[38] See also: Graciotti, 2001.

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judged by the 19th century way of thinking. Needless to say how such prejudiced interpretations limit access to primary historical sources and complicate the collaboration among historiographies.

The history of the Adriatic sea therefore pays tribute to national histories. But national histories are not the only ones. The historian who wants to write a synthesis of the Adriatic history must bear in mind at least a dozen regional histories and tens of local histories of towns, islands, villages, sanctuaries[39]. Seen from the minimal local or regional perspective, the Adriatic appears as a protagonist, not as a background of national events. In this way one may discover ancient trade between the sea coasts, migratory flows of various population groups[40].

After all, the Adriatic reveals itself as a sea-region; its history is a regional one in which we find the sum of past of the regions facing it: Apulia, Abruzzi and Molise, the Marche, Romagna, Ferrara, the Venetian lagoon, the Karst Plateau with Trieste, Istria, Dalmatia, the Croatian shoreline and the ancient Croatia, the Bay of Kotor, today's Montenegrin coast till the Drim river, the Albanian coasts and Corfu, considered the entrance key to the Adriatic. In order to encompass such plurality of histories it is necessary to start from the interpretation model elaborated by Fernand Braudel, the one that still remains unequalled (1977, 1978). The Adriatic, like all seas, is formed: (a) by a "liquid space" or "liquid plain" (Braudel's terms), in which in time we measure routes, traffic of goods, coastal trade, exploitation of the resources, fishing activities, political and military control, maritime sovereignty; (b) by the coast, or better to say within whole coastal regional systems, a sort of membrane that represents

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[39] See, for example: Anselmi, 1988.

[40] For what concerns historical contacts between two littorals, we have a conspicous bibliography: Palumbo, 1973; Di Vittorio, 1981; Branca, Graciotti, 1983; Palumbo, 1989; Graciotti, 1992; Graciotti, Massa, Pirani, 1993; Braccesi, Graciotti, 1999; Graciotti, 2009; Bruni, Maltezou, 2011.

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Belonging and Place in the Age of Globalisation. The Case of Swiss *Heimat*

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Abstract: One of the most important and least understood cultural effects of globalisation might well be the weakening of the relationship between place and identity. This article draws on recent cultural theories of globalisation and explores the impact of globalisation on the specific traditon of *Heimat* in the German speaking world; a concept which posits, since the late 19th century, a particularly strong link between personal biography and cultural memory of place and between rootedness in place and identity. The article examines how increased mobility and global connectivity impact on our sense of place and what consequences that might have on notions such as belonging, citizenship or agency. The lecture draws on examples of cultural and literary narratives of rootedness, migration, displacement and reembedding in German speaking Switzerland. It contrasts the work of Thomas Hürlimann, a Swiss writer who analysis critically the fundamental changes the forces of globalisation have brought upon his homeplace in the centre of Switzerland in the Alps with that of transcultural writer Melinda Nadj Abonji, who

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reflects in her semi-autobiographical writing her experience of migration from the Vojvodina in Serbia to Switzerland as a living between cultures and as the painful, but also enriching experience of loss of *Heimat* and the attempt to find or create a new homeplace.

Keywords: Globalisation, Belonging, Place, Cultural Identity, Swiss Literature

Globalisation, the “complex, accelerating, integrating process of global connectivity“ (Tomlinson, 2007: 352) is clearly the most important and influential mega-trend of our time, and accordingly it is has been studied from many angles. Its cultural effects, and especially those influencing aspects of identity and self, are however far less well studied and understood than those relating to, for example, the economy, politics or society. One particularly important aspect in this is the question of how hyperconnectivity via electronic media and our increasingly mobile lives affect notions of place, belonging and settledness and weaken the relationship between communicative experience and the association of communities with place. As early as 1991, in his influential *Consequences of Modernity*, Anthony Giddens described these processes as a “disembedding” of the individual. Garcia Canclini in 1995 analysed the related phenomenon of „deterritorialisation“, and in an important contribution on cultural globalisation Tomlinson (2007) recently hypothesised that this weakening of the relationship between place and cultural identity might well be the most important long-term effect of globalisation.

Let me, as a cultural and literary historian of the German-speaking world, examine this topic with recourse to the specific German concept of *Heimat*. It is a distinct and untranslatable term for the

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special place that is a utopia as much as a past memory and place of longing; a term that connotes community, belonging, ease of orientation, acceptance (as long as you don‘t violate the norms too drastically) and rootedness in history, tradition and daily practice; a term especially loaded with significance, emotion, memory and expectation. It is what anthropologists call an ‘anthropological place‘ (cf. Augé, 1995: 42 ff.), a place of relations, of history and of identity, a signifying space and and a universe of recognition. It is often the actual place of birth and that of family history and of the history of a community and a region. It is thus a place where personal and collective memories intertwine. In the following I will use this specific tradition of *Heimat* as a significant and symptomatic foil for my wider exploration of the role of place and belonging in the age of globalisation.

To begin this exploration let us briefly go back in time to the onset of our modernity at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. "‘Wo gehen wir denn hin?’", Immer nach Hause. "‘Where are we going to?’ ‘Ever homewards’" (von Hardenberg, 1987: 164)[44]. In 1802, at the onset of the modern age, the Romantic poet Friedrich von Hardenberg was already expressing the subtle but fundamental dialectic between increased mobility – the modern compulsion to be on the move both mentally and physically – and the longing for home as a place of origin and belonging. Hardenberg‘s *nom de plume* Novalis tellingly means ‘new land, new territory’: he sought, in the spirit of modernity, to conquer new frontiers in his thinking and writing. European Romanticism, for which he was a central early influence, was at the same time a sharp diagnosis of and a counter-movement to the unfolding dynamics of modernity around 1800. Novalis‘s dictum captures very well the conundrum that in an

[44] All translations from the German, with the exception of the Ernst Bloch quotation, are by the author.

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age increasingly dominated by mobile lives the question of where we come from and belong to does not become obsolete, but on the contrary comes into sharper focus then ever. Novalis also ingeniously captures the fact that this 'home', this place of an alluring "totality temptation" (to borrow Marc Augé's anthropological term, 1995: 48) is forever elusive. We are always, restlessly and endlessly, seeking it, moving towards it. This implies that we will never reach it, never be totally at home anywhere. With its elusive promise, however, home or *Heimat* holds a curious power over us. But does it still have a formative influence on identities? Anthony Elliott's research on the self in modernity has shown eloquently and persuasively that "in a highly mobile world, there are extensive and intricate connections between physical travel, new forms of communication and self-identity. Mobilities restructure the deepest link between the personal and the global, selfhood and society" (Elliott, 2013: 178 f.). Allow me to take as starting point his summary observation, which draws on Zygmunt Bauman's diagnosis of liquid modernity:

> Twenty-first-century society is a world [...] of light mobilities and liquid experiences, a world in which people, organizations, institutions, employment, entertainment, images, messages, money and the like are framed and positioned within global flows that undermine national, societal borders. This growing fluidity and liquidization of the social network carries serious implications for experiences of self, identity, interpersonal relationships and intimacy. (2000: 187)

Following on from this, Anthony Elliott asks the question that is pertinent to this investigation too: are the emerging new modes of identity "less tied to fixed localities, regular patterns or dwelt-in cultural traditions"? (2013: 181)

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It is certainly true that new mobilities and communication technologies bring about a growing deterritorialisation of communicative experience. If the term *Heimat* signifies an embedding within locality and its history and traditions, then globalisation clearly creates and accelerates processes of disembedding. Let us see whether we can shed some light on this dynamic by briefly examining the history of the *Heimat* discourse.

The *Heimat* metaphor frames questions of cultural identity principally in a spatial manner. It invites identifications via a spatial organisation which signals belonging, familiarity and reliability and thus evokes a concept of cultures as spatially secluded, homogenous and integrating identities (cf. Böhme, 2005: 602). It is important to remind ourselves of the origins of the discourse on *Heimat* in the late nineteenth century‘s movement of art and artisanship celebrating region and place. The invention of *Heimat* as a cultural topography that creates meaning, provides orientation and organises interaction was a culturally conservative reaction to the disorientating and often traumatic processes of modernisation during the so called *Gründerzeit* in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. It was a reaction to industrialisation and urbanisation as well as to the increasing mobility of migrant workers and the often uncomfortable or even threatening presence of new migrant communities. Against the threats of massification, anonymity, alienation and the presence of an unfamiliar ‘other‘ it projected a protective, imaginative rural place which, being immune to the forces of modernity, offered a space of retreat where premodern ways of life and cohesive communities still existed. The duality that constructs this antithesis is familiar and still present in today‘s debates: rural versus urban, agrarian society versus industrial zones, small versus big, nature versus technology, local and regional versus national or supranational. The emotional and sentimental connotations of *Heimat* relate to these antitheses. Looking at the etymology of *Heimat* we can also already

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discover an exclusivist dynamic: it was originally a legal term that indicated rights connected to the possession of land and reserved for those settled in a specific community. In Switzerland this notion is preserved even today in the so-called *Heimatort*, or place of home, affirmed in every Swiss passport as the place you or your (paternal) family stem from—and to which you could return at any stage if you were destitute and be housed and fed and looked after. Today this is of practical irrelevancy in a time of social security systems independent of place and origin, but the fact that in Switzerland and for the Swiss it still carries considerable symbolic significance and emotional attachement is particularly telling.

So we can say that the notion of *Heimat* is and was from the beginning a nostalgic one: that a heightened sense of one‘s origins, of one‘s place develops in the moment of loss. "When does the urge to write about *Heimat* develop? In moments of conflict with it? When it is perceived as narrow and oppressive? When one is about to lose it? Or when one has lost it?" asks Rüdiger Görner (2007: 42), one of the many contemporary intellectuals who have revisited and interrogated this specific concept of place in recent times. The *Heimat* discourse is in large parts one of loss and alienation. The German writer Bernhard Schlink, internationally known as author of *The Reader*, expressed this very well in a recent essay entitled *Heimat as Utopia*: "*Heimat* is a utopia. One experiences it at its most intensive when one has gone away and when one is missing it: the real emotion regarding *Heimat* is *Heimweh*, the pain of longing for it [...]. Memories transform a place into *Heimat*, memories of something gone and lost, or even the longing for what is gone and lost, or even the longing for this longing. *Heimat* is a place not as what it is, but as what it is not" (Schlink, 2000: 32 f). In this sense it is the longing for lost origins and for a return to these origins that was also palpable in the earlier Novalis quotation. Is this a longing that weakens or grows stronger under the conditions of globalisation?

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If we think of loss of home or homeland, we think, in the first instance, of the experience of migration, voluntarily or forced, of being expelled. We conceptualise the loss of home principally as a movement in space – but it is of course and equally and in the first instance a movement in time. In one important sense we are all expelled from the place where we first developed a sense of belonging and orientation – our childhood. We have all been expelled from the real or imagined idyll of our childhood. The loss of *Heimat* should therefore be thought of as a temporal as much as a spatial dynamic – and one that affects each and every person. The great Marxist and idealist philosopher Ernst Bloch, in the last sentences of *The Principle of Hope*, offers precisely this strong interpretation of *Heimat*. Endowing the concept with utopian vigour and promise, he defines it as "something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no-one has yet been: homeland" (Bloch, 1986: 1376). Recent feminist studies (Ecker 1997; Boa and Palfreyman, 2000) have offered a convincing oedipal reading of this narrative of loss and longing – the painful and enduring separation from the cosiness and security of our place of origin, from its womb-like warmth, so to speak, a place, however, that can also become claustrophobic and trigger reflexes of flight and escape. *Heimat* is in this sense also an anti-utopia, a place of repression and fear: the critical literature of the 70s and 80s in the German-speaking world, and especially in Austria, has created a whole genre of *Anti-Heimat* writings that describe home and the place of origin as an oppressive, intolerant and suffocating environment that we need to cut loose from in order to develop a strong self and an identity of our own.

While this notion of home and place may carry mostly nostalgic or retrospective connotations, looking backwards towards a paradise lost or a prison escaped from, Ernst Bloch stressed its open and future--oriented potential, the sense of agency that arises out of rootedness and a strong sense of identity connected to place. Anthropologists

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and neurobiologists tell us about the fundamental importance of repetitions, routines and rituals for our sense of stability, security and happiness. In this sense home is the place where such routines are established and experienced. This does not necessarily have anything to do with cliches of a rural idyll, untouched by the rapid transformations of modernity – an idyll that exists hardly anywhere anymore, if it ever existed, and today is largely the product of the tourism industry. European ethnologists such as Ina Maria Greverius or Hermann Bausinger, who since the 1970s have argued for an active and positive notion of homeplace, one that is neither folkloristic nor exclusivist nor essentialist, have stressed the importance of two dimensions of locality and place that are decisive for our sense of identity: firstly, the notion of a defined locality where we feel familiar and safe; and, secondly, a link with tradition and history, a sense of continuity that exceeds and transcends the individual generation, a link between personal experience and memory and the cultural memory of a real or imagined community (cf. Greverius 1979; Bausinger 2002). The loss or absence of such certainties, routines and mental links to a community and its history in the maelstrom of mobile lives and liquid identities might indeed trigger considerable discontents and anxieties with consequences for our sense of confidence and agency.

However, the notion that the local territory is what enables and defines cultural identity and a sense of belonging forces a binary logic onto the discursive formation of identity, one which in the history of civilisation has proven deeply problematic and destructive, defining identity as it does via the dynamic of belonging and non--belonging, inclusion and exclusion, self and other. In the German context we have only to think of how easy it was for Nazi fascism to essentialise the notion of rootedness for their myth of blood and soil and to make it a centrepiece of their racist and expansionist ideologies (cf. Blickle 2002). But we do not need the Nazis in order

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to see the problematic of an identity politics that operates with the rhetoric of origin and belonging, of demarcation and othering. Sociopolitical research has shown that there is a strong correlation between a fixed concept of the home region that idealises images of harmony and homogeneity and xenophobic tendencies, in which migrants and new arrivals are seen as threatening agents of unwelcome and uncontrollable change. Marc Augé in his study of non-places argues that settled people feel easily threatened by migrants or nomadic lifestyles, as they remind them of the principal instability of their imagined securities (Augé, 1995: 119). Political examples for this dynamic are not hard to find. One has only to think of the 2014 elections to the European parliament which returned a strong group of xenophobic parliamentarians from all over Europe to Strasbourg: on the rise are nationalist and xenophobic parties who see the effects of globalisation as a threat and react with a political and cultural closing-in around perceived and postulated notions of origin, belonging and proclaimed homogeneity of cultural identity. In Switzerland, an example to which I will return, the Swiss People‘s Party (the strongest party with around 30% of the popular vote) deploys cliches of peaceful and homogenous communities embedded in an unspoilt nature for their isolationist policies. This party uses the instruments of direct democracy, which are nowhere as developed as in Switzerland, to reinforce a narrow and intolerant cultural model which underpins xenophobic politics. One has only to think of their won 2010 referendum on the banning of minarets as symbols of an alleged Islamic claim for dominance, or the successful 2014 initiative against mass immigration which forces the government to go against existing bilateral agreements with the EU by introducing quotas on the immigration of foreigners. If this tells us anything, then it is of the enduring, but deeply problematic, appeal of narratives of origin and belonging as a counter to the destabilising and threatening effects of globalisation.

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of porous national borders. Intimacy is paired with globalization when global crime and violence toward people and the environment irrupt in the private spheres of the protagonist characters, showing that "global political economic conditions have profound effects on human relationships" (Pratt, *et al.* 2012: 31) and on their ethical understanding of justice. The novel reflects a neoliberal hyper--connected global world where the state mechanisms of justice fail the citizen. Thus, if the Canadian police investigation of Henry Curtis' death reaches a standstill due to legal, political and financial encumbrances to find and take the Nigerian con men to justice, in Nigeria the violence and widespread corruption caused by the overlapping interests of the state, the international oil companies, the local war lords, among other forces, make it even more difficult for justice to be achieved. It is then left to the individual to either resign or seek to do justice on his/her own, with the chances that this may entail the renewal of circles of violence and victimage.

If, as Michael Eskin argues, "it is the singular encounter between reader and text-as-other, soliciting a singularly just response on the reader's part that is at stake in 'ethics and literature'" (2004: 560), the experience of reading *419* leaves the reader pondering the complexity of human suffering and ethical engagement resulting from new forms of global intimacies marred by long histories of global economic exploitation and geopolitical imbalances between North and South, the West and the rest of the world. While the novel does promote bonds of universal love between self and others, Ferguson also underlines the prevalence of retributive justice when people fall short of admitting empathy, accountability, or genuine forgiveness. Narrative and storytelling may be hijacked by characters of various ethical standards to try to justify their positions as just. Yet, the novel does not succumb to this cooption but provides the reader with the necessary distance to assess the different degrees of victimization and wrongdoing in which individuals and global

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actors alike are caught, thus underlining the complexities of the ethics of global intimacy.

Ferguson's novel incites a kind of metacritical approach that relies on interdisciplinarity, illustrating the recent shifting of the ground in the study of Canadian literature, from the inside to the outside of the discipline. Far from reasserting a unified vision of Canadian identity, based on the idiosyncrasy of the Canadian landscape and Canadian history, *419* is firmly anchored in the questions raised by a highly mobile and hyperconnected world in which citizens must rework their relation and ethical responsibility to the Other not just through ideological critique, but also though the spurring of the imagination and a revived poetics.

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'Who Do You Think You are?': A Critique of the Concept of Exceptionalism in the Construction and Analysis of American Identity

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Abstract: The view of America (and later the United States) as a place apart, essentially different, and the corollary tendency to see it as defined by that difference, is a longstanding one; it can be traced back to the discovery of the 'New World' (and arguably beyond). In 1630 the Puritan leader John Winthrop described the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a 'City upon a Hill' and warned the colonists that 'the eyes of all people are upon us.' Winthrop's words, and the entailed world view, have become part of American public discourse, and have persisted, with appropriate inflections, in the age of American empire and world hegemony. Such thinking is common to those who see themselves as pro- and anti- American, to the left and the right, to those who see the United States as the 'the world's last best hope' (the phrase is Abraham Lincoln's) and those who hold the United States to be 'the Great Satan.' My paper contests the usefulness of the concept of exceptionalism as an analytical tool and suggests that greater attention should

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be paid to continuities between the new and Old Worlds, between America and Europe and that in studying United States similarities are often as significant as differences.

Keywords: Excptionalism, the United States, Americaness, History

I will begin with some basic semantics. This is not so much an exercise in definition or clarification as an attempt to identify an area of ambiguity that is significant for my present purposes. Exceptional can mean departing or deviating from the norm, unusual, rare, and also better than the average, superior, of the highest quality; it signifies both difference and excellence or most often something that is both different and excellent (unusually bad weather could be described as exceptional but the term is more likely to be applied to unusually good weather). Attaching the suffix '-ism' introduces further declensions of meaning. Recourse to an online dictionary suggests a range of possibilities of which the following are the most apposite: an act, practice or process ('journalism') – a manner of action or behaviour or form of speech characteristic of a particular person or thing (a 'Spoonerism' or a 'Bushism') – a state, condition or property ('barbarianism') – a doctrine, theory or religion ('Catholicism?) – adherence to a system or a class of principles or simply a system or a class of principles (structuralism). More specifically, but consistently with the range of meanings sketched out above, when applied to the field of American Studies 'exceptionalism' may denote both an analytical tool, a concept that claims to be useful in understanding and explaining many aspects of the United States, and an idea or belief system (one could say an ideology) that enters the domain of history with indicative, or even imperative, force.

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The term certainly has currency; indeed, it may be said to be enjoying something of a vogue. On 24 September 2013, addressing the United Nations, President Barack Obama, declared: 'I believe America is exceptional. In part because we have shown a willingness through the sacrifice of blood and treasure to stand up not only for our own narrow self-interest, but for the interest of all.' However, contemporary usage is inconsistent and even contradictory. In the post-Cold War years, the concept of exceptionalism was often invoked by all sides in discussion of the global hegemony of the United States. It could be argued that to hold the United States to be, in the words of Abraham Lincoln's Second Annual Message to Congress, 'the last best hope of earth', which is essentially what President Obama was asserting in the speech quoted above, and to see it as the 'Great Satan' are both examples of exceptionalism and so it is not merely being exceptional that is significant. In 2009. Donald Pearse published *The New American Exceptionalism*, a study of the United States post 9/11, in which he writes of 'the encompassing state of fantasy called American exceptionalism that had regulated U.S. citizens' relationship to the political order for the preceding half century' (Pearse, 2009: 1). To categorize exceptionalism' as a 'state fantasy' (a concept he derives somewhat reductively from Jacqueline Rose) is potentially interesting but all that finally emerges from the tortuous accounts given of the new exceptionalism is sense of a protean something or other that Pearse doesn't like.

The French writer Alexis de Tocqueville is generally held to have been the first to apply the adjective 'exceptional' to the United States and is accordingly sometimes said to be the first exceptionalist. In *Democracy in America* (1835/1840) de Tocqueville cautioned his readers that 'the position of the Americans is … quite exceptional' in so far as 'their strictly Puritanical origin, their exclusively commercial habits' and 'a thousand special causes … have singularly concurred to fix the mind of the American upon purely practical objects'

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(2: 36-7). Its claim to primacy gives de Tocqueville's use of the word 'exceptional' a degree of interest but I cannot see that here the word means much more than different.

More interestingly, in 1929 Stalin censured the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) for accepting the argument of the Pepper – Lovestone faction that the economic strength of American capitalism, the country's size and tremendous natural resources and the absence of a rigid class system made the United States resistant to the laws of history, as Marxists understood them, and so to revolution. Speaking in the American Commission of the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in May 1929, Stalin condemned 'factionalism' and 'opportunism' and the heresy of 'exceptionalism'. Stalin conceded that while it 'would be wrong to ignore the specific peculiarities of American capitalism … it would be still more wrong to base the activities of the Communist Party on these specific features, since the foundation of the activities of every Communist Party, including the American Communist Party … must be the general features of capitalism, which are the same for all countries.' Stalin's view prevailed and the Wall St Crash and its aftermath restored the CPUSA to orthodoxy. John Pepper (born József Schwartz) submitted to party disciple and remained in Moscow to do work for the Communist International. He was executed in a purge in 1937 (or '38). Jay Lovestone (born Jacob Liebstein) left the Party and became a militant anti-Communist (in the 1950s he collaborated with the CIA).

If the Wall St Crash and its aftermath seemed to many observers to have vindicated Stalin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal is often seen as triumph of exceptionalism: the New Deal was what Martin Walker termed an 'American solution', an alternative to a revolution or even to the emergence of a socialist movement. Walker is right to see Roosevelt as essentially a defender of the status quo, one who understood that if things were to remain the same they had to change (an American variation on British Conservative view

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the implicit referent, i.e., the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others" (1988: 64). Again, it is the West we are talking about when the women of the Rest are basically seen as nothing but victims:

> This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition--bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This (…) is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions. (…) These distinctions are made on the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm or referent". (Mohanty, 1988: 65)

We must add to this that the contrasting representation of western and non-western women has its correlation in the conception of a "good" western man that is able to live with women on equal terms, and a "bad" non-western man that embodies gender oppression.

Indeed, what is at stake here is a play of discourse that is very close to what became known as "colonial feminism". Gayatri Spivak (1988) denounces the use of the woman question in British colonial policies concerning sati (the practice of widows immolating themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres) in order to legitimate rule, by, as she puts it, having "white men saving brown women from brown men". Leila Ahmed (1992) describes at length how the dispute around the Islamic veil originated historically in a colonial dispute between males in the context of the British colonial occupation of Egypt. Women are thus instrumental in rhetorical strategies that pose as ethical missions but actually legitimate imperialistic politics. Moreover, as Uma Narayan (1998) points out, another process of

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subalternization can be added to this when non-western women also function as symbols of their own essentialised tradition in the dominant discourses of political affirmation of their own nations or communities, and become instruments of patriarchal nationalist or culturalist projects that are oppressive to them. The consequences of these processes are several and affect the West, the Rest and the Women of the Rest.

As I have been suggesting all along, the rhetoric on the Other is always more about the Self. By producing difference, the West is actually reinforcing its identity and position of superiority in a hierarchy of civilization. The identity of the Self, like that of the Other, is a construction that obeys political interests in specific historical moments and materializes in narratives that arrange the past and the present as is suitable. These constructions also manage to appear as real pre-givens and hide its construed character and to cohabit with the opposite of their own identity narrative. As Narayan points out:

> The colonial self-portrait of 'Western culture' had (...) only a faint resemblance to the moral, political and cultural values that *actually pervaded* life in Western societies. Thus liberty and equality could be represented as paradigmatic 'Western values', hallmarks of its civilizational superiority, at the very moment when Western nations were engaged in slavery, colonization, expropriation, and the denial of liberty and equality not only to the colonized but to large segments of Western subjects, including women. (1998): 89-90)

Today, for instance, while the discourse of the defense of human rights is spoken out loud to justify military interventions in Arab countries – military interventions in which the West poses as savior –, more rigid policies are drawn that condemn immigrants and

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refugees to death in the Mediterranean Ocean. The ban on the Muslim veil in public spaces in France or the *burkini* issue are both part of a campaign to "free" Muslim women from gender and cultural oppression and part of the liberal discourse on the supposed neutrality of the State. This same discourse however intentionally selects and produces difference when only this piece of clothing, and no other religious symbol, is considered transgressive of laity as an intrinsic trace of the French Republic, that is, of French national identity, and when it reinforces an idea of "cleanliness" from alien cultural expressions in the public space while tolerating gender oppression in the private sphere (such as polygamy amongst immigrant groups, which was allowed until too much pressure was exercised by polygamous families upon French social aid services) (Narayan, 1998). As was the case in the historical beginning of colonialism, the West builds a narrative of the Self that erases internal heterogeneities, which might otherwise be perceived as enriching, and reaffirms a unified identity which has a single color of skin, obeys a single paradigm of religious faith and still has patriarchy as its norm. The discourse on the Other also contributes to reinforce national identities based on the notion of a pure "Volk" and to replace possible class solidarities with xenophobia in a context of strong social inequalities. Indeed, the production of difference is beginning to threaten the European project by creating divides between a center that pursues politics and rhetoric in relation to peripheral countries that have typical traits of colonial discourse. Not surprisingly this discourse is also gendered and includes the supposedly typical behavior of the southern European Mediterranean male towards their women, namely concerning domestic violence and the exploitation of female work.

Within this dichotomic frame of thought there is no room for an understanding of the Self and of the Other that takes into account not only the heterogeneities, discontinuities and historical change on both

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sides of the divide, but also their complex encounters and relations which, in reality, build a continuum of ambiguous, multidirectional and multilayered interconnections. This is a hegemony building process that in fact contradicts all the most benevolent discourses and practices and ends up preventing intercultural dialogue and multicultural integration. The reinforcement of narratives of cultural blocks, whose identity is transferred to an ahistorical and therefore unchangeable sphere, colored with ideas of originality and authenticity that actually cover up their deeply contextual character, also deepens internal inequalities, by presenting other sources of oppression, such as class or gender, as secondary when compared to racial, ethnic, religious or cultural threats. Women and the poor in the West are forgotten when the line of conflict is displaced to the border between the Self and the cultural Other. Indeed, gender-based oppression in the West is often not even perceived as such, when oppression is defined according to the social practices of the Other, and western Women are elected as models of emancipation (despite all the violence and inequalities they are still subject to).

Last but not least, the women of the Rest become the subaltern of the subaltern in this chain of discursive construction of differences. Although they apparently occupy the first place in western preoccupations, they serve merely to demonstrate the barbarism of the Other and Western civilizational superiority, and to legitimate the redemptive role of the West – a strategy of imperialistic domination. The reduction to an object status denies the actual women not only agency but also the expression of subjective aspirations and desires, which may well include the wish to live within the cultural and religious references that give them a sense of identity, or the will to transform these references in a sense that they alone are able to determine, without paternalistic guidance by the hegemonic powers of the West, western feminists, or men of their own communities. The iconic representations that hide what they are supposed to

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show also render invisible these women's capacity of developing adequate means of resistance to what they recognize as violence, oppression and need. Therefore, the perception of the women of the Rest as eternal victims is still an obstacle even for progressive transnational feminism, which has difficulties in engaging dialogues with individuals and in listening to them as subjects in their own rights, without the filter of essentialist constructions of their culture. Indeed, even when we engage in common combats for fundamental human rights such as freedom and equality, we do not easily understand that these no longer respond to a western conceptual normative and have been appropriated by different collectives in many geographical and historical contexts in distinct battles against diverse inequalities (Narayan, 1998). To go back to the example I first mentioned, we in the West are generally reluctant to acknowledge that Muslim women may find it possible – and often find it wishful – to live in freedom and equality within Islam. This is what admirable human rights activists such as Malala Yousafzai tell us, or what Islamic feminists affirm – Islamic feminism being considered an oxymoron in Western contexts. As Abu-Lughod argues, if we care to listen to the women of the Rest, we will discover

> … not that Muslim women are in fact carefree, but that their lives are as diverse and complicated as *all* lives are, and that when we make facile and unfounded judgments about culture's role in those complications we forestall consideration of any actually effective strategies for playing an appropriate role in their alleviation. (Abu-Lughod cited by Hussain, 2013)

Solidarities are in fact needed but only those that are capable to transcend all kinds of essentialisms and consider the individuals in the specificities of their material existences. As Spivak (1988) claims, we should not try to represent these women, but create room for

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their voices to be heard. When and wherever possible we should put an unbiased microphone in front of them. That's what I tried to do here.

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