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*Utopia in the Present. Cultural Politics and Change* is dedicated to Itala Vivan who constantly contributed to the debate on utopia in the intercultural present with intellectual wit and originality, and actively encouraged the publication of the book.



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Itala Vivan

## Foreword. 'Thinking means venturing beyond'<sup>1</sup>

The different voices collected in the book edited by Claudia Gualtieri – *Utopia in the Present: Cultural Politics and Change* – act together as a meaningful piece in the mosaic that is the cultural and political reality of our present. The book offers a contribution towards keeping the spirit of utopia alive by practicing it, so that the struggle for liberation may continue in an era whose landscape is obviously not inhabited by the presence and influence of great utopian constructs.

If the principle of hope invoked by Ernst Bloch survives in our time, its anxious questioning – ‘Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What are we waiting for? What awaits us?’ – is no longer on the frontline. In this book it is (perhaps temporarily) replaced by a search for new approaches and cultural practices that may somehow answer the irrepressible human demand for a better world. The wide range and diversity of the voices impersonating and witnessing such a search are precious symptoms of their being deeply rooted in the human condition, although no longer in the perspective of that *Homo Novus* who was positioned at the other end of the vision of previous utopias.

The human desire for liberation and fulfillment is present throughout history, and in the tradition of Western thought it has frequently taken the shape of utopia, ever since Plato – or was it Socrates? – first conjured up the complex vision of a perfect imagined society.

That ancient dream of his, which he tried in vain to realise in the Sicily of his time, bounced back centuries later with a Greek name invented in 1516 by Thomas More. Recurring avatars followed those early examples, and by now utopia has become a genre of its own, spreading its branches beyond philosophy and political science, into the realm of literature. Meanwhile, with the appearance of *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726, literature also contributed to its gemination into dystopia, giving origin to a line of pessimistic projections into the future with Aldous Huxley, George Orwell and, most recently, Margaret Atwood, among its epigones.

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1 Bloch, Ernst: *The Principle of Hope*. Vol. 1. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA 1986 [1954–59]. *Introduction*, retrieved 15.11.2016 from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bloch/hope/introduction.htm>.

There was a time, in the late Renaissance, when popular types of escatologic utopia emerged to scare their contemporaries, as happened during the Lutheran Reformation with the apocalyptic Thomas Müntzer and in Puritan England with the radical Gerrard Winstanley and his Diggers. In both cases the issue that shocked their opponents most was the idea of communality – of land, and women.

The age of Enlightenment engendered many versions of utopia, from Rousseau and de Sade onwards, and the flow continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the socialist inventions taking on more and more political weight. The old theme of communalism, already present in Plato and then in the peasants' revolts, resurfaced in new utopias evoked by a huge social and economic phenomenon – capitalism – which created new forms of oppression.

In 1848, Marx and Engels opened their *Manifesto* with the image of a ghost roaming through Europe, persecuted by reactionary regimes. It was the ghost of communism, which in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would transform the czars' old Russia into the Soviet Union of proletarians: a dream come true. Communism called itself scientific and refused all connections with utopian thought. Yet, albeit an apparent contradiction in terms, it was the greatest of 20<sup>th</sup> century utopias and one that marked a long period in history, calling for the workers of the whole world to unite. The principle of hope underlying communism provided fertile ground for a persistent confidence in history – that is, in the future – as the path that would lead to the triumph of socialism and the liberation of humankind from need. This *Weltanschauung* delocalised the final achievement towards the future and thus a utopian level of reality.

For many crucial decades, the power of this vision influenced the whole world and offered a viable alternative to the hegemony of capitalism. Communism acted as a magnetic pole for all the oppressed, and encouraged and actively supported the liberation movements fighting in the colonies against the crumbling European empires. The anticolonial struggle was deeply rooted in Marxist thought and provided generations of young militants of Marxism with a reason for hope and engagement at an international level.

With the gradual collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Eastern European communist network has foundered before the world's eyes. But it is not so for the utopian strain which had nurtured it, still very much alive in Marxist thought and by now totally transferred into future history. This Marxism, still present and actively fermenting in our 21<sup>st</sup> century, is again asking for change. The urgent drive to change the world, however, no longer invokes dramatic and violent revolutions, nor does it find its foundations in a necessary class struggle, but looks forward to improving the world and making it

egalitarian through gradual changes for the better, based on solidarity, egalitarianism, communality of intentions, redistribution of wealth, and, once again, a firm belief in the possibility to free humankind from the yoke of suffering and need.

This aim calls for the cooperation of all women and men, through a simple and generous collaboration rooted in the common awareness of an existing hope.





Claudia Gualtieri

## Utopia and the Present

2016 marked the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*. As part of the celebrations and reflections on the continuing influence of utopian thought, scholars and intellectuals across the world have discussed ways in which utopia may be reconceptualised today. It appears to be a challenging and urgent undertaking, if we accept Henri Lefebvre's position that 'today more than ever, there is no theory without utopia.'<sup>1</sup> In the Western cultural tradition, utopian thought has attempted for centuries to make sense of the fascinating and complex interdependence between the human past, present and future, and has enlivened it with collective and personal desires, searches for power, and hopes for social stability and happiness. Different epochs have produced diverse forms of utopia according to shared aspirations, the imagination of a better future, and allegiance to ideologies and structures of power. In the global present of mass movement and rapid technological development, however, once-fixed categories of time, place, and identity have lost stability, and change is a constitutive feature of our present. Utopia seems to have become a site of contestation, even though the past and the future have been made less relevant by the pressures of our present, and the utopian appeal of the future appears to be consequently tarnished.<sup>2</sup>

Early in 2016, in the cities of Bolzano and Trento in northern Italy, Zygmunt Bauman spoke about utopia, underlining how, in our modernity, the political and social promises, which were embedded in Thomas More's utopia, have been destroyed by consumerism and the fetishism of wealth and the market. Bauman said that 'Utopia itself has been appropriated and privatised' and the presuppositions

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- 1 Lefebvre, Henry: 'Reflections on the politics of space'. In Brenner, N./Elden, S. (eds.): *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*. Translated by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN 2009 [1970], p. 178.
  - 2 See Canfora, Luciano: *La crisi dell'utopia. Aristofane contro Platone*. Laterza: Bari 2014, Sandten, C./Gualtieri, C./Pedretti, R./Kronshage, E. (eds.): *Crisis, Risks and New Regionalisms in Europe. Emergency Diasporas and Borderlands*. Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, Trier 2017, and Sassoon, Donald: 'La crise actuelle et les crises du passé. La dimension historique'. Lectio at the Académie Royale de Belgique, 7 March 2017, retrieved 15.09.2017 from <https://lacademie.tv/conferences/la-crise-actuelle-et-les-crisis-du-passe>.

for a utopian society have turned into forms of anti-utopia.<sup>3</sup> In our present, the future has been emptied of its promises, to the extent that, in *Retrotopia*, Bauman explores the notion of nostalgia as a form of utopia. The idea that human beings could achieve happiness in an ideal future state, which Thomas More tied to a *topos* – Bauman argues – has lost appeal, but the human aspiration that made this idea so compelling has re-emerged as a vision focused on the past, ‘not on a future-to-be-created but on an abandoned and undead past that we could call retrotopia.’<sup>4</sup>

The notion of golden ages had been previously explored by Raymond Williams with reference to the changing attitudes to the country and the city in English culture and imagery.<sup>5</sup> In regard to the pastoral way of life, he identified a nostalgia that looks backwards towards an ever-receding past of bucolic lifestyles and which is animated by a desire for lost rural England. In his cultural and political analysis, Williams warns against the dangers of idealising social structures on the basis of uncritical and immutable nostalgia which ignores systems of power, subordination and exploitation, and their consequences in specific historical contexts. The ambivalence and ambiguity of this form of nostalgia also relate to its being applied and expressed out of context, outside contingent networks of relationships, and devoid of ideological alliances. For the purpose of locating utopia in the present, Williams’s notion of an ever-receding past provides an archetype according to which Bauman’s idea of retrotopia may be understood and seen at work in context.

The recent Brexit results offered a clear example of the backward turn to an idealised impossible past. The crisis of the present, the fear for the future, the distrust of the political elites, the widening gap between political management and democratic representation, the silence and ostensible absence of public intellectuals, and the anxiety about what will come, as it appears to be uncontrollable, justify ways in which the past seems to offer a more reassuring shelter than an uncertain and chaotic future. In Bauman’s analysis, in modernity, the link connecting utopia

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3 Bauman, Zygmunt: ‘L’utopia del futuro dell’utopia’. Lecture at Utopia500. Trento. 31 January 2016, retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfEed4\\_zZnA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfEed4_zZnA). Part 1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkcQsA-Llwg>. Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qS1rfnuhIAs>. Part 3; Bauman, Zygmunt: ‘Utopia e inferno: il mondo liquido e le sorgenti del male’ (Utopia and Hell. Liquid modernity and the source of evil). 1 February 2016. Second event in the Series ‘La promessa dell’utopia, cercando una società più giusta’ (The promise of utopia. For a more equal society). Libera Università di Bolzano.

4 Bauman, Zygmunt: *Retrotopia*. Polity Press: Malden, MA 2017, back cover.

5 Williams, Raymond: *The Country and the City*. Chatto & Windus, London 1973.

and the future has been broken, and a dangerous regression towards the past is emptying utopia of both its idealistic future aspiration and its political meaning.<sup>6</sup>

If the past and the future mark contrasting *topoi* where a vision of utopia may be posed, and if human actions seem to have lost their effect in building a positive future, the questions that the essays in this collection try to answer are: Is there any place for utopia in the present? If so, what political and cultural relevance might utopia express? How may utopian visions be recuperated, perceived, and put into action in the present? Would new forms of communal utopias prove useful for cultural politics and change?

In a talk titled ‘The biopolitical crisis of Europe’ at the 2016 *Festivalfilosofia* in the city of Modena in Italy, the Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito offered a possible answer by referring to the recent political European impasse. He argued in favour of Immanuel Kant’s conception of ‘cosmopolitanism’ – as is theorised in the political essay *Perpetual Peace*<sup>7</sup> – in order to re-establish a utopian vision for Europe and the world.<sup>8</sup> Esposito repositioned Kant’s suggestion of the ‘league of nations’ locally, namely in contemporary Europe after Brexit, and tried to rethink a condition of possibility for utopia in Europe. Arguing against the claim of the impossibility of Kantian cosmopolitanism, he assumed Kant’s suggestion of working towards a shared sense of communality, inclusive governmental practices, and down to earth actions that would bring peoples together is the only viable path for Europe; in order to construct its new identity, it must draw inspiration from Kant’s federation of states in perpetual peace. This Europe, Esposito claimed, will not be a final target or an ideal aspiration, but a departure point for ethical and political progress, a process that may take place everyday, thus helping the realisation of a possible utopia in the present.<sup>9</sup>

This encouraging view is not entirely shared by Italian philosopher Massimo Cacciari and historian Paolo Prodi in *Occidente senza utopia*.<sup>10</sup> By tracing a historical excursus from diverse disciplinary perspectives and by examining the

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6 Bauman, Zygmunt: ‘Utopia with no topos.’ *History of the Human Sciences* 16 (1), 2003, pp. 11–25.

7 Kant, Immanuel: *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. Translated by Ted Humphrey. Hackett: Indianapolis and Cambridge 1983 [1795].

8 Esposito, Roberto: ‘The biopolitical crisis of Europe’. Lecture delivered at *Festivalfilosofia*, Modena 2016.

9 On the debate about cosmopolitanism, see Geiselberger, Heinrich: *Die Grosse Regression. Eine internationale Debatte über die geistige Situation der Zeit*. Suhrkamp Verlag: Berlin 2017.

10 Cacciari, Massimo/Prodi, Paolo: *Occidente senza utopia*. Il Mulino: Bologna 2016.

relationship between prophecy and utopia as a political project, the authors give reasons for the failure of this relationship as regards the prophetic components of monotheisms which lead to the problematic function of the Church of Rome and Islam as structures of power. Also, they argue, this abortive alliance marked both the end of the prophetic utopian projects of modernity – based on a faith in constant progress which was taken for granted – and the ensuing lack of reference points which globalisation produced. Cacciari's and Prodi's chronologic reading of the development of utopian thought in relation to prophecy is useful to understand utopia's specificity in the European and North American cultural contexts, and to understand how utopia is bound to ideology, and, therefore, relative to historical milieux, religions, and traditions of thought. In 'Grandezza e tramonto dell'utopia', Cacciari argues that in the global present, insurmountable aporias dislocate utopia as *ou-topía*, hence preventing the possibility of utopian thinking and action, unless politics, theology, and utopia themselves are regarded archaeologically (substantially in their *arché*), so as to allow the emergence of something new.<sup>11</sup>

It is this possibility of change – embedded in contextual localised actions in the present – that this collection of essays sets out to explore. In order to trigger a constructive discussion about utopia in the present, it is useful to follow Bauman's argument in *Retrotopia*, because it provides some essential notions that help to envision change in utopian terms, given that, as Bauman bluntly puts it in 'Utopia with no topos,' 'The utopian model of a "better future" is out of question.'<sup>12</sup> These key notions may be presented in apparently opposite, though mutually significant, pairs: first, 'globalisation and locality'. In our historical present, Bauman underlines how globalisation has gradually provoked 'a deepening gap between power and politics – that is, the ability to have things done and the capability of deciding what things need to be done, once vested with the territorially sovereign state.'<sup>13</sup> This has led to 'an age of persistent instrumental crises.'<sup>14</sup> Among the consequences of such a divorce is 'the lack of an agency deemed to be fit to face [...] the original idea of pursuing human happiness through the design-and-build of a society more hospitable to human needs.'<sup>15</sup> Hence, an institutional void has

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11 Cacciari, Massimo: 'Grandezza e tramonto dell'utopia'. In: Cacciari, Massimo/Prodi, Paolo: *Occidente senza utopie*. Il Mulino: Bologna 2016, pp. 129, 131.

12 Bauman 2003: p. 22.

13 Bauman 2017: p. 12.

14 Bauman 2017: p. 153.

15 Bauman 2017: p. 12.

displaced society from being the subject of a search for common good, leaving up to each individual the pursuit of personal happiness and wealth.<sup>16</sup>

In this collection of essays, *Utopia in the Present*, such emphasis on individualism is contested through the presentation of social-communal examples of what are offered as utopian actions in the present, which attempt to reinstate shared goals for the common good, as in the Anishinaabe, Native American, and refugee cases. 'Collective versus personal' points to the second revealing pair that emerges from Bauman's account of the present-day 'global epidemic of nostalgia' in Svetlana Boym's terms: an 'affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world'.<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, fragmentation and deterritorialisation are constitutive features of our present, which mass migration and movement daily bring to the foreground. New forms of aggregation may forge new 'tribes', lead 'back to tribes', or make us 'retreat into enclaves of the like-minded'.<sup>18</sup> Tribes, Bauman argues, respond to the human need to make sense of, and share, the existential condition and cluster around the construction, perception, and representation of identity, which is at issue for tribes as well as for nations.<sup>19</sup> However, Bauman warns, if aggregation converges around the opposing definitions of us and them – the familiar and the stranger, the civilised and the primitive, the alike and the different – then borders are raised and inequality grows. Accordingly, the mass migration that Europe is facing today posits the question of inclusion and exclusion.

The essays in part 2 of this collection – 'Utopia in Performance and Practice' – provide examples of utopian actions for the present that deal with migrant and youth cultural and subcultural productions and practices, and offer diverse voices – Muslims, Native Americans, refugees, migrants, men, women, wealthy, and poor – from varied geographies, global and local – Europe, North America, the Islamic world, Ravenna, Cesena, Pimachiowin Aki – and from different cultures. Maureen Matthews and Roger Roulette's 'Minongeng, an Anishinaabe Utopia', Massimo Campanini's 'The Utopian Dimension of a (Possible) Islamic Philosophy of History', and Francesco Meli's 'Euro-American Utopia and Native American Ethics' further underline how the notion of utopia is culturally produced and contextual, always connected to times, places, narrations, and contingencies.

Localities (a term that was first mentioned in this introductory essay in contrast to globalisation) are concrete contexts, both particular and exemplary. In order to

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16 Bauman 2017: pp. 12, 49.

17 Boym, Svetlana: *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, London 2001, p. xiii.

18 Bauman 2017: p. 151.

19 Bauman 2017: pp. 80, 83.

face the cosmopolitan global condition from contextually specific positionalities and angles, the notion of the intercultural present is adopted in this collection as an expression of an interdisciplinary cultural dialogue among diverse voices and worldviews. With different emphasis, scholars now advocate forms of integration to the level of humanity, promote critical thinking for the advent of new utopian praxis, adhere to the principles of happiness, hope, and peace embedded in utopia. In this collection, peace is kept in the foreground, as Esposito asserts alongside Kant's theorisation of perpetual peace, because of the urgency to reaffirm and sustain it in the global, intercultural, mutable, and tense present. Peace results from negotiations and struggles.

The struggle for liberation is at the core of postcolonial utopianism which, as Bill Ashcroft maintains in *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures*, 'arises from an unrecognised but powerful reality: that successful resistance is transformative, and transformation rests on the belief in an achievable future'.<sup>20</sup> Ashcroft's endorsement of Bloch's notion of hope for postcolonial liberation is meaningful in order to frame the essays in this collection, because the spirit of hope, as Ashcroft contends, characterises utopianism as a rooted, place-specific, imaginable, and practicable form of utopia.<sup>21</sup> The struggle for liberation in the postcolonial context provides a model for re-thinking and re-structuring the us – them relationship, helping to make the possibility of social change pursuable and realistic. In this struggle, the osmosis between present and future is animated by the awareness that '[t]he present is the crucial site of the continual motion by which the New comes into being'<sup>22</sup>, because utopianism 'must engage in a significant polemic with the dominant culture'.<sup>23</sup> In order to keep this intellectual attitude and praxis alert, postcolonial texts are strategically important narratives that rewrite history:

Where postcolonial thinking turns away from imperial utopia is by *reconceiving the present*, specifically the place *of* the present and place *in* the present. [...] The combination of time and place offers a different way of being in the present: its utopian energy is directed at resistance to the tyranny of history by the confirmation of the transformation of place 'here and now'.<sup>24</sup>

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20 Ashcroft, Bill: *Postcolonial Transformation*. Routledge: London 2001, quoted in Ashcroft, Bill: *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures*. Routledge: Oxford and New York 2017, p. 4.

21 See Itala Vivan's Foreword to this collection.

22 Ashcroft 2017: p. 8.

23 Bauman 1976 quoted by Ashcroft 2017: p. 8.

24 Ashcroft 2017: p. 10, original emphasis.

In this passage Ashcroft condenses the key notions of postcolonial utopianism – resistance, critique, place, and the present, which inspire the essays in this collection – and also underlines that postcolonial utopianism differs from imperial utopia. This is a key notion that brings to the fore the mutual dependence of utopia and ideology aimed at bringing about social change. In this collection, Marco Sioli's essay 'Utopian View: Thomas McKenney's Portfolio of American Indians' is particularly interesting because it identifies forms of colonial utopia that, to mutually exclusive degrees, include occupation and conquest, the annihilation of the native, their assimilation, the European settlers' utopia of a new empty land, and a sort of benevolent pacific cohabitation with the natives. Meli's and Matthews and Roulette's essays also enrich the nuances and stratifications that imperialism and religion have placed on the function of colonial utopia with the complex myth of the promised land.

Building on this theoretical frame and expanding it outside the geographical area of Europe, the essays in the collection explore the possibility and the conditions of possibility to start building a utopia through everyday actions in the present. The essays share visions and establish a fruitful dialogue about utopia as a tension embedded in the present, which adopts different languages and actions for diverse contexts. These languages may be global – like hip hop, rap, the internet, emancipation struggles, cinema, artistic productions – yet they are rooted in specific concrete contexts, and speak about precise local experiences. The collection may take its lead from Thomas More's illustrious study, but it re-elaborates and transforms the idea of utopia, in order to adapt it to the intercultural present. The overall perspective is interdisciplinary and anti-canonical. Utopia, as addressed in this collection, may be understood as a metanarrative projected towards the future and rooted in local experiences and actions: building utopia by practising the present.

The thread that connects the apparently disparate essays in the collection is, in fact, the utopian narrative that begins in everyday contingencies. The essays provide varied examples that do not aim at universality, nor suggest models that can be universally reproduced and replicated. They pay careful attention to local needs, contexts and contingencies, and their objectives may be outside dominant cultural paradigms and structures of power. The methodological frames of cultural studies and postcolonial studies inspire a connection between the global, the local, the marginal, the subaltern, and the dispossessed, and also underline the tension between a utopian vision and everyday action, where the tension towards liberation, acceptance, and dialogue, and their practical realisation, are persistent traits. Such notions are conceived in general terms (liberation from the

colonisers, from oppression, marginalisation, silence, poverty, incomprehension, refusal, from the rigour of the canon, the rhetoric of power, the dictatorship of common sense, the dynamics of exclusion) and animate the search for peace and the use of utopia in this collection.

Possibly, utopia may be understood as a language that is being constructed and put into practice while trying to imagine a better future, a vision that is radically different from the *master narratives* of power that dominate our present life. Imagining and searching for social and cultural change outside hegemonic articulations of power and control is a practice of freedom opposed to the protective drive that raises borders and walls around potential islands to claim the right of keeping them isolated and self-sufficient. Localities may be islands, which, however, should be kept together by imagining cohesive forms of action respectful of localism, and new political forms respectful of a multitude.

Part one – ‘Utopia in Theory’ – sets the practice of the collection as dialogic, interdisciplinary, and subversive of established canonical perspectives by dealing with the notions of utopia, in Massimo Campanini’s ‘The Utopian Dimension of a (Possible) Islamic Philosophy of History’, and by constructing the idea of dystopia in Fabio Vighi’s ‘From Utopia to Endgame: What is Left of Capitalist Metaphysics’. From different standpoints, these essays explain how a search for social stability and the attempt to realise it are culturally rooted and specific. Campanini’s essay discusses the utopian dimension in Islamic philosophy of history by underlining the role of the community in the formulation of utopian thought throughout Islamic history. He explains how Islamic philosophy of history looks towards the past as exemplary and confronts the present with that model, not at all with a future yet to be built. In addition, the complex relationship between past and present in Sunnism and Shiism has produced forms of counter-utopia which hinder a possible utopian future vision while exposing the community to the tyranny of power. Differently and importantly, Fabio Vighi’s contribution addresses utopia in a time of economic crisis and points to the lure of economic wealth at the core of contemporary life. Drawing on the philosophical theories of Hegel, Marx, and Lacan, and exploring the notion of value-form, Vighi articulates his argument on the value of labour, and presents a kind of dystopia, in our present of capitalist totality, fundamentally incapable of tackling the economic crisis at its roots.

‘Locality’, as I have suggested, is a keyword in the essays, in addition to ‘present’ and ‘action’. Their localism is useful in order to focus on the specificity, contextuality and contingency in which actions take place, and on their practical effects. Two disparate and distant localities – North America and Romagna – are the reference *tòpoi* around which many of the the essays cluster. The former locality is



addressed in part three – ‘Utopia and Localities: North America’ – which presents contrasting visions of utopia – Native American, colonial, and Anishinaabe – and a gender-biased perception of dystopia in post-9/11 science fiction cinema in the United States. In ‘*Minongeng*, an Anishinaabe Utopia: A. I. Hallowell’s Contribution to a UNESCO Anishinaabe Cultural Landscape’, Maureen Matthews and Roger Roulette offer an anthropological perspective on the rhetorical deployments of utopia. Their countervision of utopia explains the dramatic attempt to regain control of traditional Ojibwe territory via a bid for a UNESCO world heritage site as a cultural landscape, through which the people hope to regain control of their land and future. This contribution puts two diverse cultural visions of the past-present-and-future next to each other, and suggests an interrogation both of consolidated canonical ideas of utopia in Western thought, and of the settlers’ colonial utopia of the new land. Similarly, Francesco Meli’s essay confronts visions of utopia in North America by opening a window of critical dialogue between the native perspective, the official rhetoric, and of the nation where indigenous peoples now live. By presenting a peculiar colonial utopia of Native Americans, Marco Sioli’s example of Thomas McKenney’s portfolio of American Indians contributes to explaining how varied, contingent, and contextual visions of utopia may be, thus revealing ambivalences, ambiguities and complexities in the formulation of utopias in different times. Raffaella Baccolini’s ‘Feminine Weakness and Restored Masculinity in Post-9/11 Science Fiction Cinema’ explores the twist of utopia into dystopia in science fiction cinema – a genre canonically defined as having strong critical potential – by examining the reaffirmation of masculine stereotypes in post-9/11 productions. Dystopia is included in this collection of essays not as negative utopia, but as a form of critical interrogation on the present and a useful analytical instrument to propel change.

The locality referred to in the essays in part two – ‘Utopia in Performance and Practice’ – is Romagna. Geographically, it is the eastern section of the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna which includes the Po valley and faces the Adriatic Sea. Romagna may be understood as a locality that expands beyond its contextual border into the wider world. The essays examine practices that answer local needs while also imagining a network of cosmopolitan relations that stem from these practices, thus turning them into models of common utopian actions. Lanfranco Vicari, aka Moder, a rapper, a cultural mediator, and a teacher presents some of his lyrics. As an artist and educator, he works with migrants and working class youth in a cultural centre located in Lido Adriano on the suburb of Ravenna, in Romagna. In different artistic laboratories, these young people produce a personal, yet common language of affirmation and liberation. Improvisation is the

magic of rap, which makes the artistic practice more creative and spontaneous, and the relationship more direct. Lanfranco Vicari's lyrics do not directly address utopia, but deal with the place of hope, which coherently leads from a critical view of acceptance and awareness of the present condition to a vision of a future.

Roberto Pedretti's 'Performing Rap, Practising Utopia, Building Resistance' expands the analysis of rap and hip hop as artistic discourses of liberation, emancipation, and self-affirmation, paying attention to new forms of art by migrants. Pina Piccolo's 'The Black Body Telling Stories: *Giullarate* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' presents the artistic performance of Dario Fo as a jester and a storyteller. Dario Fo was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1997 and died in December 2016. His art scoured authority and upheld the dignity of the downtrodden. He aimed his dramatic action towards a political, social, and cultural utopia, which – through art – began to take shape in everyday actions. Although he was originally from Milan, he had an artistic laboratory in a small village in Romagna named Sala, close to the sea resort of Cesenatico, where he worked on his last project, the exhibit 'Darwin, l'universo impossibile'. It is a narrative – made of paintings, words, and performance – audaciously constructed in order to artistically dismantle racial stereotypes of pure origin. With his art and actions, he ploughed the seeds of the enquiring, critical attitude which hopefully leads to utopian actions in the present. Claudio Venturelli and Hazal Karabas's 'From Knowledge to Practice: A Possible Utopia in the Global Era with Refugees and Social Services. The *Door to Door Project: A Network Against Tiger Mosquitoes*' reports on a project for the professionalisation of migrants, devised by the Regional National System of Romagna and disseminated through a European project network. Their contribution brings the perspective of quantitative science into the dialogue, and shows how teamwork is essential in order to build utopia by practising the present. The essay is built on a modest and immediate understanding of utopia which rests on the value of solidarity among citizens, social services, and refugees in combination with the practical sanitary objective of pest control.

The success of our experiment is presented and cherished as a basic step in practicing utopia in the present. Some of the essays in *Utopia in the Present. Cultural Politics and Change* were presented at the 'Practising Utopia in the Intercultural Present' symposium within the interdepartmental project 'Searching for Neverland', step two, section 'Eu-topia: Times and places of utopian encounters, virtual and real', coordinated by Stefano Simonetta. His afterword reports on some developments of the interdepartmental project.

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# **1. Utopia in Theory**



Fabio Vighi

## From Utopia to Endgame: What is Left of Capitalist Metaphysics

Today, criticism of utopia has degenerated into the stock inventory of ideology, while the triumph of technical productivity deludes us into believing that utopia, which is irreconcilable with the relations of production, has nevertheless been made real.

Theodor W. Adorno<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Insofar as the communist utopianism evoked by Marx has been dead and buried at least since 1989, what is left on our historical scene is the original capitalist dream of realising a self-sufficient society that sidesteps political or institutional mediations to establish the priority of ‘free’ economic relations on a purely empirical basis. The extent to which such a dream scenario is likely to turn into a real nightmare is the topic of the present chapter, which draws on Hegel, Marx and Lacan to examine the magnitude of the current economic crisis. The fundamental structural problem with the liberal-capitalist utopia as a utilitarian venture sustained by its own economic laws is that it has to rely on a blind, intimately fetishistic relation to the specific historical totality that Marx captured with the term *value*, understood as the quantity of labour extracted from the workforce, projected into the capitalist constellation and primarily crystallised in the commodity form. This modern metaphysics of value is no doubt the *a priori* condition that structures our world in advance, silently and invisibly sustaining our subject-positions insofar as they are characterised by the ever-increasing and all-pervasive dominance of empirical relativism. Looking at this crucial issue from Marx’s Hegelian notion of totality, it becomes apparent that under capitalism the most elementary phenomena of everyday life are empirical facts thoroughly mediated by the invisible, yet ontologically ubiquitous ether of the value-form. Our capitalist totality relies on the transcendental operation we perform by disavowing, through commodity fetishism, the substantial character of abstract labour. The constitutive inability to reflect on the disavowed cause of our ontological horizon translates into our inability to tackle economic crisis at its roots. However, as it can be shown through Hegel’s dialectics, it is not a matter of lifting the fetishistic veil to discover the cause in its

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1 Adorno, Theodor W.: ‘Late Capitalism or Industrial Society? The Fundamental Question of the Present Structure of Society’. In: Tiedemann, Rolf (ed.): *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*. Stanford University Press: Stanford 1969, p. 118.

supposedly material evidence. Rather, the type of denial denounced by Marx ultimately hides the radical inconsistency of the cause itself, i.e. the self-relating negativity of labour.

## Which utopia?

French historian Pierre Rosanvallon has defined Adam Smith's economic theory as 'utopian', insofar as it presupposes the existence of a society that reproduces itself automatically on account of the famous 'invisible hand of the market'.<sup>2</sup> Such an economic society would be self-regulating, as it would not need mediations such as natural law or the social contract, but would instead rely on the purely empirical interrelation of independent actors and objects. No interceding political state is needed in such utopia, for the invisible hand provides all the necessary ingredients for harmonious living in a blissful condition of infinite growth based on commodified material wealth. As Italian philosopher Costanzo Preve pointed out, this notion of society's autonomous self-constitution without political mediation was first introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the empirical and utilitarian theory of human nature proposed by David Hume (see the three volumes of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, 1738–40), and then applied in Adam Smith's emerging economic doctrine (see his *Wealth of Nations*, 1776). This way, the priority of economics over politics, which was necessary for the development of capitalism, was established.

However, the idea of a self-constitutive society also re-surfaces on the opposite ideological side, in Marx's utopianism, characterised by the extinction of the state and the classless society.<sup>3</sup> As is well known, Marx's teleological-utopian view of history is based on the scientific prediction that the capitalist socialisation of labour constitutes the necessary ontological ground for the advent of communism. Abstract labour, in short, was endorsed by Marx, and even more by the Marxist tradition, as inherently revolutionary, and in any case leading to the communist banquet to come. What history has shown, however, is the intrinsic impossibility of creating a revolutionary subject out of a class (the proletariat) that was always intra-systemically co-opted into the type of socialisation dictated within the capitalist mode of production. The bitter truth about the revolutionary aspirations of the working class are encapsulated in the simple sociological observation (emerging from Marx, despite Marx's own expectations that the forces of production would prevail over the relations of production) that in capitalism, the category

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2 See Rosanvallon, Pierre: *Le capitalisme utopique. Histoire de l'idée du marché*. Paris: Editions de Seuil 1999. My translation.

3 See Preve, Costanzo: *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia. Il cammino ontologico-sociale della filosofia*. Pistoia: Petite plaisance 2013, pp. 218–9.



of labour is not only entirely over-determined by capital, but even contributes fundamentally to the production of the specific form of alienation that, as we shall see, endows capitalism with its metaphysical anchoring.

In Marx's case we therefore witness a sort of dialectical reversal of the utilitarian constitution of capitalist society into a communist utopia (despite his fierce critique of the utopian socialists) sustained by in-built mutual solidarity. On this point, what is often overlooked is that Marx's utopianism of the classless society, which would be turned into a dogma by Marxist movements worldwide, far from exhausts the complexity and richness of his philosophical achievement, to the extent that we struggle to find clear indications in his work concerning the sort of society that would establish harmony and plenitude for all. One of the few places where Marx develops something remotely comparable with a utopian vision is a letter written in 1875 to the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (SDAP), which became known as the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Here is a well-known extract from this document:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!<sup>4</sup>

To find another reference to the type of harmony that Marx assumed would emerge from the abolition of the breach between state and civil society (which did not stem from an egalitarian notion of justice, but from the principle of the allocation of what was appropriate to each individual according to their needs), we would have to refer back to one of his earlier works, *The German Ideology*, written in 1846 but published only in 1932. Yet in this text, contradicting the later elevation of labour to 'prime want', Marx's ideal society beyond the brutalising effects of the capitalist mode of production is merely sketched anecdotally as a sort of rural arcadia where people would 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner'.<sup>5</sup> Although Marx undoubtedly dared to look into the future, as his many pages on the scientifically necessary and inevitable arrival of communism amply testify, he nevertheless refrained from offering a blueprint of the ideal society to come, as utopian socialists like Saint-Simon

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4 Marx, Karl: *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Dodo Press: London 2009, p. 11.

5 Marx, Karl: *The German Ideology*. Prometheus Books: New York 1998, p. 53.

and Fourier did. Regardless of whether, as Preve suggests, Marx was negatively influenced on this point by the utilitarian utopianism of Smith and Hume, it still needs to be remarked that he avoided ‘writing recipes [...] for the cook-shops of the future.’<sup>6</sup> Rather, his utopianism had a ‘positivistic-religious dimension’<sup>7</sup>, which arguably was necessary to mobilise ‘the great masses of peasantry and workers, filling the vacuum opened by the decline of mass religions starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century’.<sup>8</sup> And yet, the question posed by Preve on the possible correlation between liberal-capitalist and communist utopianism in Marx remains relevant, since it suggests a socio-ontological type of continuity between the capitalist and the communist projects.

With respect to the above question, Slavoj Žižek has argued for the necessity to consider the communist utopia as a ‘capitalist fantasy’:

Capitalism and communism are not two different historical realizations, two species, of “instrumental reason” – instrumental reason as such is capitalist, grounded in capitalist relations, and “really existing socialism” failed because it was ultimately a subspecies of capitalism, an ideological attempt to “have one’s cake and eat it,” to break out of capitalism while retaining its key ingredient. Marx’s notion of the communist society is itself the inherent capitalist fantasy; that is, a fantasmatic scenario for resolving the capitalist antagonisms he so aptly described. [...] The task of contemporary theory is thus double: on the one hand, to repeat the Marxist “critique of political economy” without the utopian-ideological notion of communism as its inherent standard; on the other hand, to imagine really breaking out of the capitalist horizon without falling into the trap of returning to the eminently pre-modern notion of a balanced, (self-)restrained society (the “pre-Cartesian” temptation to which most contemporary ecology succumbs).<sup>9</sup>

If we accept Žižek’s analysis, then one further (obvious) consideration is in order, which brings us back to the utopian core of capitalism as already imagined by Adam Smith: insofar as communist utopianism as evoked by Marx has been dead and buried at least since 1989, what is left on our historical scene is precisely the original capitalist dream of realising a self-sufficient society that sidesteps political or institutional mediations to establish the priority of “free” economic relations on a purely empirical basis. The extent to which such a dream scenario is likely to

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6 Marx, Karl: *Capital*. Vol. 1. Penguin Books: London and Harmondsworth 1990, p. 99.

7 Preve, Costanzo: *Una approssimazione al pensiero di Karl Marx. Tra materialismo e idealismo*. Il Prato: Saonara, PD 2007, p. 41. My translation.

8 Preve 2007: p. 41.

9 Žižek, Slavoj: *Less than Nothing. Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso: London and New York 2012, p. 257.

turn into a real nightmare will be clear if only we stop for a moment to consider the magnitude of the current economic crisis.

### **The invisible ether of the value-form ...**

The overwhelming significance of the role of the economy in our world has been described very poignantly by Jean-Pierre Dupuy in his recent book *Economy and the Future. A Crisis of Faith*. Here is a passage from the Introduction:

Little by little, Economy emancipated itself from the shackles of the sacred. Once held in check by religion, and then by politics, it has today become both our religion *and* our politics. No longer subject to any higher authority, it cannot decide our future, or make us a world in which to live: it has become our future *and* our world. Advanced postindustrial societies have been well and truly mystified, in the original sense of the word, and their politicians hoodwinked. The result is paralysis.<sup>10</sup>

For Dupuy, it is necessary to find a way to trigger the self-transcendence of the economy so as to force it into a position of subordination, and this possibility is strictly connected with the return of politics: ‘When politics is preeminent, rather than subordinate, so that economics is properly understood to mean political economy, the effect is to open the future up to us, rather than to close it off’. Dupuy’s reading of René Girard’s theme of the inescapability of the sacred is key to grasping his critical position: the modern phenomenon of the advent of the economy as sole guarantee of social cohesion, for him, marks nothing other than modernity’s attempt to leave behind the sacred by re-sacralising it as economic value, which implies the disavowal of belief/faith as the background to any form of socialisation. Economic value would then embody the sacred in disavowed modality, and it is on this disavowal that the current, debilitating liberal-capitalist utopia rests. One has a fetishistic relationship with value, only without being aware of it.

This perspective highlights a fundamental structural problem with the liberal-capitalist utopia as a utilitarian venture sustained by its own economic laws, for it has to rely on a blind, unreflexive, intimately fetishistic relation to the specific historical totality that Marx captured with the term value, understood as the quantity of labour extracted from the workforce and projected into the capitalist constellation, primarily as crystallised in the commodity form. This modern metaphysics of value is therefore the *a priori* condition that structures our world in advance, silently and invisibly sustaining our subject-positions insofar as they

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10 Dupuy, Jean-Pierre: *Economy and the Future. A Crisis of Faith*. Michigan State University Press: East Lansing, MI 2014, p. xiii.

are characterised by the ever-increasing and all-pervasive dominance of empirical relativism. Looking at this crucial issue from Marx's notion of totality, which he inherited from Hegel, we could say that under capitalism, the most elementary phenomena of everyday life, from the buying and selling of commodities to the organisation of free time, are empirical facts thoroughly mediated by the invisible yet ontologically ubiquitous ether of the value-form, which is rooted in the specific exploitation of abstract labour that qualifies the capitalist mode of production.<sup>11</sup>

The passage from Smith's invisible hand of the market to the invisible ether of the value-form is crucial if we are to grasp the metaphysical lure inscribed in capitalism's utopian ambition, which today remains all the more captivating despite increasing evidence of its miserable fallibility. If the "invisible hand" (market) sanctions the self-regulation of society through economic exchange, the "invisible ether" (value-form) stresses the economy's dependence on a libidinal (unconscious) mechanism that, in philosophical terms, demonstrates how "phenomenological existence" is inextricably linked to "ontological substance". Although modern subjects are guided by utilitarian and empirical principles – suggesting the priority of the individual over the social, with the social emerging only as a consequence of such priority – in truth their individuality is mediated in advance by a mode of production whose object is not merely capital, but capital as a socially synthetic formation.

Alfred Sohn-Rethel's oxymoronic notion of 'real abstraction' captures in a nutshell the ideological mechanism that provides the abstract qua metaphysical support to the historical dynamic of capital's self-valorisation. Sohn-Rethel claimed that the physical act of exchange, realised thanks to the "reasonable" and undisputable mediation of money, inexorably obfuscates the reality of commodity production, which is the place where the abstract and intangible ether of capitalist society is generated.<sup>12</sup> The cause of capitalist abstraction (the seemingly untranscendable world in which we dwell), is thus to be found in the short-circuit between empirical fact (exchange) and disavowed presupposition (production); and the point not to miss is that what is disavowed here is not just the exploitation of the workforce, but especially the production of the ontological substance that fills our world at the so-called 'end of history'. The material presence of empirically

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11 'Political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms. But it has never once asked the question why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product' (Marx 1990, pp. 173–4).

12 Sohn-Rethel, Alfred: *Intellectual and Manual Labour. A Critique of Epistemology*. Macmillan Press: London and Basingstoke 1978.

verifiable facts is therefore far from our ultimate existential horizon. On the contrary, the significance of these facts – including of course economic facts – can be truly grasped only by calling into question our *a priori* unconscious investment in the socialising mediation of abstract value and the historical horizon it provides for our lives. The following passage from Theodor Adorno's 1969 essay 'Late capitalism or industrial society?' fully endorses Sohn-Rethel's view on the objective dominance of the abstraction of the exchange relation:

[T]otality, or in Hegel's words the all-penetrating ether of society [...] is anything but ethereal; it is, rather, the *ens realissimum*. If it seems abstract, this is the fault not of fantastic, wilful thinking, hostile to the facts, but of the exchange relation, the objective abstraction to which the social process of life is subject. The power of this abstraction over human beings is more palpable than the power of any other single institution that has been tacitly constructed on the basis of this principle, which is drummed into people.<sup>13</sup>

What should be added to this is the crucial observation that the "abstract objectivity" imposed by the exchange relation functions through the disavowal of what takes place "underground", in the realm of production. The disavowal of value-production was famously captured in the subchapter of *Capital* (volume 1) aptly entitled 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret'. Here Marx claims that the commodity is 'a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'; he discusses 'the mystical character' of commodities that makes them 'sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social'; and he explicitly states that 'this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them'.<sup>14</sup> The "metaphysical lure" of the commodity, according to Marx, lies in replacing the amount of abstract labour necessary to produce it with its "objectively fetishistic" character. The empirical dimension of the commodity can be approached only via its ontological/structural conditions of possibility, which bestow upon them a metaphysical character. Understanding the link between the ontic dimension of the commodity (its positive, objective content) and its rarefied ontological horizon is crucial to grasp the deepest implications of Marx's notion of commodity fetishism. For while the ontic can only appear within an ontological backdrop, at the same time no ontic content can be derived directly from its ontological form;<sup>15</sup>

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13 Adorno 1969: p. 120.

14 Marx 1990: pp. 163–5.

15 This is the gist of Žižek's critical reading of Heidegger's distinction between the ontic and the ontological. See Žižek, Slavoj: *The Ticklish Subject. The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. Verso: London and New York 2001, pp. 11–28.

that is to say: while the commodity expresses an invisible measure of abstract labour, which constitutes its transcendental-ontological condition of possibility, at the same time this relation cannot be directly assumed or rationalised, but instead needs to be fetishised.

The risk to avoid is thinking that, once the fetishistic veil is lifted from the commodity, subjects will be able to see the object for what it really is, without its ‘metaphysical subtleties’, namely as the product of the exploitation of human labour. This materialistic reading should be turned on its head, for what we can infer from Marx’s remarkable intuition is that the gap between the ontic and the ontological is constitutive of ontology as such – in our case, of the capitalist ontology of the value-form – which is why it can only be bridged via metaphysical solutions such as commodity fetishism. Insofar as it is constituted around the value-form, the transcendental horizon that screens our lives is always already inconsistent and lacking. The task ahead, then, is not merely to dispel the mystical haze that surrounds the commodity in order to reveal the material truth of production (human labour), but more crucially, to realise that, insofar as this ontic, material hard-core is by definition mediated at the ontological level, it is the expression of the fundamentally disjointed structural condition of capitalist ontology as such: as an ontological notion, the value-form ultimately represents the immanent contradiction of the capitalist world it regulates transcendently.

The reference to the above reading of Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism is, of course, Hegel, for whom any concrete materialisation of reality at the ontic/phenomenological level is dialectically rooted in ontological inconsistencies and contradictions: the transition from ontological ground (value-form) to “objective reality” (commodity) is not linear and consequential, but rather takes the form of a dialectical short-circuit where the ontological ground mediates reality not by remaining external to it, but by morphing into a particular relation with that reality, and therefore vanishing as ground. The operation of ontological mediation thus involves a weird passage from “nothing” (the original inconsistency of the ontological ground) to “nothing” (the immediate, unconditioned and groundless object of such mediation) through “nothing” (the vanishing of the ground that releases the object in its immediacy). As Hegel put it succinctly in the *Science of Logic*: ‘The emergence into Existence is therefore immediate in such a manner that it is mediated only by the vanishing of mediation.’<sup>16</sup> If we apply Hegel’s radical idealism to Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism, we have the following dialectical sequence: The immediacy of the commodity (its appearance as a desirable

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16 Hegel, G. W. F.: *Science of Logic*. Humanity Books: New York 1969, p. 477.

object) is the product of the self-mediation of the value-form, which vanishes as ground ('fallen to the ground', to use Hegel's phrase)<sup>17</sup> precisely by appearing in the particular content of the object-commodity. It is insofar as it embodies nothing but ontological disparity that the value-form informs the commodity's contingent dislocated content. Put differently, the contradiction contained in the commodity-form as denounced by Marx should not be related back to a positive ontological ground, but rather to the radical inconsistency of this ground qua value-form.

The limit of Marx's labour theory of value lies precisely in its failure to fully accomplish the passage from value as positive ground (quantifiable entity calculated as socially necessary labour time) to value as the grounding gap or inconsistency that triggers the dialectical self-deployment of the capitalist dynamic. Hegel's dialectical approach allows us to dispel the illusion that the external obstacle (the capitalist exploitation of labour contained in the value-form) thwarts the potential inherent to non-alienated labour, preventing it from realising itself in a utopian scenario. In respect of this misleading binary logic, the Hegelian dialectical lesson is that a given ontic potential, such as the potential inherent in human labour, is always consubstantial to, or speculatively identical with, the contradiction or negativity that qualifies its historically deployed ontological essence. As we shall see in the next section, Jacques Lacan's reading of Marx centred precisely on this overlap between the self-related negativity of the category of labour, and the self-related negativity of the 'discourse of the Capitalist', i.e. of capitalism as a socio-ontological formation.

With his notion of commodity fetishism, then, Marx ventured into psychoanalytic territory before psychoanalysis was invented, for he effectively claims that the commodity qua exchange-value hooks human beings by tapping into their unconscious. Sohn-Rethel's notion of real abstraction can be traced back to Marx's prescient foray into the psychic mechanism of fetishistic disavowal pertaining to human beings' relation to the commodity: '[B]y equating their different products to each other in exchange as values, they equate their different kinds of labour as human labour. They do this without being aware of it'.<sup>18</sup> Insofar as it conceals the specificity of the value-form under capitalist conditions, the commodity promotes the fetishistic relation supporting the capitalist utopia: we do it (we exchange the abstract value of labour) without being aware of it. More precisely, what we are not aware of is the transcendental role played by abstract, valorised labour in structuring our socio-historical horizon in advance of our empirical experience of it.

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17 Hegel 1969: p. 478.

18 Marx 1990: pp. 166-7.

Our capitalist totality relies on the transcendental operation we perform unconsciously by disavowing, through commodity fetishism, the substantial character of abstract labour. The constitutive inability to reflect on the disavowed cause of our ontological horizon translates into our inability to tackle economic crisis at its roots. However, as I have suggested via Hegel's dialectics, it is not a matter of locating the cause in its supposedly material evidence. Rather, the fetishistic type of denial denounced by Marx hides the radical inconsistency of the cause, i.e. the self-relating negativity of labour.

### **... and its crisis.**

Despite not being a Marxist (like Marx himself, for that matter!), in the late 1960s and early 1970s Lacan tackled Marx's insights into the capitalist mode of production, drawing some remarkably astute conclusions. To the extent that, within the context of his "discourse theory", he formulated a 'discourse of the Capitalist' that in his view subverted the logic of the four discourses he had previously devised (Master, Hysteric, University and Analyst). Lacan's formalised discourse theory aims at capturing the role played by negativity, intended in Hegelian terms as conflict, antagonism or contradiction, within the particular socio-ontological constellation where the subject is inscribed. In his version of discourse, then, the social totality entertains a historically-specific relation with the disruptive negativity embodied by the unconscious. Every discourse produces and negotiates a grounding impasse, a self-generated contradiction that may or may not cause the implosion of the discourse itself. In Lacanian theory, this impasse is introduced by what Lacan calls 'symbolic castration', namely the grafting of language on the human being, which provides signification by splitting the subject into its conscious and unconscious agencies. It is from the moment the human being assumes the alienating power of language as a forced choice (since the alternative is psychosis) that negativity and dissatisfaction become one with subjectivity and knowledge. At its most elementary level, history itself for Lacan is the battleground between forces of discursive preservation (the field of the Symbolic) and the peculiar contingency of the very ground from which they emerge (the Real). There is, of course, no victor here, since the Symbolic and the Real are two sides of the same coin, interlocked within the same totality. Indeed, from a Lacanian angle one the most insidious illusions for humankind is the utopian one, since it has to do with the temptation to abolish one of these two sides.

It was especially in seminar XVI (*From an Other to the other*, 1968–69) and XVII (*The other side of psychoanalysis*, 1969–70) that Lacan worked out the silent presuppositions of Marx's critique of capital. He did so by focussing on the



disavowed substance that constitutes the ‘transcendental hinge’ supporting the capitalist totality. In a manner that resembles the Hegelian dialectical process as previously summarised, Lacan effectively showed that the whole discursive apparatus of capitalism, its socio-synthetic force, depends on the invisible conversion of the ontological negativity of labour into a positive value, countable and exchangeable. More precisely, Lacan claimed that when Marx shows that value is the specific capitalist abstraction rooted in the exploitation of human labour, this latter term is to be understood as *unconscious labouring*: human labour, the substance of capital, is rooted in a “knowledge that does not know itself” (the unconscious), and the capitalist revolution is fundamentally concerned with the spoliation of *this* knowledge from the worker. The totalising abstraction performed by the Capitalist discourse sets itself the historical task of abolishing the troubling Real of the human condition by converting it into a value that has to appear countable and quantifiable in order to be exchanged profitably.<sup>19</sup> Despite its ability to turn nothing into value, however, capitalism according to Lacan might have a shorter life span than we tend to assume. In a talk at Milan’s Università Statale, given in 1972, he claimed that capitalism is ‘follement astucieux, mais voué à la crevaisson’<sup>20</sup>: wildly clever, but headed for a blowout. In short, in line with Marx’s thesis enunciated in volume 3 of *Capital*, Lacan regards the accelerating pattern of capitalist expansion through blind economic valorisation to be fundamentally self-destructive. Let us briefly sketch out why.

The discourse of the Capitalist, as outlined by Lacan on the blackboard in his Milan talk, reproduces a circular, logical and seemingly uninterrupted movement among its four constitutive terms, one that effectively simulates the closed loop of infinity ( $\infty$ ). It is in the illusion of this infinite circular movement that the metaphysical character of capitalist utopia lies: a smooth and unhindered movement of perpetual acceleration fuelled by the valorisation of the Real, whereby the subject supposedly experiences no cuts or breaks. Bringing to completion the process of neutralisation of otherness that inspires the discourse of modern science (which Lacan names the “University discourse”), as emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, capitalism aims at the systematic abstraction of the Real. As such, it requires the constant commodification of what is by definition resistant to quantification, that is to say the incessant recycling and valorisation of the unconscious core of human labour, which Lacan, throughout seminar XVII, captures with the

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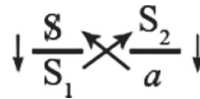
19 I have further developed this point in Vighi, Fabio: *On Žižek’s Dialectics: Surplus, Subtraction, Sublimation*. Continuum: London and New York 2010.

20 Lacan, Jacques: *Lacan in Italia/Lacan en Italie 1953–1978*. La Salamandra: Milano 1978, p. 48. [web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Milan\\_Discourse2.pdf](http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/Milan_Discourse2.pdf), retrieved 03.01.2017.

term *savoir-faire*, “unconscious knowledge-at-work”. In its effort to gentrify the intractable dimension of human labour, the capitalist discourse aims at avoiding castration, thus attempting to install a utopia of plenitude, where every type of dissatisfaction can be readily gratified on the market.

This is why the subject at the helm of the Capitalist discourse is the hystericised subject of the unconscious, whose role, however, is not to challenge the knowledge possessed by the master, as in the discourse of the Hysteric, but rather to deliver himself to the capitalist drive (Marx’s ‘automatic subject’), which in Lacan’s schema occupies the position of unconscious truth. Put differently, the subject of capitalism morphs into a fetish in order to feed the only structure available to him, the one hinging on capitalist valorisation. The aspiration is precisely to validate the efficiency of this structure so as to gain, in return, a degree of subjective consistency. This ruse involves the utopian illusion of bypassing symbolic castration in the attempt to establish a social ontology (Lacan’s ‘big Other’) founded upon a relentless act of recycling: the transformation/distortion of the unconscious roots of knowledge-at-work into a universally countable and exchangeable value that may feed the capitalist drive *ad infinitum*.

The ‘discourse of the Capitalist’ (reproducing the symbol of infinity)



- \$: subject of the unconscious (here, capitalist worker/consumer).
- S1: master-signifier, responsible for stopping the endless shifting of the signifying chain, thus generating meanings within a given structure (here, the capitalist drive to accumulate capital and generate profits).
- S2: signifying chain qua knowledge (here, scientific/technological knowledge).
- a: *objet petit a(uttre)*, the ‘small other’, the meaningless residue of any process of symbolic signification (here, surplus-value).

Generally spoken, the four fixed positions of Lacan’s discourse are Agent, Other, Product and Truth, which in the discourse of the Capitalist are occupied respectively by \$, S2, a and S1. In this socio-ontological structure, then, surplus-value (a), the object of the capitalist drive, effectively sustains the gravitational orbit of the drive itself, i.e. capitalist accumulation. In this respect, the central point uncovered by Lacan would seem to be that the accelerating and self-referential movement of capital hinges on its blindness *vis-à-vis* the actual composition of its founding cause, namely surplus-value. Lacan tells us that this valorised surplus – a conspicuous part of which is reinserted in the accumulation process to create

more surplus-value – corresponds not merely with non-remunerated surplus-labour time, as denounced by Marx; more importantly, it consists of what Lacan terms *plus-de-jouir*, *surplus-jouissance*, namely the unconscious kernel of the human being's labouring capacity as negative substance of the whole process. It is this blindness toward its own cause that ultimately derails the capitalist utopia, inasmuch as it manifests itself in economic crises. What emerges in this reading is what I would call the contemporary version of the Hegelian infinite judgement, where opposites coincide in their substantial negativity: the phenomenological appearance of economic crisis is correlative (speculatively identical to) the inherent contradiction of the ontological ground, i.e. the value-form.

As Lacan put it in 1972, the discourse of the Capitalist runs very fast, as if on wheels ('comme sur des roulettes') and yet it consumes itself to the point of consumption ('ça se consomme si bien que ça se consume').<sup>21</sup> This is because its blind accelerating self-expansion works only insofar as it cannot fathom its cause, i.e. *the necessity of the exploitation of human labour* – the very "object" that is increasingly being made redundant by today's capitalist alliance with modern science and technological innovation. This blindness to its cause is constitutive of the capitalist mode of production, and as such it triggers crises whose magnitude differs according to the historical circumstances in which they emerge. However, acknowledging the fundamentally self-identical modality of failure of the capitalist drive, its immanent instability, does not warrant the argument that economic crises are always cyclical and by definition conducive to the self-revolutionising dynamic of capital. The Long Depression of the late nineteenth century was overcome at a higher level of development because industrial capitalism had at its disposal enormous margins for its expansion. Later, the Great Depression of the 1930s, which affected a much higher level of industrial production, was brought under control by the adoption of the new model of Keynesian regulation (state-administered capitalism) and the Fordist organisation of production. However, this last "social democratic" model of capitalist accumulation, which provided three decades of post-war economic growth and relative socio-political stability in the OECD countries, began to subside in the 1970s. The result was a series of crises that were countered by an inflationary strategy based on public credit, which triggered the neo-liberal transformation while the problem of value-creation was passed on to the financial markets. The historical cause of this leap towards neo-liberal deregulation was the so-called 'third industrial revolution' (microelectronics, information technology), which has eroded value accumulation in the

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21 Lacan 1978: p. 36.

real economy to a new and potentially catastrophic extent. The reason for this is that the introduction of microelectronics has provided capital with an extraordinary incentive to accelerate the process of automation in production, which, incidentally, always informed its principle of competition. However, the drastically increased elimination of workforce rendered possible by advanced automation – due to further escalate with the imminent onslaught of artificial intelligence – has severely undermined the conditions for accumulation, inasmuch as these conditions are contingent on the extraction of surplus-value through the exploitation of abstract labour (wage work). If this were not the case, capital would not have escaped with such unprecedented frenzy into the calamitous spiral of debt and attendant financial bubbles, where the incessant creation of substanceless monetary capital can only result in a chain of crises, with social instability turning increasingly unmanageable.

More and more, we are approaching the Hegelian moment of dialectical truth, with negativity emerging as the unacknowledged substance of our social totality. That is to say, negativity as a particular economic crisis (and consequent rupture in the social fabric) coincidental with the “crack” in its ontological ether. As Lacan’s reading of Marx suggests, the value-form, embedded in unconscious knowledge-at-work, was always already a notion “in crisis”, beleaguered by its own inconsistency; this deep, structural inconsistency is now beginning to loom large on the horizon of our increasingly post-social society. Whether we like it or not, the value-form is the substance of our socio-ontological order, the very “air we breathe”, the invisible social aggregator that makes us who we are; it is the modern incarnation of what Lacan generically calls the ‘big Other’, the silent, invisible socio-symbolic presupposition of our existence. The pressing and no doubt difficult task ahead – now that abstract labour is becoming obsolete, the value-form is chronically ill and the laceration in the capitalist big Other is deep and tangible – is to avoid the moralistic blame game of the beautiful soul and find a way to reconfigure the specific form that constitutes our ontological horizon as vanishing mediator.

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Massimo Campanini

## The Utopian Dimension of a (Possible) Islamic Philosophy of History

**Abstract:** This chapter deals with a sensitive issue in Islamic thought: that of the relationship between past and present, between counter-utopia and utopia. The Moroccan historian ‘Abdallāh Laroui said that the past, or, in other terms, history, weighs heavily on Muslim consciousness. The mythologisation of the past has produced counter-utopia and a distortion of the philosophical view of history. Counter-utopia means that Muslims must look at the pristine glory of the Golden Age of the Prophet Muhammad and the first four Rightly Guided Caliphs in order to build the future: exactly the opposite of Ernst Bloch’s ‘principle of hope’. This outlook led many Sunni ‘*ulamā*’ to negate and refuse progress, because that Golden Age was and is considered – against the historical reality, at least regarding the caliphs, of whom three out of four were assassinated – the insuperable model of politics and associated life to be reproduced without changes. This distortion, as it were, of historical time involves a huge difficulty in projecting a philosophy of history, especially in Sunnism. In the Middle Ages, philosophers like al-Fārābī and Averroes theorised political utopias while on the other hand, Shiism is waiting for the return of the occulted Imam Mahdī, who will realise the kingdom of justice on earth. Therefore, Shiism seems more inclined than Sunnism towards a positive consideration of historical development. The troubled present of the Islamic world and thought needs, however, a utopia which looks at the future, recovering the correct dimension of the ‘principle of hope’. In Hegelian terms, it would mean to find out a teleology of history. This outlined dialectics is the backbone of the present chapter. In recent times a number of Sunni reformers, like Khaled Abou el-Fadl and Tariq Ramadan among others, proposed a balanced re-negotiation and implementation of ideal *shari’a* as a straight path in order to renew Islamic society and thought. Their work will be discussed thoroughly.



This chapter deals with a sensitive issue in Islamic thought: that of the relationship between past and present, between counter-utopia and utopia. The Moroccan historian ‘Abdallāh Laroui said that the past, or, in other terms, history, weighs heavily on Muslim consciousness<sup>1</sup>. A mythologisation of the past, as I will argue, has produced counter-utopia and a distortion of the philosophical view of history. The troubled present of the Islamic world and thought, on the contrary,

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1 Laroui, Abdallah: *Islam et histoire*. Albin Michel: Paris 1999.

needs a utopia which looks towards the future. This dialectics is the backbone of the present chapter.

Utopia is an uncommon concept in Islamic thought because Islamic *Weltanschauung* is grounded in the conviction that the perfect and ideal state is not a *utopos*, a “non-place”, but that it was factually realised in the past.<sup>2</sup> Before entering the present discussion about utopia and a possible Islamic philosophy of history, I believe it necessary to define the term – a difficult item indeed even in Western thought. In agreement with Ernest Bloch’s definition, here I mean by utopia the planning of the future world and society along with a ‘principle of hope’.<sup>3</sup> Utopia does mean to lean towards the *future* in order to build a better society and a better world. On the contrary, by counter-utopia I mean the conservative consideration of the *past* as the model to be repeated and conformed to, as the insuperable embodiment of the ideal.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly, my thesis is that in the classical age of Islam (the so-called Middle Ages), two trends developed in political thought: one utopian and one counter-utopian. The former was theorised mainly by the *falāsifa*, that is the philosophers inspired by Greek thought<sup>5</sup>, among them mainly al-Fārābī (870–950) and Ibn Rushd/Averroes (1126–1198). The latter was theorised mainly by thinkers formed in the traditional milieu of Islamic culture marked by jurisprudence, that is the ‘*ulamā*’.

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2 Over the years, I wrote a number of papers devoted to the issue of Utopia in Islamic political thought. See for example: Campanini, Massimo: ‘L’utopia nel pensiero politico dell’Islam. A proposito del *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* di Patricia Crone’. *Oriente Moderno* 74 (3), 2004a, pp. 671–83; Campanini, Massimo: ‘Islam e politica: il problema dello stato islamico’. *Il Pensiero Politico* 37 (3), 2004b, pp. 456–66; Campanini, Massimo: ‘La Teoria politica islamica’. In: Montessoro, Francesco (ed.): *Lo stato islamico. Teoria e prassi nel mondo contemporaneo*. Guerini e Associati: Milano 2005, pp. 7–65.

3 Bloch, Ernst: *The Principle of Hope*. MIT Press: Boston 1995.

4 This kind of ideological attitude has been recently labeled ‘reactionary’ by Mark Lilla. Lilla, Mark: *The Shipwrecked Mind. On Political Reaction*. The New York Review of Books: New York, 2016. Looking back is not necessarily reactionary. ‘Ali Sharī’atī and Hasan Hanafī, for example, paid a strong tribute to *turāth*, the past heritage of Islam, but were far from being ‘reactionary’; on the contrary they were absolutely ‘progressive’ or even ‘revolutionary’. See Campanini, Massimo: *Islam e politica*. Il Mulino: Bologna 2015.

5 I will resort often to Arabic words and vocabulary because they are technical terms, not understandable with a simple *verbatim* translation. For example, *falāsifa* hints to a particular kind of rationalistic philosophers, while *hukamā*’ would allude to philosophers more inclined to a religious outlook.



Philosophers strictly connected the project of the best (philosophical) state with the possibility of its implementation. Al-Fārābī argued that the happy political regime is ruled by an *imām* (guide) who is all at once prophet, philosopher and king<sup>6</sup>. Actually, it is not always clear if al-Fārābī was speaking of a “possible” regime or a “factual” one. If he was Shi’i – as I believe in agreement with other historians – the perfect state would be for him that of Shiism, the state of the *imāms*, grounded upon intellectual perfection and a consequent hierarchy of individuals and functions. Al-Fārābī strictly connected metaphysics, religion and politics. Religion is the driving/belt between philosophy and politics. Political science is a religious science whose basis is philosophy.

As to Averroes (Ibn Rushd is the original Arabic name), in the *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, besides offering a panorama of his ideas on government and the ideal state, he theorises a “Platonic” state, having in mind very concretely how the Almohad caliphs of his time could factually realise the perfect state of philosophy in their own kingdom. In Averroes’ view, Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) renewal of political and social institutions could be set up only through a full implementation of the Almohad power (which he called *amr ghālib*, that is ‘triumphant rule’), and the Almohads had to be a sort of philosophers-kings in an Islamic framework.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, utopia becomes a *real* fact. Averroes did not have the possibility to see his project implemented, however, because at the end of his life he was charged with heterodoxy by the powerful ‘*ulamā*’ of his time and exiled, while, shortly after his death, the Almohad caliphate decayed quickly.

In the field of theology, on the contrary, thanks to the action of prestigious ‘*ulamā*’, starting from Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) up to the Ash’arite theologians, the idea took shape among theologians – and became common amongst the Sunnis – that the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs had been an extension of the exceptional era of the Prophet Muhammad. The idea was formulated, in other words, that the Islamic state was not incarnated only in Medina, at the time when Muhammad ruled in the name of God, but also in the troubled era of the internecine power struggles between the first caliphs (especially ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī). The three decades of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632–661) became a golden age (against any

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6 See especially the *Madīna al-fādila*: Walzer, Richard: *Alfarabi on the Perfect State*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1985 and al-Fārābī: *Scritti politici*. Campanini, M. (ed.). Utet: Torino 2007.

7 Averroes: *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*. Lerner, R. (ed.). Cornell University Press: Ithaca 1974. See also my discussion in Campanini, Massimo: ‘Introduction’. In *Averroes. The Decisive Treatise. The Connection between Islamic Religious Law and Philosophy*. Gorgias Press: Piscataway, NJ 2017.

historical likelihood, considered that three caliphs out of four were murdered) to be reproduced and imitated like the extraordinary experience of the Prophet.

The construction of this mythology would have been unjustifiable and pointless if the *'ulamā'* had been able to guarantee the legitimacy of the ruling power through the *sharī'a*, as it is expected in the ideal policy. Governance by God (*hākimiyya*) would have been a factual government without any need to project it into the past. Unfortunately it did not happen, on the one hand, because the *'ulamā'* became a caste that deprived Islamic people of their capacity to be "the" charismatic *umma*.<sup>8</sup> Actually, the *'ulamā'* succeeded in consolidating their power and in reproducing themselves within Islamic society, being sure to find in the sovereign power an interested support. Although there is the widespread conviction that Islam is "theocratic", sovereign power and religious authority have run parallel throughout the centuries, supporting each other, not abusing each other. When Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (ca. 1056–1111) said that *'sulṭa* [power] and *dīn* [religion] are twin-sisters"<sup>9</sup>, he pictured this mutual support between the two authorities: the secular power (*sulṭa*) protects religion, while religion (*dīn*) gives the power its legitimacy.

The consensus (*ijmā'*) of the *'ulamā'* provided an objective religious sanction to the secular authority of caliphs and sultans. This balance of authority and consensus was probably unavoidable in the troubled times of the subordination of the 'Abbasid caliphs to the Sultan dynasties of Buyids and Seljuqs (10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries), and even more later when the Mongols conquered Baghdad in 1258 and destroyed the same 'Abbasid caliphate. However, in doing so, Muslim people or better Muslim *umma* (the charismatic community of believers) was disempowered of its theoretical right to freely elect the *imām* and to achieve the normative and binding consensus (*ijmā'*) that is by default infallible. Usurping the *umma* of its infallible right to achieve a binding consensus on political and religious issues, the *'ulamā'* became the exclusive custodians of the sacred law (*sharī'a*) and the mediators of its implementation. This process hampered the development both of the Islamic political thought and of the Islamic political institutions.<sup>10</sup>

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8 *Umma* is specifically the community of the believers in Islam. About the Islamic *umma* as charismatic see Watt, Montgomery W.: *Islamic Political Thought*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh 1980.

9 Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid: *Moderation in Belief*. Yaqub, A. M. (ed.). University of Chicago Press: Chicago 2013.

10 Actually, after the failure of 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn's (813–833) project to submit all authority to himself, the *'ulamā'* became the (theoretical) controllers of the caliph's election, but, as Qasim Zaman argued, this theoretical possibility meant that they had

On the other hand, being stated previously that the *'ulamā'* became the masters of *sharī'a*, the actual implementation of *sharī'a* was elusive because of the overwhelming prominence among caliphs and sultans of corruption, violence and tyranny over the ideal government of Qur'anic justice. Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) for example complained that

[w]hen the Messenger of God was about to die, he appointed Abū Bakr as his representative to [lead] the prayers, since [prayer] was the most important religious activity. People were thus content to accept him as caliph, that is as the person who causes the great mass to act according to the religious Laws. No mention was made of royal authority, because royal authority was suspected of being worthless, and because at that time it was the prerogative of unbelievers and enemies of Islam. [...] The caliphate then went to 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān and 'Alī. All these caliphs renounced royal authority and kept apart from its ways. They were strengthened in this attitude by the low standard of living in Islam and the desert outlook of the Arabs.<sup>11</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn's theory is consistent here with the traditional Sunni outlook which considers 'Alī and Mu'āwiya (the two rivals in the civil war of 656–661, known as *al-fitna al-kubrā* or '*la grande discorde*'<sup>12</sup>) both as worthy persons and right caliphs. Both of them took care of religion and of the Islamic empire.

Then came the later Umayyads. As far as their worldly purposes and intentions were concerned, they acted as the nature of royal authority required. They forgot the deliberate planning and the reliance upon the truth that had guided the activities of their predecessors. This caused the people to censure their actions and to accept the Abbasid propaganda in the place of the Umayyads. Thus, the Abbasids took over the government. The probity of the Abbasids was outstanding. They used their royal authority to further, as

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already done it in practice. Zaman, Qasim M.: *Religion and Politics under the Early Abbasids*. Brill: Leiden, 1997. Ahmad Hasan argued that this process disempowered the people of their right to decide in political and religious issues as well. Hasan, Ahmad: *The Doctrine of ijma' in Islam*. Islamic Research Institute: Islamabad 1984, p. 31. The *'ulamā'* sanctioned theoretically the power of caliphs and sultans, but they were never completely independent actors, because in some way, they were obliged to obey the caliph's or the sultan's commands. See also my discussion in Campanini, Massimo: 'Consenso (ijma)'. *Il Pensiero politico* 39 (1), 2006, pp. 69–81.

- 11 Ibn Khaldūn: *Muqaddima*. Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya: Beirut 1993, pp. 136 ff. and Ibn Khaldūn: *The Muqaddima. An Introduction to History*. Abridged by N. Dawood. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London 1978, pp. 161 ff., chapter three, 'On dynasties, Royal Authority, the Caliphate etc.', paragraph 26, 'The Transformation of Caliphate in Royal Authority'.
- 12 Djait, Hichem: *La Grande Discorde. Religion et politique dans l'Islam des origines*. Gallimard: Paris 1989.

far as possible, the different aspects and ways of the truth. [The early Abbasids] eventually were succeeded by the descendants of al-Rashīd. Among them there were good and bad men. Later on, when the power passed to their descendants, they gave royal authority and luxury their due. They became enmeshed in worldly affairs of no value and turned their backs on Islam. [...] It has thus become clear how the caliphate was transformed into royal authority. The form of government in the beginning was the caliphate. Everybody had his restraining influence in himself, that is [the restraining influence of] Islam. They preferred [Islam] to their worldly affairs, even if [the neglect of worldly affairs] led to their own destruction. [...] A change became apparent only in the restraining influence that had been Islam, and now came to be group feeling and the sword. That was the situation in the time of Mu'āwīya, Marwān, his son 'Abd al-Malik and the first Abbasid caliphs down to al-Rashīd and some of his sons. Then, the characteristic traits of the caliphate disappeared, and only its name remained. The form of government came to be royal authority pure and simple. Superiority attained the limits of its nature and was employed for particular [worthless] purposes, such as the use of force and the arbitrary gratification of desires and for pleasures.<sup>13</sup>

Being this the case of factual policy, the ideal state was projected behind, as being in the past; utopia became retrospective and involved the idea that, in order to build the *future*, it was necessary to look at the *past*. This outlook was overwhelming among all traditional 'medieval'<sup>14</sup> thinkers, and it still is today among conservative Salafis and the so-called Islamic radicals who dream the impossible utopia to reconstitute without any change the very prophetic regime of Muhammad.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that the two visions (utopian for the philosophers and counter-utopian for the 'ulamā') are contradictory. The former did not exercise great influence because philosophy remained marginal in the Islamic culture. The latter became a weight that heavily pressed upon Muslim consciousness, insofar as it is clear that counter- or retrospective utopia implies a distortion of historical time – which has no straightforward direction but bends on itself. The outcomes are heavy in the perspective of philosophy of history. Actually, traditional Islam hardly developed a philosophy of history, that is a philosophical interpretation of historical evolution and development akin to Hegel's, and this is of no surprise. Being trapped in their retrospective imagination, the 'ulamā' were unable either to apply theoretical devices to the interpretation of history, or to cancel the sacred character of a history

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13 Ibn Khaldūn 1993: pp. 136 ff. and 1978: pp. 161 ff.

14 The concept of Middle Ages has no sense in Islamic history. Western Middle Ages correspond to "classic" Islam.

15 See Hallaq, Wael: *The Impossible State. Politics and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. Columbia University Press: New York 2013.

turned past. In the classical age of Islam (2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>16</sup> only Ibn Khaldūn, whose culture was partially philosophical while he was professionally a diplomat, a jurist and a historian, succeeded in reading history through the lenses of material, social, economic paradigms. However, Ibn Khaldūn was also affected by retrospective utopia, insofar as he judged the epoch of Medina and the first caliphate as the most nearly perfect human societies to have ever existed, while his contemporary state was marked by injustice and violence. Ibn Khaldūn's retrospective utopia is founded on a highly realistic and pessimistic vision of history and this realism led the Arab thinker to put history at the center of his worldview.

The dialectics between utopia and counter-utopia also involves the important ideological division between Sunnism and Shiism in Muslim civilisation. It is important to say immediately that Sunni outlook is different from Shi'i one. Shiism theorises that after the Prophet Muhammad, his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī had to be his immediate successor. Three men, however (Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān), usurped the caliphate and when, finally, 'Alī became caliph, he was unjustly opposed, and in the end killed. His successors had no more possibility to take power. The last *imām* in 'Alī's succession chain, Muhammad al-Mahdī, entered occultation in 874: he was from then on until today concealed (*ghā'ib*), kept miraculously alive by God, and awaited (*muntazar*) and he will reappear at the end of times as *Mahdī* (approximately 'messiah') to realise on earth the perfect kingdom of justice before the Last Hour. It is clear that Shiism conceives a teleology of history; history has an end and final outcome, when the perfect society will be re-built. A principle of hope, or at least a principle of hopeful awaiting, is in operation.

In this broad conceptual framework, an authoritative contemporary Iranian sociologist and philosopher, 'Alī Shari'atī (1933–1977), argued that Shi'i Islam is revolutionary and aims to restore the original situation of justice and balance. He put forward a philosophy of history on the basis of a personal original reading of the biblical (but also Qur'anic, Q. 5: 27–31) story of Abel and Cain. In Shari'atī's interpretation, the murder of Abel by Cain symbolises the passage from the ideal state of nature – happy and uncorrupted – to the present state of social injustice and exploitation of humans over other humans. He writes:

[The story] treats two wings of human society, two modes of production. The wing represented by Abel is that of the subject and the oppressed; i.e. the people, those who throughout history have been slaughtered and enslaved by the system of Cain, the system

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16 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> means that the second century of Hegira corresponds to the eighth century of the Christian Era; 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> means that the eighth century of Egira corresponds to the 14<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian Era.

of private ownership. The banner of Cain has been held high by the ruling classes, and the desire to avenge the blood of Abel has been inherited by succeeding generations of his descendants, the subjected people who have fought for justice. [...] The transhistorical struggle between Abel and Cain is also the struggle between *tawhid* [lit. the Unity of God] and *shirk* [associationism, that is polytheism], between justice and human unity on the one hand, and social and racial discrimination on the other. There has existed throughout human history and there will continue to exist, a struggle between the religion of deceit and the religion of awareness, activism and revolution. The inevitable revolution will mean the end of the history of Cain. The end of time will come when Cain dies and the system of Abel is established anew. This is the inevitable direction of history. The glad tidings of God will be realized: “We have willed that We should place under obligation those who have been weakened and oppressed on the earth, by making them the leaders of men and heir to the earth” (Q. 28: 5).<sup>17</sup>

Sharī'atī speaks like a Marxist revolutionary, being surely conditioned by the studies on Marxism he carried on in Paris during his PhD doctorate in the 60s. But what is important, is that his view contemplates, full of hope, the return to the pristine conditions of justice and equality. The ‘oppressed’<sup>18</sup> (*mustad'afūn*) will inherit the earth, the history will reach its end and aim. Struggle and revolution, *jihād* and martyrdom are the weapons to realise this utopia.<sup>19</sup>

Broadly speaking, in Shi'ism a kind of utopia functions and a philosophy of history is also present, although both are sometimes disguised. The perspective of Sunnism is on the whole different. Sunnism too believes that at the end of times a Mahdī will appear, but there is no anxious awaiting of this event and justice must be pursued presently and straightforwardly. Classical Shiism (up to Khomeini who changed this mentality) maintained that, while the *ghā'ib* and *muntazar imām* is absent, all political regimes are illegitimate. Contrary to that, Sunnism looks at the political regimes in power as always legitimate if they defend religion and implement God's law (*sharī'a*)<sup>20</sup>. Rule is a necessity that cannot be postponed until the Mahdī's return.

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17 Shariati, Ali: *On the Sociology of Islam*. Mizan Press: Berkeley 1979, pp. 108–9. I slightly modified the Qur'anic translations.

18 The term has a strong connotation in twentieth-century Islamic revolutionary language. See, for example, Q 28: 4–5.

19 Shariati, Ali: *Shahadat*. In: Abedi, Mehdi/Legenhausen, Gary (eds.): *Jihad and shahadat. Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*. The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies: Houston 1986, pp. 152–229.

20 See Crone, Patricia: *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh 2004; and Campanini 2015.

Now, in an anonymous recent article on Islamic philosophy of history, evidently written by a Sunni author<sup>21</sup>, a great emphasis is placed on a famous Qur'anic verse often quoted by modern reformist Muslims: 'Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change what is related to their own conduct and behaviour' (*Sura al-Ra'd*, Q. 13: 11). In a sense, this verse paves the way for a philosophy of history, insofar as it involves the obligation to change ourselves in order to change and positively orient our own political and reformist action. Human will is duly stressed against any misunderstood Islamic "fatalism". The author of the article emphasises both the fact that the Prophets mobilised society by awakening religious feeling, unfolding social consciousness and shaking off the dust from men's conscience, and the fact that morality is the leading factor of any constructive change. For spiritual and moral corruption, sin of the heart, the loss of insight, the deformation of the soul, the observance of ancestral customs and habits are condemned by the Qur'an as obstacles in the way of the development of society and its moving towards peace and prosperity. On the contrary, in the author's opinion, four elements affect the rise and fall of a society: 1) justice and injustice; 2) unity and discord among humans; 3) observance or disregard of God's commands; 4) moral depravity.

This ethical approach is positively considered as wishful thinking but on the whole disappointing, because the contemporary perspectives of utopia in the Sunni outlook are concentrated in the project of a new Islamic state in very practical terms. I think it will be useful to follow the main steps of the development of Sunni thought and practice in this regard.

First, as we have seen, there was the realisation of utopia on earth with the Medinan community of Muhammad. However, from the point of view of the present concept of State, the Prophet's Medina was not at all a state. No administrative organisation nor institutions devoted to the functioning of a political organism did yet exist. Nevertheless, Muhammad ruled the *umma* through his personal charisma and through the prestige he had acquired as the conveyor of revelation and, when necessary, as a war leader. Politically, he was first of all a judge: Inspired by God, legislation (*shari'a*) flowed from his mouth and his behaviour; his companions executed his commands. Medinese community applied the Islamic principles and rules as soon as Muhammad revealed them and made them the very basis of his own and of his companions' conduct. This is the reason why, in posterior mythology, Medinese society became the model of the Islamic state, to which the management of community and politics must be referred.

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21 *Man and Universe*, retrieved 01.12.2016 from [www.al-islam.org](http://www.al-islam.org).

Later, the *rāshidūn* period followed, that is the period of the first four successors of Muhammad, the so-called Rightly Guided Caliphs: Abū Bakr (632–634), ‘Umar (634–644), ‘Uthmān (644–656) and ‘Alī (656–661). In the deformed perspective of counter-utopia, also their rule acquired the improbable characteristics of a perfect and enlightened policy, grounded in revealed principles and in the personal honesty and rightness of the first caliphs and of the first generations of Companions and pious ancestors (the *salaf*). They were the best generation humanity ever witnessed, just as the Qur’ān contends: ‘You are the best Community ever existed among men’ (Q. 3: 110). However, this prejudice, as it were, is far less convincing than the perfection of Muhammad’s time. Three caliphs out of four (‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī) were assassinated, two or three civil wars (the *fitnas*) erupted, the ethical and moral principles of Islam were scarcely respected by the population. Moreover, the basic Islamic political principles were not yet formulated. Therefore, it is impossible to speak of a true Islamic state in the *rāshidūn* caliphs’ Medina, neither theoretically nor practically. Yet, Sunni mythology (obviously not Shi’i salvation history which drinks deep to the martyrdoms of ‘Alī and Husayn) extended the golden age far beyond Muhammad’s perfect “state”, including the *rāshidūn* period.

The following Umayyad (661–750) and ‘Abbasid (750–1258) caliphates represented a much too long period of interregnum in which, on the one hand, it is difficult to identify the Islamic credentials of the state, while, on the other, the political practice of the caliphate was lacking a theoretical basis. Obviously, the two aspects are linked together: If a theoretical basis is lacking, practice is also missed. On the one hand, it is impossible to consider the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphates as properly Islamic because *sharī’a* was not factually implemented, while many caliphs were corrupt and interested in *mulk*, the personal patrimonial power, rather than in people’s welfare. On the other hand, political reflection developed theories moving away from the original ideal situation.

Reacting against the decadence, al-Māwardī (d. 1058) elaborated on the full theory of Sunni caliphate when the Sunni caliphate had decayed. Al-Māwardī did so when the caliphate was dying, or at least by then devoid of real political power, proposing a strong model, able to heal the secular weakness of the ‘Abbasid regime.<sup>22</sup> Shortly later, however, Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), in the troubled times of the subordination of the ‘Abbasid caliphs to the Sultan dynasties of Buyids and Seljuqs recorded above, recognised that, although the caliph owns all the

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22 See Mikhail, Hannah: *Politics and revelation. Mawardi and after*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh 1995.



religious prestige, the real political power lays in the hands of the sultans, who rule by means of force.<sup>23</sup> Still later, after the fall of Baghdad under the Mongol swords (1258) and the factual end of the 'Abbasid caliphate, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) tried to theorise a *siyāsa shar'iyya*, that is, a state ruled according to the divine law but without the possibility to renew the caliphate<sup>24</sup>. Ibn Jamā'a (d. 1333) has been the most cynical representative of counter-utopia, insofar as he theorised the legitimacy of the violent seizure of power by sultans. I already stressed that Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) looked nostalgically on the ancient caliphate, while he was totally pessimistic about the possibility to build it anew.

After Ibn Khaldūn, the discussion on the Islamic state had been suspended until contemporary times, when Islamic political thought moved again towards a model of an Islamic state, theorising a new (retrospective) utopia. When Mustafā Kemāl Atatürk abolished the virtual Ottoman caliphate in the 20s, a sharp confrontation arose between supporters of the caliphate (Rashīd Ridā, for example, d. 1935) and adversaries of the caliphate ('Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq, for example, d. 1966)<sup>25</sup>. The debate represented a "romantic", so to speak, endeavour by the supporters of the caliphate to revitalise al-Māwardī's utopia of a communitarian and universal Islamic state, identified with the caliphate. Political or radical Islamism, with the Muslim Brothers (founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Bannā) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), renewed the Islamic state's utopia but, as I am arguing just from the beginning of this article, looking *backwards*, looking back to the perfect time of the Prophet<sup>26</sup>. Qutb's condemnation of all secular political systems, like Nasserism in Egypt or the authoritarian military regimes of Syria and Iraq, which he charged with unbelief (*kufr*), was only the first step in order to restore God's sovereignty (*hākimiyya*), justice (*ādīl*) and consultation (*shūrā*) as the main pillars of Islamic policy.<sup>27</sup>

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23 See Campanini, Massimo: 'Al-Ghazali and the Seljuqs'. In: Lange, C./Mecit, S. (eds.): *The Seljuqs. Politics, Society and Culture*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh 2011, pp. 228–39.

24 See the classical translation of Laoust. Laoust, Henry: *Le Traité de Droit Publique d'Ibn Taymiyya*. Institut Français de Damas: Beirut 1948.

25 See the translations: Laoust, Henry: *Le Califat dans la doctrine de Rashid Rida*. Maisonneuve: Paris 1986; and Abderraziq, Ali: *L'Islam et les fondements du pouvoir*. La Découverte: Paris 1994.

26 Qutb, Sayyid: *Ma'ālim fi'l-tariq (Milestones)*. Dar al-Shurūq: Cairo 1983.

27 Qutb, Sayyid: *Al-'Adāla al-ijtimā'iyya fi'l-Islām (Social Justice in Islam)*. Dar al-Shurūq: Cairo, 1987 and Qutb, Sayyid: *La battaglia tra Islam e capitalismo*. Picchi, M. (ed.). Marcianum: Venezia 2016.

Al-Qaida's and IS's terrorism has thrown a heavy shadow on this project of recovery. There is a revival of utopia, but once again, retrospective; moreover, there is little clarity about the factual realisation of this imagined "new" state.<sup>28</sup> The today widespread concept of a 'civil state' (*dawla madaniyya*) in important thinkers like the Egyptian Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, the Tunisian Rāshid Ghannūshī and others, and the equally widespread tendency to re-read and revise *sharī'a*<sup>29</sup> are moving tentatively towards a deep change in Islamic political thought.

However, the problem of a 'philosophy of history' remains unresolved in Sunnism. The implementation of *sharī'a* and of the Islamic state does not mean in itself the distorted counter-utopia's correction. What seems to be necessary is the de-mythologisation of the *Salaf* period. Muhammad's excellence is obvious and universally agreeable and out of question. The Rightly Guided Caliphs' and the *Salaf*'s excellence, on the contrary, is not. A profound revision of the same history of the first phases of Islamic community is needed. Already, three thinkers at least moved in this direction: Muhammad 'Abid al-Jābirī (d. 2010), Nasr Abū Zayd (d. 2010) and Burhan Ghalioun (alive).<sup>30</sup>

All three shared substantially the same interpretation: the *fitna* or civil war between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya provoked (in Abū Zayd's direct words) a 'falsification' of Muslim consciousness. This consciousness was primarily religious, but the *fitna* transformed religion into politics: politics instrumentalised religion and what was originally spiritual became mundane. Therefore, the successive caliphates and sultanates – as Ibn Khaldūn complained – often bore the mark of tyranny, being too far from the "ideal" Islamic policy realised by the Prophet. Developing the awareness for the disruptive consequences of the *fitna* and de-mythologising the alleged golden era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs could allow a reconsideration of the meaning of all Islamic history and help the theorisation of a philosophy of history whose direction is straightforward, not bending towards the past.

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28 See Belkeziz, Abdelilah: *The State in Contemporary Islamic Thought*. I. B. Tauris: London 2009.

29 Clever contemporary supporters of a renewal of *sharī'a* are 'Abdullahi al-Na'im, Wael Hallaq, Khaled Abou el-Fadl, Tariq Ramadan, and Jasser Auda.

30 Ghalioun (1998). Al-Jābirī, Muhammad A.: *al-'Aql al-Siyāsī al-'Arabī (The Arab Political Intellect)*. Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wahda al-'Arabiyya: Beirut 1994; Abū Zayd, Nasr: *Naqd al-Khitāb al-Dīnī (Critique of Religious Discourse)*. Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda: Cairo 1992; Ghalioun, Burhan: *Islam e islamismo. La modernità tradita*. Editori Riuniti: Roma 1998.

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## **2. Utopia in Performance and Practice**



Lanfranco Vicari aka Moder

## **Mauro and Tiziana, Perelà's code, Nails in my mouth**

**Abstract:** This artistic intermezzo offers three rap songs composed and performed by Lanfranco Vicari aka Moder. They explore the personal and affective elements whereby every life story provides a specific example of a unique participation to the reflection on a present utopia and of the contribution of art and performance to this dialogue. While focusing on personal experience and individual moments of life, the lyrics tell the wider and contingent local stories of specific places and people, also describing the culture and history of Italy in the 1980s and that of today. References to Ravenna and its suburbs – mosaics, beaches, salt flats – appear as a landscape. The texts narrate the protagonist's life through expressing contrasting but complementary feelings of love and pain, dreams and illusions, failure and rebirth, doubt and decision, and weaves the individual story with that of other people – close and distant, famous and unknown – and of material objects. Material and immaterial references, facts and feelings articulate stories where music is a leading theme. At times with delicate stokes, at times with crude touch, the lyrics focus on the awareness that the unavoidable individual and contingent history is the starting point according to which life stories lead and change. There is a sort of ironic gaze on the pieces and details of life which makes the texts critical and political, too. They powerfully trace the search to make sense of individual actions always rooting them locally and positioning them inside present facts in order to make actions relevant for a positive, useful change. The titles and subtitles of the lyrics are: Mauro and Tiziana: Biography and my story, Perelà's code: Dream and utopia, Nails in my mouth: love, alcohol, suburbs.

## Mauro and Tiziana<sup>1</sup>

Opened my eyes it was late at night  
 can't remember much it was the eighties  
 the years of Craxi<sup>2</sup> and high finance  
 dreaming of Manhattan  
 of ghosts in the parks with needles in their arms  
 Italy winning 3–1 the World Cup in Spain  
 Pertini Zoff and Smaila's Italy<sup>3</sup>  
 Rino Gaetano splittin' up from Aida with no goodbyes  
 Bologna blown up<sup>4</sup> to the sound of Dalla's music  
 it was the Italy of wealth  
 of keep your mouth shut and fill your belly up  
 sundays with the holy *Gazzetta* paper and a Fernet Branca  
 the world's changing the class struggles're in the pubs not on the streets  
 I was baptised near the sea and the countryside  
 holy water somewhere near salt flats and beaches  
 a child knows no evil and cannot recognise it  
 I draw smiles on scraps of paper

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- 1 Translated from Italian by Giuseppina Rizzi. Thanks for helping with the translation to Giovanna Gualtieri, Roberto Pedretti, and Andrea B. Farabegoli. The translation captures the meaning and images of Moder's rap, but does not reproduce the rhyme scheme which is in the Italian version. Moder's rap contains numerous references to the Italian cultural, social and political scene, retrieved 01.06.2017 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaMwIhm383Q&list=PL6aNaGhh9uzVOEauqK-6XLVKf-IK4gKKY> 'Mauro e Tiziana'; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIFeUE6cKrw&list=PL6aNaGhh9uzVOEauqK-6XLVKf-IK4gKKY&index=3> 'Il codice di Perelà'; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B483sgKiapE&index=5&list=PL6aNaGhh9uzVOEauqK-6XLVKf-IK4gKKY> 'Tra i denti'.
  - 2 Bettino Craxi was a discussed politician of the Socialist party who was active in the eighties. Found guilty for corruption during the investigation 'Mani pulite', he fled to Hammamet in Tunisia where he died in 2000.
  - 3 Sandro Pertini was a member of the Social Party and the seventh president of the Italian Republic in the years 1978–1985; Dino Zoff is a worldwide famous soccer player. He was goalkeeper of the national team when Italy was world champion in 1982. Roberto Baggio and Salvatore Schillaci are soccer players. Umberto Smaila is a cabaret TV actor. Rino Gaetano and Lucio Dalla were songwriters. *Aida* is the title of Gaetano's third album. *Gazzetta dello sport* is the most widely read sport newspaper. Fernet Branca is a typical digestive drink.
  - 4 It refers to the major terrorist far-right attack that took place on 2 August 1980, when a bomb exploded at Bologna station killing and wounding hundreds.



father worked and had nothing in his pockets  
 mother was a housewife up the duff with my sister

I was ready to run away  
 who knows what my father thought in his days  
 how long has it been since you noticed  
 we weren't supposed to keep each other posted  
 driving around with the same music playing  
 five euros and a pack of Winston Blue in my pocket  
 you've seen how I get by  
 it's hard to tell how I write  
 to change you just need to try  
 while another day goes by

I was running in the fields wearing rags  
 candied fruit merry-go-rounds ice-creams in summer's boulevards  
 primary school dictation Baggio and Schillaci  
 had to learn to be streetwise or end up counting seek-and-hide  
 spring riding bikes with no hands  
 winter you get sick  
 autumn the leaves paint branches yellow  
 they said you're all equal but them were lies  
 some are born with nothing and some are poker guys  
 the first kiss the first drag of forbidden sighs  
 then father died unexpectedly  
 that day my world turned grey  
 suddenly everything changed I waved goodbye to the harbour and left  
 have you ever felt worthless you know it really hurts  
 dying at Christmas time  
 is what you get for Xmas I wanted to fly away  
 hanging onto the sky without ever coming back  
 at school they said grow up get out  
 still talk to the walls because they keep secrets  
 I was ready to run away  
 who knows what my father thought in his days

I'm Mauro and Tiziana's son  
 Gastone and Verdiana's daughter Maria and Walter's son  
 how far I have come how far I have to go  
 these are my stories 'n' I love telling them  
 how long has it been since you noticed  
 we weren't supposed to keep each other posted  
 driving around with the same music playing  
 five euros and a pack of Winston Blue in my pocket  
 you've seen how I get by

it's hard to tell how I write  
 to change you just need to try  
 while another day goes by

### Perelà's code<sup>5</sup>

we  
 we never met just ran into each other  
 it' s a question of feeling  
 teach me how to cry  
 we shut our eyes with dreams that we see  
 the glass of Murano is easy to shatter  
 been tripped up  
 you are my world the closer I get the more I lose you  
 what's going on?  
 someone disappeared someone else is here  
 god give me a hand to paint silence  
 everyone is the world 'n' the world is a universe  
 hey there city everything's shut but we're not done  
 take your time byzantine mosaics wander around the town<sup>6</sup>  
 happy hours a few martinis now you're happy  
 mum look at me  
 pedalling hard just like Coppi and Bartali like you used to say  
 I'm older now so calm down  
 draw your eyes and send them to me  
 come on say something move your lips  
 how can you flee from sharks if you can't swim  
 just about keeping my head above water  
 got a secret can fly above this ghost town  
  
 like Perelà am made of smoke  
 forever young like Peter Pan  
 life goes on after the bling 'n' coke  
 you will always find me afloat

- 
- 5 References to the Italian context are: Murano is a small island in Venice lagoon where a worldwide famous artistic glass factory is located; Fausto Coppi was a famous cyclist in the 40s and 50s, and world champion in 1953. Gino Bartali was a cyclist, too, and animated the Italian sport scene as Coppi's rival.
- 6 The reference is to Ravenna, a famous historic town rich with byzantine mosaics, where Moder is based. It was the capital city of the Western Roman Empire in the years 402–476.

You wanted even more rap  
 you were the one who was shouting olé  
 gave you everything and kept nothing for myself  
 anxious paces on the floor  
 my DJ stage  
 saturdays full of pills gin and schweppes  
 'n' fly above the ground following jet trails  
 your skin is pale but your soul is grey  
 with your out-dated ray bans  
 the one-legged soldier plays Daitarn 3 in a battle  
 well done for setting the table on the floor  
 'cause you quickly get used to eating dust  
 you're in the group with those waiting  
 the loner in front struggles to fit in  
 we're a documentary on displacement  
 those who really suffer will sue us for plagiarism  
 I look at myself I am a stranger  
 drill a hole in my skull use it as a moneybox  
  
 learn how to hurt yourself and not speak out  
 to be a father without a doubt  
 to pray without believing nought  
 when I write am naked 'n' bear my soul that's all right

### Nails in my mouth

late at night eyes slit  
 after sun cream on sunburn  
 sunglasses vampires to light  
 playing notes in silent rooms  
  
 think you're right but your stance is wrong  
 you built a prison with your dreams  
 missed your chance lost your money  
 I don't understand the risks you take  
 jeez you freak me up  
 why the hell you listening to me  
 any idiot can write a rhyme  
 tried my best to hide my feelings  
 always meet  
 drunk  
 same place same jerks  
 I always shouting at the deaf  
 you with the right answers  
 regrets in crumpled sweatshirts 'n' dirty socks

tear off rhymes from my flesh in sleepless nights  
 no more cold sweat no hot blood  
 the closer I get the less I want to go across  
 nobody arrived  
 when I asked  
 my future like smoke can't grab it

collect failures 'n' file mistakes  
 if you like them I can sell 'em for heaven's sake  
 collect failures 'n' file mistakes  
 if you like 'em

know I want what I don't have  
 bit of love won't calm my anger  
 got a vulture on my shoulder 'n' a fistful of sand  
 know a big heart is bound to break  
 contact's impossible wrapped in barbwire  
 rewind wasted time and pick up what you sow  
 I start again fine  
 make mistakes start again like assembly line  
 you know I'm pissed off  
 with your comments  
 with glasses full 'n' empty  
 with your CDs new 'n' harmless  
 with rap rock discoes and music  
 what the fuck do you want what the hell  
 the more stories are real the less they appeal  
 what the fuck do you want what the hell  
 got only swear words and nails in my mouth

first rule is nothing for nothing  
 nothing's forever  
 we cling to doubts look for certainties  
 punches hurt less than caresses  
 wounds like stories tattooed on our skin  
 look for answers in these songs tell me if you find them  
 wanted to look inside me see if I was locked out

with my hands 'll steal every minute of hope  
 since Matilde's been around  
 I know who to give it to  
 with my hands 'll steal every minute of hope  
 if I can't do it  
 hope she knows

Roberto Pedretti

## Performing Rap, Practising Utopia, Building Resistance<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Since the second half of the 70s, rap has been engaged in a struggle to conquer and maintain spaces of survival and resistance worldwide. Its 'message' spread from the American urban ghettos to the periphery of the world, giving birth to countless artistic and cultural products and practices rooted in the local experience. In this frame, rappers fought and still fight to affirm and maintain 'authenticity' as a way to resist the material and ideological pressure of capital and capitalism. Among many criticisms about the commodification and commercialisation of rap culture, most practitioners still claim rap is a powerful tool to practice forms of liberation. In this perspective, the many ways in which hip-hop acts may be interpreted as a way to reimagine utopia as the practical articulation of new forms of resistance and struggle positioned in the interstices of the dominant neo-liberal paradigm. Although vast and intricate, hip-hop culture, especially in its musical representations, lends itself to post-colonial reading. The multiplicity of the possible creative expressions which present themselves as part of a cultural whole are in fact representative of the material conditions in which the heirs of colonialism and post-colonialism operate. The story of the Italian hip-hop and rap scene may offer an interesting case study in order to observe the application of the global language of hip-hop to specific contexts and contingencies. This story may be read as reflecting the fast and tumultuous transformations of the country's material conditions, and of the wider social and economic relationships that placed Italy within European and global networks. In the perspective of the global/local dialectic, this chapter offers an overview of the Italian rap scene from its birth, and underlines its specificity. It also focuses on the 'political' narrative of Italian rap as alternative to traditional political discourses.

### Introduction

After more than 30 years, the blurred frames of Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's video 'The Message' continue to send back images of an urban space in a state of abandonment, poverty, violence, exclusion and marginality.<sup>2</sup> These electronic fragments bear a vivid resemblance to contemporary images of places around the world where hip-hop produces its message of resistance, freedom,

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1 The author wishes to thank Monica Lagazio and Andrew Neish for their friendly help and invaluable advice with the translation of this chapter.

2 Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five: 'The Message', retrieved 14.07.2017 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PobrSpMwKk4>.

creativity and justice. Different and distant social environments, apparently more suitable to represent a dystopian space than a place of resistance and creativity, become the stage on which hip-hop practitioners experiment with forms of artistic practices rooted in everyday experience and life. The many ways in which hip-hop works may be interpreted as possibilities to reimagine utopia as a new form of resistance and struggle, positioned in the interstices of the dominant neo-liberal paradigm. It is in these Temporary Autonomous Zones<sup>3</sup> that hip-hop produces material which escapes cultural appropriation and corporate economic interests and gives way to alternative narratives of the present.

In the case of some contemporary cultural traditions that often position themselves radically outside mainstream culture, such as hip-hop, language offers a tool for cultural enfranchisement and the opportunity to take back the ownership of representation and narrative. Even within the dominant cultural system, imposed by the dominant classes not exclusively white, cultural practices such as hip-hop can reveal the social contradictions that have generated their own existence, while simultaneously positioning themselves as opposing forces. Taking inspiration from the post-colonial tradition, Caliban's curse against Prospero in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* aptly describes such cultural and political confrontation: 'You taught me language, and my profit on't/ Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!'<sup>4</sup> Specifically, as a central element of the colonial and post-colonial dialectic, language becomes an instrument of great creative potential in the hands of the subaltern. Undoubtedly, Caliban speaks the language of the coloniser, but takes possession and hybridises it. Prospero has lost control of a language that becomes a space for possibility where post-colonial subjects develop strategies of opposition and resistance, and where alternative stories emerge which conflict with, and contradict hegemonic master narratives.

Since the 70s, the post-colonial vision of the world has confronted and welcomed marginal historical and cultural experiences, and has favoured the inclusion of cultural practises emerging from complex social systems in its own theoretical system. These practises are representative of dissonant and competitive voices that reclaim the right to access self-representation and to offer counter-information.<sup>5</sup> It is within this perspective that we should locate hip-hop. Hip-hop

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3 See Bey, Hakim: *The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, Brooklyn NY, Autonomedia 1991. Free download at: [https://hermetic.com/bey/taz\\_cont](https://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont).

4 Shakespeare, William: *The Tempest*. OUP: Oxford [1611] 1987, 1.2, ll. 362–364.

5 See the critical dialogue between Post-colonial and Cultural Studies and Stuart Hall's works and reflections.

started to be practised in the United States in the mid-70s and soon became one of the most significant and popular youth cultures. Generated in the marginal areas of the great American urban areas experiencing radical post-industrial changes, hip-hop culture established itself as an instrument that represented the tensions and contradictions caused by these radical changes in social, economic and racial relationships.<sup>6</sup> It is possible to interpret this culture as the expression of post-modernist aesthetic and condition, a narrative comprising elements of everyday experience as well as fragments of political and cultural critiques assembled from outside an ideologically structured discourse. Rap and hip-hop culture may then be regarded as forms of anti-memory and anti-history. They are expressed through symbolic processes of resistance triggered by poverty, marginalisation, institutionalised racism and discrimination. Hip-hop quickly established itself as anti-narrative against dominant pathologic representations of Afro-American urban communities. It used diverse expressive forms: rapping/MC-ing, DJ-ing/turntablism, b-boying/breakdance, and writing/graffiti art.<sup>7</sup> In a famous essay published in the United States in the 60s, the intellectual and political militant LeRoi Jones, today known as Amiri Baraka, argued that music provided the most suitable expressive channel to convey the historical experience of black Americans.<sup>8</sup> Following Jones' argument, hip-hop has become what free-jazz was for Jones, namely a cultural and artistic practice that not only positioned itself completely outside official culture but that also marked the cultural and political radicalisation that was taking place within the Afro-American community (Leroy 1963: p. 231).<sup>9</sup> Following diverse expressive forms and outcomes, several young Afro-Americans, together with other minority groups, used hip-hop to inform about the conditions of marginalisation that were imposed by the liberal project of economic restructuring initiated at the end of the 60s. In a context strongly

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6 Rose, Tricia: 'A Style Nobody Can Deal With: Politics, Style and the Post-Industrial City in Hip-Hop'. In Ross, Andrew/Rose, Tricia (eds.): *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*. Routledge: New York 1994, pp. 71–88.

7 These forms are porous, malleable, and interactive. See Taylor, Paul C.: 'Does Hip-Hop Belong to Me? The Philosophy of Race and Culture'. In: Darby, Derrick/Shelby, Tommie (eds.): *Hip-Hop and Philosophy, Rhyme 2 Reason*. Open Court: Chicago 2005, pp. 79–91.

8 See Jones, Leroi: *Blues People. Negro Music in White America*. William Morrow and Co.: New York 1963.

9 Jones's work is rooted in a time of exceptional political radicalisation and the beginning of a series of social struggles which would exhaust themselves at the end of that decade.

characterised by dynamics of exclusion, hip-hop provided an opportunity for re-constructing forms of identity rooted in the street and ghetto experience.<sup>10</sup> The racial dimension of hip-hop is inescapable, as the American philosopher Cornel West underlined<sup>11</sup>, as it undeniably mixes cultural practices in a global/local dialectic and recalls the experience of diaspora.

Yet, in spite of ambiguities mainly originating from homogenising cultural processes and economic moves towards the commodification of hip-hop for multinational capital, hip-hop culture has proved to be changeable and iridescent, with a degree of autonomy and creativity that has produced stories of injustice, dominance, and racism. These stories are different from the consumed and often reactionary images conveyed by mainstream media.<sup>12</sup> The chameleon-like quality of hip-hop to transform and adapt to different environments has projected this culture into a post-colonial, globally orientated perspective. Therefore, the American ghetto has turned into one of many places where social and political processes associated with colonialism, imperialism, and their long-term impacts are taking place. The workshop where hip-hop is produced is the world: from the barrios in Buenos Aires to the banlieues in Paris and Marseille, from the London suburbs to the periphery of Naples, from the Arab Spring squares to South African townships. Each place offers original artistic stimuli to put forward an alternative and often provocative reading of contemporaneity.

### Caliban “keeps it real”

Although vast and intricate, hip-hop culture, especially in its musical representations, lends itself to post-colonial reading. The multiplicity of the possible creative expressions which present themselves as part of a cultural whole are in fact representative of the material conditions in which the heirs of colonialism and post-colonialism operate. Differences of class, gender, geographical collocation, ethnical membership, and education operate as key elements in the formulation of a myriad of cultural practices forged in social and historical contexts which are specific and different from each other.

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10 See Pedretti, Roberto/Vivan, Itala: *Dalla Lambretta allo skateboard. Teorie e storia delle sottoculture giovanili britanniche (1950–2000)*. Unicopli: Milano 2009, pp. 164–5.

11 West, Cornel: ‘Foreword’. In: Darby, Derrick/Shelby, Tommie (eds.): *Hip-Hop and Philosophy, Rhyme 2 Reason*. Open Court: Chicago 2005, p. xii.

12 The intelligent use of social media by individual performers, groups, and communities has favoured emancipation, the preservation of autonomous spaces opposing the cultural mainstream.



In hip-hop slang, “keeping it real” has a meaning. For many hip-hop practitioners it means to maintain an attentive and constant relationship with the everyday street life experience and the knowledge of how places, times, and generational factors and characteristics consistently shape ever-changing and mutable identities.<sup>13</sup> The agency comprising hip-hop practitioners takes form in the activation of processes of socialisation and incorporation. Tricia Rose explains the notion of “keeping it real” as ‘[...] both representing a particular black ghetto street life and being truthful about one’s relationship to that life.’<sup>14</sup> Today this definition escapes the constraints of American ghettos and applies to any places and moments where social, cultural and artistic practices, which challenge a stereotypical representation of the other, emerge. This creative flow re-interprets and re-positions historical, cultural, and political contexts suggesting a reading of the past and an interpretation of the present that are highly contextualised in everyday life experiences.

Among the many cultural, aesthetic and artistic efforts that could be taken as examples of coherent implementations of hip-hop philosophy and its insistent call for building connections with the lived experience, the work on *The Tempest* by artist and rapper Will Power, as well as the exhibition on hip-hop ‘Utopia: Culture + Community’ are the perfect case studies. Together with other choreographers and performers, Will Power is the founder of Hip-hop Theatre, a type of popular theatre that can also be employed for didactic purposes. Established in the United States and then fostered globally, this theatre, which uses diverse expressive forms that are typical of hip-hop, takes place within urban communities that are often marginalised or disadvantaged. Hip-hop theatre provides an example of a much wider movement, which interprets the artistic production as an opportunity for, and an instrument of empowerment, growth and integration, specifically in contexts characterised by the presence of different ethnic groups and migrants. In his performances, which explore the possibility to connect European traditional theatre with hip-hop culture, Power combines storytelling, dance movements, spoken-words, and music in order to narrate stories about race, violence, HIV, and exclusion. In 2012, on the occasion of the celebration of the London Olympic Games, the Royal Shakespeare Company asked the American artist to write a piece of work, which was to connect electronic rhythm and the beat of hip-hop with *The Tempest*. The outcome was a video in which parts of Caliban’s discourses

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13 Morgan, Marcyliena: ‘After ... Word! The Philosophy of the Hip-Hop Battle’. In: Darby, Derrick/Shelby, Tommie (eds.): *Hip-Hop and Philosophy, Rhyme 2 Reason*. Open Court: Chicago 2005, p. 210.

14 Rose, Tricia: *The hip-hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip-Hop – and Why It Matters*. Basic Books: New York 2008, p. 136.

were blended with rhythms and sound typical of hip-hop, using the technique of mashup.<sup>15</sup> Offering a post-colonial reading of Shakespeare's text, Power touches on those similarities and communalities that he believes make the languages of Caliban and hip-hop similar. According to Power, both languages express a sense of rebellion against power, its structure and the establishment. Caliban and hip-hop operate along the same critical level and '[...] authentically and eloquently bring their energy to the forefront'.<sup>16</sup> The language of Shakespeare and the rhythms of the verses in his plays lend themselves to be transmuted into hip-hop poetry via a process of appropriation, not dissimilar to that theorised and practiced by the poet Linton Kwesi Johnson when he asked the question about the redefinition of the canon of English literature and the inclusion of post-colonial writers in it during the 70s and 80s.

Following this line of argument, the statement of the English rapper, performer, and educator Akala, who is also the founder and artistic director of the Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company<sup>17</sup> becomes relevant to the discussion. Akala wonders who possesses knowledge and who is the guardian of the knowledge.<sup>18</sup> The search for knowledge, interpreted as the journey towards empowerment, liberation, and inclusion, is, for many hip-hop practitioners, the fifth building block of hip-hop philosophy. This implies a sort of pedagogy of hip-hop, which takes place through the implementation of a number of activities especially centred around the use of art and artistic performance. In this context, hip-hop language acts as a guide for cultural mediation, it triggers communication and cognitive processes opening up new forms of knowledge and integration.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of the relationship between hip-hop and communities as well as the acknowledgment that hip-hop functions as cultural mediator and street

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15 See Power, Will: Retrieved 20.06.2017 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1B\\_HLJsVQM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1B_HLJsVQM). In this video, Will Power also explains why he chose that specific fragment of Shakespeare's play and specifically the character of Caliban. Listen to 3 different artistic versions on: Power, Will: 'Caliban', retrieved 20.06.2017 from <https://soundcloud.com/thersc/sets/will-power-caliban>.

16 Power 2017.

17 Founded in 2008, the Company organises plays, workshops, and live events on Shakespeare's texts, underlining their social and cultural connections, and language correspondences with hip-hop, retrieved 20.06.2017 from [www.hiphopshakespearecompany.org](http://www.hiphopshakespearecompany.org).

18 Alaka: Retrieved 20.06.2017 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSbtKLA3GrY>.

19 Rapper KRS-One defines this attitude 'edutainment', and underlines that hip-hop is not 'done' but is 'lived' everyday. *Edutainment* is also the title of a 1990 album by Boogie Down Productions.

pedagogy were the main themes of an exhibition, held in the first months of 2017 in Jersey City (NY). The exhibition, staged in the Art Gallery of the Hudson County Community College and significantly titled *Hip-Hop Utopia: Culture + Community* gave the opportunity for rethinking and retracing the functioning of hip-hop within communities. In the mind of the curators<sup>20</sup>, the exhibition offered a space for reflection on the social aspect of hip-hop and the dialectic relationship between hip-hop and the community where hip-hop is produced and lived. Using the different articulations of this culture, the exhibition reinterpreted its expressive modes and offered a reading that followed the path of hip-hop from the expression of the resistant voice of the excluded and the marginal to the practice of social communication and liberation.

However, it is important to note that not the whole hip-hop world has recognised itself in such a cultural project, which came to life at the beginning of the 90s and cannot be easily isolated from other later emerging trends. The opposition between brain and bling – namely, the tension between the educational objective and the provocative and disputed style lending itself to celebrate consumerism and material wealth – as well as the emergence of new styles like *gangsta rap*, which oppose the establishment more radically and aggressively, are some examples that reveal the complex and plural nature of hip-hop. What remains is the capacity for, and willingness to adapt to historical and geographical conditions that are fundamental for the development of cultural practices expressing the needs and desires, the critiques and grievances, which are forged in unique contexts and possibilities.

## Verba Manent

The story of the Italian hip-hop and rap scene may offer an interesting case study in order to observe the application of the global language of hip-hop to specific contexts and contingencies. In 1993, Frankie Hi-Nrg MC (born Francesco Di Gesù), one of the most gifted Italian rappers of the time, published a seminal record entitled *Verba Manent* (the Latin expression for “words remain”). Frankie’s first record may be considered the point of arrival of the first wave of the Italian rap scene, one that signalled the maturity of the movement and indicated possible trajectories and future developments. The song ‘Potere alla parola’ (Power to the word) tellingly insists on the political and cultural dimension of rap as an

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20 *Hip-Hop Utopia: Culture + Community*. Vitale, Michelle aka woolpunk/Fleischer, Fred (curators): Art Gallery of the Hudson County Community College, Jersey City, retrieved 20.06.2017 from <http://streeartnyc.org/blog/2017/01/30/hip-hop-utopia-culture-community-at-jerseys-cities-dineen-hull-gallery-through-february-21/>.

instrument that fights against respectability and conformism. The content of the record may be read as representing the specific context in which the Italian rap scene took shape and developed. It was a context characterised by the long-term effects triggered by the radical transformation of the economy, accompanied by the emergence of a new cultural paradigm whose powerful hegemony would be confirmed in politics through the astonishing success of *berlusconismo*.<sup>21</sup>

For many (often well educated) youngsters, hip-hop offered a way to escape the silence in which they were forced in society, and a powerful tool to radically oppose hegemonic discourses by elaborating new forms of communication outside the traditional channels of party politics and institutional rhetoric. In this perspective, hip-hop culture offered the chance to build a space of experimentation for new languages and practices rooted in contingent everyday life. Therefore, the story of the Italian hip-hop and rap scene may be read as reflecting the fast and tumultuous transformations of the country's real conditions, and of the wider social and economic relationships that placed Italy within the European and global networks.

### Caliban “keeps it real” in Italy

Based on 2015 official statistics, the migrant population now resident in Italy is about 5 million. This is equivalent to 8.3% of the total population of 60 million.<sup>22</sup> The country started to experience sizable immigration flows from the end of the 80s with the arrival of Albanians, followed by Eastern Europeans and then by people from the Mediterranean. The unsettling change overturning the traditional narrative inclined to depict Italy as a country of emigrants should have fostered a new reading of the past and a reflection on possible paths for integration, also taking inspiration from models and solutions already adopted in neighbouring European countries. Instead, the immigration phenomenon was absorbed in a cultural context characterised by a lack of public reflection on the role that the country had played in 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial enterprise. This was a thorny piece of history (started with the Italian unification in 1861), which was better to keep as a false narrative, supporting the argument that Italian colonialism only played a marginal role within the international context. In addition, even within institutional boundaries, there were examples where national

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21 Berlusconi may be defined as an ideology deeply influenced by economic neo-liberalism, ferociously individualistic and self-indulgent in regard to both individual ethics and public morality.

22 Data retrieved 20.06.2017 from [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it) and [www.ismu.org](http://www.ismu.org).

colonialism, in particular the one occurring during fascism, was presented as benign and tolerant towards the colonised.<sup>23</sup> This was a narrative still based on the old rhetoric of “Italians, the good people” and the myth of civilisation and modernisation brought about by fascist Italy. This was indeed a real paradox, given the economic and social backwardness of the country during that period.<sup>24</sup>

In many of his articulations, Italian hip-hop has reclaimed contamination and hybridity as creative elements that can innervate and nurture Italian culture, in order to reflect on the social and demographic transformations that require to re-think forms of national identity based on exclusion and homogeneity. Significantly, many musical productions have captured in the Mediterranean area a cultural imagery that has become the basis for advancing divergent and concurrent identity readings, and for suggesting different memberships and trajectories that underline a sort of common destiny of the populations facing the Mediterranean basin.<sup>25</sup>

Emerged in the late 80s, especially finding experimentation and communication spaces in social centres and squats, the “Italian school” has proved to be one of the most fruitful, creative and radical on the international stage, feeding an alternative productive cycle (discs, CDs, concerts, audio-visual productions, books and fanzines) in overt competition with the established cultural industry and cultural mainstream. Moreover, the articulation of this tradition has allowed a pragmatic philosophy that has been adapted to the fast technological and market transformations. The first wave of posses and rappers – committed to build an original scene, abstaining from simply reproducing the content and aesthetic of American hip-hop – put into practice a creative effort inspired by the awareness of the cultural and social specificity of Italy. It must be underlined that Italian hip-hop took its first steps in a context characterised by the exhaustion of the cycle of social struggles started in the 1960s, by the implementation of the new

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23 See Gianfranco Fini’s public speech in September 2006. At that time, he was a well-known politician in the extreme-right party Alleanza Nazionale and was the President of the Camera dei Deputati. In 2010, he sustained similar biased ideas on Italian colonialism in a public meeting, retrieved 20.06.2017 from <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2006/09/26/fini-rivaluta-le-colonie-italiane-guardate-come.html?ref=search>; see also Farris, Erika: ‘Tra colonialismo e immigrazione’ [www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/11/04/tra-colonialismo-e-immigrazione-intervista-a-matteo-dominioni/765309/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/11/04/tra-colonialismo-e-immigrazione-intervista-a-matteo-dominioni/765309/).

24 In 2012 in Affile, the birth place of *Maresciallo d’Italia* and *Viceré d’Etiopia* Rodolfo Graziani, the inauguration of a monument dedicated to him and built with public money triggered widespread protests and opened a hot public debate.

25 See the band Alma Megretta among others.

neoliberal paradigm and the consequent reorganisation of the capitalist economy and market labour, as well as the crisis in credibility of the traditional political system. While, especially in metropolitan areas, hip-hop developed a language strongly defined by a social imagery in which converging experiences of social and economic marginalisation were sometimes expressed using the lexicon of radical politics<sup>26</sup>, in the south of the peninsula, it generated a variety of productions that alongside social issues expressed a strong interest in the Mediterranean cultures and dialects – often contaminated by the jargon of the road and thus made alive and pulsating – as an ideal medium to narrate everyday experiences.<sup>27</sup>

While Italian rap was structuring itself through the definition of a variety of schools and styles that also mirrored international trends and tendencies, and the demands of a mature market, controlled by multinational record companies, the impact of migratory phenomena began to transform the demographic structure of the country and was reverberating on both social relations and the economic system. More and more often, young immigrants of recent arrival, and children, born in Italy to immigrant families, started to represent a new type of Italian. Some of these new Italians, bearers of specific interests and in search of public recognition, found in hip-hop an expressive tool to shape the needs, anger, tensions, expectations that the host society failed to, or did not want to solve and satisfy. These second-generation Italians have created a variety of artistic and cultural productions through which they represent innovative ways of being Italian that express themselves through the enhancement of contamination and hybridity. Rather than accepting a selective and waterproof definition of national identity, they propose a hybrid definition, built on the assemblage of materials and cultural vibrations born out of different experiences of the world: a sort of cultural bricolage that escapes rigid interpretations and offers a composite catalogue of productions and cultural practices in which the global/local dialectic represents a constant matrix.<sup>28</sup> Of course, even in this specific articulation of contemporary popular cultures, the ability of any subject to resist dynamics linked to the unstable and ambiguous relationship with the cultural industry and the modes of mass consumption should not be idealised. Even though we may not forget Stuart Hall's admonition that contemporary popular culture '[...] is a place of homogenization where stereotyping and the formulaic mercilessly process the

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26 See Onda Rossa Posse, Assalti Frontali, 99POSSE, AK-47, Frankie Hi-Nrg MC, Articolo 31.

27 See Dissoi Logoi and Kunsertu.

28 On the definition of bricolage applied to subcultures see Hebdige, Dick: *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style*. Routledge: London 1979.

material and experiences it draws into its web, where control over narratives and representations passes into the hands of the established cultural bureaucracies, sometimes without a murmur<sup>29</sup>, in many ways, hip-hop still remains a form of popular culture that produces significant practices also within an area governed by dominant economic mechanisms.

In this context, Italian hip-hop has developed and transformed by following, interpreting and narrating, in a polyhedral and original manner, the social changes and the legal issues related to the immigration trends in the last decades. Although not often offering accomplished and convincing outcomes, many Italian rappers have been articulating a worldview that challenges the stereotypes of national homogeneity and cultural permeability, suggesting a dissenting and radical, often ironic and iconoclastic reading of the present.

### **Caliban writes back (1)**

The rapper Bello Figo (real name Paul Yeboah) is a 24-year-old youth from Ghana who has been living in Italy for about twelve years. A rap enthusiast and exponent of swag style<sup>30</sup>, he began to build a certain reputation for himself as Gucciboy, a pseudonym he had to abandon after being threatened with a lawsuit by the historic Italian fashion brand Gucci, now part of the French luxury group Kering. Evidently, the group feared the disrespectful and iconoclastic potential that the rapper was unknowingly releasing on YouTube through the images and lyrics of his songs combined with the name and style of one of the most renowned global luxury brands. The use of hyper-realistic and parodistic aesthetic emerging from Bello Figo's home-made videos immediately deconstructs the stereotypes – even racial ones – on which millionaire global advertising campaigns are built. In fact, Gucciboy/Bello Figo is not functional for corporate marketing like many multi-millionaire rappers are: those global icons which are integrated into the economic mechanisms that drive the image of global brands. Bello Figo builds his parodical pieces using the most popular trend in the web and in the media system.<sup>31</sup>

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29 Hall, Stuart, 'What Is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture?'. In: Dent, Gina (ed.): *Black Popular Culture*. Bay Press: Seattle 1992, p. 26.

30 A controversial subgenre of rap emphasising the lack of talent, swag style often and ironically boasts about money and wealth as major values for rappers.

31 Bello Figo composed songs drawing inspiration from the iPhone, Google Chrome, and famous public figures such as the Italian footballer Francesco Totti and the anchorwoman Barbara D'Urso.

In December 2016, he featured in an infotainment broadcast on Retequattro (one of the digital channels of Mediaset, the media company owned by former premier and leader of Forza Italia Silvio Berlusconi). The broadcast entitled 'Dalla vostra parte' (On Your Side) is characterised by the pretence of "giving a voice to people", those people normally described as impoverished, frightened, marginal, and voiceless. The issue at stake in the episode concerned housing shortage, high rents, and the question of eviction as opposed to the hospitality for migrants provided by the state and public institutions: a narrative constructed on the premises that immigration policies paradoxically discriminate locals and advantage foreigners in a contest of scarcity of resources and bad management of welfare. Bello Figo was invited because his song 'No pago affitto' (Me no pay rent) sounds like a claim by immigrants – especially blacks – to be hosted for free and therefore on the shoulders of poor Italians. Published on youtube, the song was watched by millions of surfers triggering an avalanche-effect that made Bello Figo extremely popular. By posing himself and his language outside the accepted political lexicon and the bombastic language of public stereotypes, Bello Figo reveals the ideological mechanisms of political communication dominating the public space, in particular those of electronic media.

Perhaps unknowingly, Bello Figo also unveils the mechanisms of a political narrative that seems no longer able to propose a worldview, but that merely assembles fragments of reality, interchangeable and replaceable stories based on limited and contingent interests. The effect is a cultural and media shortcut that breaks out a consolidated narrative model. The presence of Bello Figo contributes to the demolition of this narrative model: The lyrics and home-made videos of Bello Figo put in place a hyper-realistic version of 20 years of narration of migration and the immigrants. It is through the technique of trolling<sup>32</sup> that stereotypes and prejudices on immigrants and immigration are abnormally amplified so as to become absurd. Hence we, the public, are asked to reflect on the strategies that information and communication systems implement to build the rhetoric that dominates the story of immigration.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to notice that during the broadcast, Bello Figo was stigmatised and dubbed with subtitles that had already built a precise narrative of the character. Comments were: 'the refugee sings,' 'the refugee boasts of not paying the rent.' As a matter of facts, Bello Figo is not a refugee, he is an

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32 Trolling is a rhetorical technique used to provoke and piss people off, amplifying and exaggerating the rapper's own point of view.

33 Bello Figo, retrieved 20.06.2017 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDqOi97YaDs>.



Italian citizen.<sup>34</sup> The attempt to articulate, through the stigmatisation of Bello Figo, a strategy for confirming the most obvious stereotypes and prejudices did not work because, paradoxically, it was precisely the attitude of Bello Figo that revealed the artifice of the show that resembled a poor theatrical text.

In the hilarious videos available on YouTube that have garnered millions of views and have caused indignant reactions that paradoxically have contributed to raise his reputation, Bello Figo claims the right to self-representation without having to adapt to narrative models that circulate in public opinion. By rejecting the adaptation of biased dominant labels, Bello Figo refuses to be included in categories he did not choose or belong to, and he replaces them with a spectacular representation of patterns of consumption and material hedonism from which he should be excluded. Here at stake is not the relevance of the artistic and aesthetic quality of Bello Figo's rap production, it is rather being able to grasp the disorientation that provokes its presence as a signal, a warning that reveals the deep and hidden tendencies of Italian society: both his ghostly and material presence signal the racial obsessions and the fear of contamination many Italians are experiencing in a context of insecurity and increasing economic instability. In this perspective, Bello Figo's provocations work because they tear off the masks of hypocrisy and decency by exposing, instead, the contradictions and feebleness of a society unable to reckon with the force of transformation. Finally, it is relevant to underline the practical consequences of the controversy and material reactions caused by the appearance of Bello Figo: threats by neo-fascist extremist groups have forced several dance halls and discotheques to cancel scheduled concerts for fear of incidents.<sup>35</sup> Unbelievably, imprisoned in the obsession of finding proofs to their prejudices and their racist rhetoric, Italian neo-fascists groups cannot realise that they are the unconscious actors of an overturning forcing them to accept to speak and act on the same rhetorical terrain that the rapper has chosen – that of paradox, irony and absurdity – an overturning effect which transforms them into a parody of themselves.

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34 In an interview Bello Figo says that 'sometimes it seems that people do not want to understand my reasons because I am black'. He also explains that he attended the broadcast because 'he was there for those who wanted to understand his point of view', retrieved 20.06.2017 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YALL\\_YoBvr8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YALL_YoBvr8), my translation.

35 In the first months of 2017, scheduled shows were cancelled in Rome, Brescia, Mantua, and in the Swiss town of Lugano.

## Caliban writes back (2)

One of the most recent statistical surveys (2017) reveals that over one million children born to immigrants live in Italy: about three-quarters of them were born in the country. On the basis of current legislation, all of them – even those born in Italy to foreign parents – cannot get Italian citizenship until the age of 18. In 2015, the Camera dei Deputati (Deputy Chamber) passed a text affirming the principle that those who are brought up in Italy are Italian: it was a first attempt to replace the current *ius sanguinis* principle with *ius soli*. The text was passed on to the Constitutional Affairs Commission and has not reached the Senate, yet.<sup>36</sup> Some second-generation rappers are asking for reform of the right to citizenship, insisting that new Italians are now part of the country and that changing the legal framework is an essential step in accelerating integration and redefining the concept of citizenship and belonging.

Second-generation rap is now a consolidated reality of the Italian artistic scene and is characterised by an extraordinarily expressive variety and creative vitality. Born and/or brought up in Italy, these rappers represent the multiform reality of immigration and contribute to the emergence of contaminated and hybridised cultural practices. The polyphony of voices emerging from this world contributes to feeding that pedagogy of the street that uses everyday experience to build a narration of the present that can contest prejudice and ignorance. Second-generation rappers choose a mode of representation that privileges a cosmopolitan view, open to a world that combines global trajectories with local specificities, they mix regional dialectal cadences with the languages of their parents, the lexicon of international rap with fragments of the Italian melodic tradition.

In 2006, the Italian-Egyptian rapper Amir Issaa addressed the theme of the visibility of second-generation Italians with the song 'Straniero nella mia nazione' (Foreign in My Country).<sup>37</sup> Born in one of the most derelict and problematic districts of Rome (Torpignattara), Issaa alternates the activity of rapper with musical producer and writer, and collaborates with associations dealing with social activities. In several interviews, Issaa insists on the value of rap as a language that can be adapted to different forms of cultural productions, such as theatre and cinema, with the aim of communicating messages, especially to young people,

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36 While I am writing in June 2017, the bill is under scrutiny at the Senate. See <http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/diritti-umani/2017/05/02/news/cittadinanza-164434783/>, retrieved 20.06.2017.

37 Issaa, Amir: Retrieved 20.06.2017 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k\\_rFTVbjLQQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_rFTVbjLQQ).

that would otherwise be difficult to transmit.<sup>38</sup> Anticipating the issue of citizenship rights for second-generation Italians, Issaa acknowledges that '[i]n 2006 Italy was not ready yet. Today's audience is more attentive, second-generation youth have grown up, they recognize themselves in the rappers they encounter through social networks.'<sup>39</sup> Rap is a particular model of pedagogical work that takes shape in the most diverse places and situations: Schools, universities, social centres, associations, television channels are spaces in which to convey those messages that, according to Issaa, constitute the true content of hip-hop culture.

Tommy Kuti aka Mista Tolu is one of the many voices recently emerged in the rap scene. 22 years old, of Nigerian descent, Kuti is an example of cosmopolitan youth who looks at the world from a prospect of openness and cultural exchange. He studied in Italy and the United States, and graduated in Communication Sciences in Great Britain. For Kuti, too, rap is a tool to challenge stereotyped media images of immigrants and migration which help to articulate a good part of national common sense, those biased representations that speak of second-generations in terms of foreigners and disenfranchised subjects, essentially presenting them as a problem and not as a resource. It is also thanks to his knowledge of the mechanisms of mass communication that Kuti utilises rap as a medium to represent that conspicuous part of Italy which has little media coverage and is mainly narrated through stereotypes. In a video interview from 2017, Kuti says that his way of rapping responds to the need to use knowledge to deny those narratives that insist on offering an image of the country different from the real one, a tale that pretends not to see the deep social changes affecting the nation.<sup>40</sup>

The new rising star of the Italian rap scene is Laïoung (real name Giuseppe Conso), a 25-year-old Afro-Italian who defines himself as a citizen of the world. He has lived in Brussels, Paris, London, Canada, and Italy, and is another of those rappers who say they want to give voice to second-generation Italians. An outstanding

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38 Issaa, Amir: Interview, retrieved 20.06.2017 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPszGMeV5p4>. In this role, he is the artistic director and teacher of the project 'Potere alle parole – beat e rime contro le discriminazioni' (Power to words – beat and rhymes against discrimination), a project born with the aim of de-structuring stereotypes and prejudices that support discrimination through musical educational workshops in schools. See the official website <http://www.amirissaa.com/biografia/>.

39 Issaa, Amir: Interview, *La Repubblica*, retrieved 20.06.2017 from <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2017/05/15/la-secondagenerazione30.html?ref=search>, my translation.

40 Kuti, Tommy: Retrieved 20.06.2017 from <http://stream24.ilsole24ore.com/video/notizie/tommy-kuti-afroitaliano-per/AEE5La9>.

representative of the trap<sup>41</sup> scene, Laïoung, an artist with great charisma and communicative abilities, uses rap to narrate in a simple and naive language the ambitions and difficulties of those who, like him, experienced discomfort and poverty. Differently from Issaa's most politicised language and that of other rappers who are more socially aware, such as Maruego's Italian-Moroccan language, Laïoung adopts an emotional approach to stage individual moods and emotional feelings rather than sociological reflections. This is definitely a more suitable way to meet the mainstream market demands, a marketplace looking for reassuring products to propose to a less permeable audience who would not accept radical and provocative messages. Exponents of a post-ideological generation, these rappers often seem unaware of the implicit contradictions of capitalist market mechanisms where messages of global emancipation only end up in fame and individual wealth.

## Ghost track

Part of the philosophical tradition imagines the state of Utopia on a distant island.<sup>42</sup> Consolidated in a separated dimension, this ethically and politically perfect state envisioned to assure and favour the happiness and well-being of its citizens is placed in a space other than history, somewhere else, where the "other" is not expected to live or, at the most, represents an external element which may jeopardise the stability of the community. The type of social project that emerges in this tradition implies the creation of static and waterproof communities at different instances of freedom and transformation. In that framework, the fear of conflict and social confrontation has the effect of preventing the transformation of social and institutional structures and, ultimately, of achieving what Ralph Dahrendorf calls 'the possibility of freedom.'<sup>43</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that certain lines of thinking approach utopia by insisting on the imperfections, faults and risks of utopian societies. From this viewpoint, utopia ceases to be a quest for a perfect social state and becomes the space for praxis and individual agency.<sup>44</sup> Recalling that

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41 Trap is a subgenre of rap characterised by the use of electronic dance music (EDM) and lyrics often referring to poverty, violence, and marginality.

42 While Plato, Thomas More, and Francis Bacon set Utopia on unknown islands, other traditions, for example Tommaso Campanella's, set Utopia in an imaginary town.

43 Dahrendorf, Ralf: *Uscire dall'utopia*. Il Mulino: Bologna 1971, p. 280. English version: 'Out of Utopia: Toward a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis.' *American Journal of Sociology* 64 (2), 1958, pp. 115–27.

44 See Jameson, Frederic: 'Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalization and the Production of Utopian Discourse.' *Diacritics* 7 (2), 1977, pp. 2–21.

perspective, today we are invited to rethink utopia not as a project but as a space of the concrete and possible, a real place in which to activate social and material practices that animate the experience of individuals and communities and make way to freedom and equality.

Since 2011, the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa has been defined as Emergency Island, the gateway to Europe, the moral capital of the Mediterranean, and has also been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Transformed into the “immigration emergency” metonymy, the island has been used by the media and political rhetoric as a model through which European public opinion has built its perception and understanding of migratory phenomena. In the 2016 documentary ‘A sud di nessun nord’ (In the south of no north)<sup>45</sup>, a Lampedusan inhabitant offers a different reading of the island(s). No longer a place of separation and confinement, the island becomes a passage of opportunity that is “in the middle”: an opportunity to imagine connections and establish networks of communication and transit of needs, desires, expectations, dreams, and actions.

Italian rapper Willie Peyote, in the video ‘Io non sono razzista ma ...’ (I’m not racist but ...) <sup>46</sup>, partly shot in Lampedusa, used the monument of Porta d’Europa – made by sculptor Mimmo Paladino in 2008 in memory of the migrants who died in the attempt to reach Europe – as a backdrop. The monument, an open arch that recalls monuments of antiquity and looks south, is a metaphorical “in between”, a possible point of contact and encounter, exchange and knowledge, arrival and departure. Likewise, many young rappers – Italian, Afro-Italian, Italian-Something – produce cultural practices that emerge from their everyday life, speak the language of contamination and curiosity, and pave the way to a number of possible utopias.

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Pina Piccolo

## The Black Body Telling Stories: *Giullarate*<sup>1</sup> in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This chapter seeks to provide a textual based comparative study of the utopian potential contained in the forms of storytelling deployed in Italy today by Afro-Italian, black artists. Many of them are committed to bringing to the fore issues like racism and colonialism, which have been largely absent in the national consciousness and discourse. Such efforts are measured against the backdrop of Dario Fo and Franca Rame's specific brand of storytelling, the *giullarata* which, in reclaiming and adapting forms from the Italian popular tradition, constituted a destabilising force *vis-à-vis* official, dominant discourses on class and women in the 1960s through the 1980s. Through their *giullarate*, Fo and Rame deployed what Bakhtin described as 'the dialogic imagination', succeeded in constituting communities of large audiences in places that were not traditional sites for the theatre, turning binary systems of power upside down, while demystifying long held preconceptions. The chapter attempts to assess how much of their experience can be useful in contemporary Italy, in light of worldwide changes that have surfaced since then, like migrations, speedups in technological innovations, issues of identity, the challenges of neo-liberal economics and policies, climate change, etc. The narrative strategies employed by Igiaba Scego in her short stories and novels centering on Italian colonialism are examined, as well as the performances of Paul Yeboah, aka Bello Figo, that take on present day racism

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- 1 The term *giullarata* refers to the theatrical structure used by the *giullari* (medieval jesters; *giullare* is the singular form) and re-elaborated by Fo, in which the actor, cast as a polyphonic monologist/narrator alone on the stage, relates a story by giving both his own commentary and lending his voice and gestures to quote the utterances of the characters. Dario Fo's signature *giullarata* was 'Mistero Buffo' (1969) in which Fo, as a sort of syncretic irreverent jester, creates a gallery of characters and situations from the New Testament and the history of the church. His most successful segments, which rose to the status of classics in Italian theatre, are 'The wedding at Cana', in which the stock narratives are turned upside down through carnivalesque reversals; biblical episodes, such as 'The resurrection of Lazarus', hybridised to level critiques at 'the society of spectacle'; and 'Boniface VIII meets Jesus Christ' that sets up a fictional encounter between the two bent on demystifying the power of the church and exposing its hypocrisy by deploying a particularly militant and enraged Jesus Christ against a pompous pope masterfully mimicked in movements and dress by Fo.
  - 2 I am much indebted to my intellectual co-conspirators Camilla Hawthorne and Reginaldo Cerolini for their research and insight into Black Italian cultural production and critical issues.

using “trolling” devices and trickster-like features. Finally the lyrics of Emeka Obiarinze of the hip hop duo Odio Razziale Klan with their paradoxical mix of denunciation and longing are explored in their affinity with a “border” sensibility applied by artists such as Guillermo Gomez Pena and Coco Fusco, creating art in the border regions of the U.S. Mexican/Caribbean/Latin American borders.

## Introduction

From the standpoint of the urgent need for a radical imagination as a driving force in today’s movements of resistance and utopian construction, I have often wondered what can be gleaned and used from the works and practices of Dario Fo and Franca Rame, the two Italian theatre figures who embodied the highly irreverent spirit of resistance of the great movements of dissent in Italy from the late 1960s into the early 1980s. I am using the notion of Radical Imagination as it has been theorised in the work of scholar-activists Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish, originally in the journal *Affinities*, and currently in the Radical Imagination Project, which was founded in 2010 as a platform to study, analyse, stimulate, divulge and promote ideas and demands for radical change issued internationally from various social movements.<sup>3</sup>

Of course the differences in the political, social, economic, technological, intellectual and demographic landscape between the period that marked the heyday of Dario Fo and Franca Rame’s public acclaim and today’s Italy could not be more dramatic, as is also the shift in the character of social movements of resistance, their practices and the systems of thought that inform them. This makes comparisons particularly challenging but all the more necessary, especially because Fo-Rame’s bold and seamless mixing and matching of styles can be an inspiration for a whole slew of artists confronted today with the task of changing the prevailing narratives on the issues of race, colonialism, current demographic changes to a largely reluctant Italian population. Even at the level of intellectual discourse,

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3 In their foundational book, *The Radical Imagination*, scholars Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish theorised the radical imagination as a cross-temporal force, the fruit of collective processes capable of creating multiple, overlapping, across boundaries, intersecting forms of resistance to help envision alternative modes of living and of relation among people. Haiven, Max/Khasnabish, Alex: *The Radical Imagination – Social Movements in the Age of Austerity*. Zed Books: London 2014. The theoretical underpinnings of much of their work is based on the theories of philosophers Ernst Bloch and Cornelius Castoriadis. Bloch, Ernst: *The Spirit of Utopia*. Stanford University Press: Palo Alto 2000; Castoriadis, Cornelius. *A Society Adrift. Interviews and Debates, 1974–1997*. Fordham University Press: New York 2010.

the issues of colonialism and race have been a relatively blind spot in Italy and, thus, artistic contributions on these topics are essential to address root causes and move forward into the present and future.

In this spirit, this paper will focus on Dario Fo and Franca Rame's *giullarate* as a destabilising storytelling force *vis-à-vis* official, dominant discourses and strength of its deployment as part of what Bakhtin described as 'the dialogic imagination'.<sup>4</sup> With this framework in mind, I offer these preliminary notes on the potential that Dario Fo and Franca Rame's storytelling style might hold for young black artists in Italy today, by engaging in an initial exploration of the narrative strategies employed by Igiaba Scego, the performances of Paul Yeboah, aka Bello Figo, and the lyrics of Emeka Obiarinze of the hip hop duo Odio Razziale Klan, as terms of comparison. All three of them are young, black Italian artists of immigrant or refugee descent, seeking to develop an independent voice and field of action that challenge present structures of power, while creating new communities and ways of being in the world.

## Knowledge Production and Subversive Art

The production of knowledge useful to the oppressed was one of Dario Fo and Franca Rame's pressing concerns, especially from the mid 1960s to the end of the 1990s. While the grotesque was their all-encompassing paradigm and demystification their main aim, in their post-1968 work they used two distinct dramatic structures to convey different types of knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

Elements of the farce and *giullarata* were present and mixed in all their works, but the mechanisms of deceit and discovery<sup>6</sup> implicit in the farce were mainly used when wishing to provide counterinformation about specific events (for example, anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli's death at a Milan police station), while the *giullarata* brought to light a more general type of knowledge stemming from universal dichotomies, for example oppressor/oppressed, dominant/subordinate, hero/villain and so on.<sup>7</sup> This binary structure lent itself to a full blooming of the grotesque usually deployed through imaginative reversals, paradoxical combinations, explosive metaphors and metonymies. However, it was limited in its ability to

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4 Bakhtin, Mikhail: *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Aris: Ann Harbour 1973, pp. 101–37.

5 Piccolo, Pina: 'Dario Fo's *giullarate*: Dialogic Parables in the Service of the Oppressed'. *Italica* 65 (2), 1988, p. 131.

6 Piccolo, Pina: 'Farce as the Mirror of Bourgeois Politics: Morte Accidentale di un anarchico'. *Forum Italicum* 20 (2), 1986, pp. 170–2.

7 Piccolo 1988: p. 131.

convey complexity, something that the two artists sought to come to confront later in their career, in the post-1978 years marked by the political and social backlash that followed the kidnapping and killing of Aldo Moro. The prominent Christian Democratic politician was part of a current within his party that was open to a historic compromise with the Italian Communist Party, a policy that was not acceptable to either the Christian Democrats of the conservative wing or to the Red Brigades, who kidnapped him in March and murdered him in April 1978. Fo scholar Joseph Farrell wrote an extensive essay 'History as Tragedy and Farce: Dario Fo and the Moro Case' on how this impacted Fo's artistic process and works.<sup>8</sup> As a result of these constraints, the change in the political climate and the ensuing difficulty of "being at one" with the audience as a single community of intent with a unified frame of reference, the *giullarata* form underwent some adjustments transitioning from a predominantly joyful, carnivalesque tone, one that belied a sort of complicity between narrator and audience, to a somewhat more sombre demeanor, dominated by the 'the tragic grotesque'.<sup>9</sup> With a waning in the complicity between audience and narrator, a greater amount of explanatory spoken commentary was needed on the part of Fo and Rame and they often lamented the fact that their relationship with the audience had changed.

I have chosen to focus on the *giullarata* rather than the farce because for the purpose of comparison it provides a more malleable structure, more easily transferable to other art forms. An added consideration is that the notion of storytelling can be applied to the visual arts and is, thus, an essential element to consider due to the increasing importance of visual elements as tools of resistance today, especially in the social media. Even if the domination of the visual was not as strong during Fo-Rame's time, they had incorporated it in their stage work, especially in later years. From the inception of his theatrical career, Fo integrated his drawing and painting skills in the stage backdrops, and later in his career he had actually started to more consciously combine his *giullare*-style lectures with a visual component of paintings, drawings and projections. This was done explicitly in 1992 in his two-act monologue *Johan Padan a la scoperta de le*

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8 Farrell, Joseph: 'History as Tragedy and Farce: Dario Fo and the Moro Case'. In: Emery, Ed (ed.): *Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Proceedings of the International Conference on the Theatre of Dario Fo and Franca Rame*. Cambridge, 28–30 April 2000. Red Notes: Sydney 2002, pp. 85–102.

9 Valeri, Walter (ed.): *Franca Rame: A Woman on the Stage*. Bordighera Press: W. Lafayette, Ind. 2000.

*Americhe*<sup>10</sup>, and was exuberantly pursued in his 1997 lecture ‘Contra Jogulatores Obloquentes – Against Jesters Who Defame and Insult’ delivered by Fo himself in front of the Nobel prize awarding committee in 1998<sup>11</sup>, as well as in the many lectures/*giullarate* on painters Fo performed in the 2000s. Memorable among these later lectures was one by the provocative title ‘Dio è nero!’ (God is Black), delivered as a lecture/show about evolution and performed on 13 February 2011 at Milan’s Museum of Natural History.<sup>12</sup>

### The 2000s: Black Italian Artists Rising to the Challenges

Since the early 2000s, the torch of the classic, stage performed, politically committed *giullarata* has been passed down to actors Ascanio Celestini and Marco Paolini. Even though it may not seem immediately pertinent, there might be some insights to be gained by comparing and contrasting Fo’s deployment of the *giullarata* with storytelling techniques that are employed by black Italian artists in different capacities, insisting that stories of colonialism and racism, instead of being removed from the collective, national consciousness, come to the fore, re-told directly by themselves as unabashed, irreverent, black artists. And here lies the first important difference. The ideas and reversals of dominant narratives proposed in Fo and Rame’s work, though controversial to the majority of the *benpensanti* (conformists) and staged in locations that were outside canonical, dedicated places, were still delivered by an ‘Italian’ couple whose apparent ethnic status reflected that of the majority of the population. But what happens when an artist with a patently black ethnic status ventures into similar terrains to challenge the dominant narrative, offering his/her lived experience as part of storytelling, and does so unapologetically and in irreverent ways? On this score, suffice it to think of Tommy Kuti’s ‘mancamelanina’ project reproaching the rap scene in Italy for lacking a certain “blackness”, or Igiaba Scego’s Joycean quest through the streets of a vacant, torrid August Rome, her black body searching for sausages (the object

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10 Fo, Dario: *Johan Padan a la descoberta de le Americhe*. Firenze: Giunti 1992. A discussion of the play can be found in Mitchell, Tony. *Dario Fo: People’s Court Jester*. Methuen Drama: London 1999.

11 Fo, Dario: ‘Contra Jogulatores Obloquentes – Against Jesters Who Defame and Insult’. Nobel Lecture. 7 December 1997, retrieved 05.06.2017 from [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1997/fo-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1997/fo-lecture.html).

12 Fo, Dario: ‘Dio è nero’. *Dialogo tra due esseri comuni*. Raffaello Cortina Editore: Milano 2011, available at <http://bpfe.eclap.eu/eclap/axmedis/0/035/00000-035bdf2-2d07-4bc1-bd3d-c26092751120/2/~saved-on-db-035bdf2-2d07-4bc1-bd3d-c26092751120.pdf>.

that then becomes the emblematic title of her short story) while musing about the painful experience of having to participate in the national competition mills (the famous *concorsi*) in order to get any type of civil servant or teaching post.

A desirable result of these preliminary comparisons would be that of sparking some ideas for an array of “adaptations” of the *giullarata* as a narrative-shifting device with great potential in the hands of artists reclaiming traditions like the griot or the trickster and enriching them with today’s technological and social media tools capable of forming virtual audiences and communities, first online and then in real life. All of this in a context where, unlike Dario Fo and Franca Rame’s heyday, the notion of a univocal narration representing the truth has taken a beating with the proliferation of alternative facts, fake news, and conspiracy theories. In fact, think of the explosive, Foesque potential of ‘the Kalergi plan’ as material for satire deployed by black Italian artists.

An attempt to reintegrate and update traditional African storytelling in an Italian context could be borrowed from experiments that are taking place in Africa today. What comes to mind is, for example, the adaptations of Nigerian novelist Lola Shoneyin’s novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* to a theatrical storytelling medium by Nairobi-based storyteller and actress Maimouna Jallow.<sup>13</sup> In reflecting upon the transformation, many commentators have remarked about the need to preserve a dialogical element present in African storytelling, i.e., “call and response”, which in a theatrical context concerns the relationship of the actor *vis-à-vis* the audience. An additional element that has strengthened traditional African storytelling is the incorporation of music and dance in telling the story. Many of these elements have been absorbed in African-American literary and performance styles and something similar could happen in Italy as well, as has already been the case for Ethiopian-born writer Gabriella Ghermandi’s novel *Regina di fiori e perle*. Published originally as a novel in 2007, Ghermandi has taken to the road (including to the U.S.) as a travelling many-voiced storytelling show, complete with singing and music, using a circular storytelling device to tell her multigenerational, family stories as well as the history of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia.<sup>14</sup>

Not coincidentally, interaction with the audience was also a strong point of Fo and Rame’s performances, especially during the introduction of their *giullarate*, an element belonging to the performance side of Fo and Rame work and their

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13 Shoneyin, Lola: *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*. William Morrow, New York 2010. See also ‘Bringing African folktales to life’, *BBC News*, 2 July 2017, retrieved 05.06.2017 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40460236>.

14 Portelli, Alessandro: ‘*Regina di fiori e perle*: Gabriella Ghermandi’. *Il Manifesto*, 3 May 2008.

commitment to break down the fourth wall.<sup>15</sup> In seeking to create a space of community, a kind of practical utopia of daily life, the location of the performance is of the outmost importance, and Walter Valeri's article chronicling the couple's work for seven years in Palazzina Liberty in Milan addresses the historical and cultural significance of that experiment.<sup>16</sup> Such complex territory, however, cannot be addressed with any measure of justice in the short space of this chapter, but can be explored at length by reading Dario Fo's seminal work *The Tricks of the Trade*.<sup>17</sup>

If we wish to bring up the notion of utopia or reconfiguring the future, the Fo-Rame *giullarata* could also be reinvented in a myriad imaginative ways, suffice it to think of the rapper as a modern day storyteller/griot, and this is already happening with figures like Tommy Kuti, Odio Razziale Klan, la Piccola Orchestra di Tor Pignattara; or we can imagine the subversive potential of artists telling their story through the aesthetics of Afropunk or Afrofuturism, something that greatly challenges the stereotypical idea of the incongruity between Africa and modernity. In this regard it is interesting to note the use of reversals and other carnivalesque devices and memes visually put into place by the site #AfroitalianSouls through their short films on the daily life of Afro-Italians in their interactions with white Italians. We could also think of the subversive implication, both at the visual and narrative level, of online magazine *Griot* devoting a YouTube series to black Italian expats – a term usually reserved for the British or U.S. citizens, but then imaginatively deployed to describe the experience of young black Italians forced to migrate, sometimes for the second time, not unlike their white counterparts, in search of jobs and opportunities. In fact, even the rich terminology and euphemisms used to describe or evade migration or race would provide plenty of parodic material for any artist willing to take it on.

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15 It is a theatrical convention, typical of post-Enlightenment, western naturalist theater, which was studied by Bertold Brecht in his attempt to create an "epic theater". This imaginary wall separates the actors from the audience, enabling the latter to spy (unbeknownst to the actors) on an intimate scene taking place on the stage. Of course such an attitude is deleterious when the artist is trying to forge the audience into a community in which exchange can take place between the stage and the spectators, and horizontally among spectators.

16 Valeri, Walter: 'Dario Fo e Franca Rame alla Palazzina Liberty', retrieved 05.06.2017 from [www.lamacchinasognante.com](http://www.lamacchinasognante.com), 30 December 2016.

17 Fo, Dario: *The Tricks of the Trade*. Translated by Joe Farrell, Methuen Drama: London 1991.

The trolling ways of Bello Figo<sup>18</sup>, whose destabilising punch has been picked up by rebellious youth and miscast by right wingers or even progressives who fear that that type of attitude might alienate the general population, can be seen as a modern-day, destabilising *giullarata*. In fact, the sceptre of the kind of scandal and controversy that Fo and Rame used to raise among the *benpensanti* seems to have been passed to Paul Yeboah, *in arte* Bello Figo, the Ghanian/Parmense artistic provocateur.

In these times of economic crisis and general backlash, including the surge of racism and xenophobia, one of the functions of these more contemporary, adapted *giullarate* performed by an array of black jesters could possibly convey knowledge that has been obscured, denied or conveniently forgotten when it comes to Italian colonialism, racism, the present-day partaking in the spoils of globalisation and neo-liberalism, in a sort of crucible that reveals the past and the present, with an eye towards the future, just as in the past Dario Fo and Franca Rame used the form to bring to light issues related to class struggle, imperialism, and women's rights.

The class struggle was the dominant metaphor in Dario Fo and Franca Rame's days and any notion of utopia would be necessarily tied to it. Today, as the historical need for the nation-state is subjected to the pressures of neo-liberal economics and politics, it causes the notion of belonging to rise to a prominent position in society and cultural life. As suggested by anthropologist Donald Martin Carter's work on African diaspora in Europe<sup>19</sup> one must consider the dialectics between black (and immigrant) invisibility and hyper-visibility in Europe.

[B]lackness now hovers over Europe like an early morning fog foreshadowing perhaps a world in transformation. [...] The work of a new generation of writers of an emergent black Italia who are exploring the new texture of Europe offers an opportunity to examine both European-ness and blackness as protean figures of the cultural imagination. The new Italians are fluid, moving in and out of traditional languages, social contexts, and memories of former selves ... their cultural fluency is the currency of a world yet to come. If things go their way, they may insinuate into the everyday a global others have only cloudily imagined up to now.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Cerolini, Reginaldo: 'Un negro Bello Figo lo srapper dall'ironia complessa'. [www.lamacchinasognante.com](http://www.lamacchinasognante.com) 4 December 2016, retrieved 05.06.2017 from <http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/un-negro-bellofigo-lo-srapper-dallironia-complexa-reginaldo-cerolini/>.

19 Carter, Donald Martin: *Navigating the African Diaspora: The Anthropology of Invisibility*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 2010.

20 Carter, Donald Martin: 'Blackness over Europe: Meditations on Culture and Belonging'. In: Rosenhaft, Eve/Aitken, Robbie (ed.): *Africa in Europe: Studies in Transnational*



Of course to fully express the ambiguities and potentialities of this mode of standing and moving in the world a new kind of storytelling is required. This kind of retelling has been performed in the cinema with films such as *Asmarina* (2015), part of a larger project by Alan Maglio and Medhin Paolos, created inside the *habesha* community in Milan.<sup>21</sup> The choral narrative is an intergenerational one, shifting between the Eritrean-born elders who migrated or were displaced to Italy as youth, and the younger generations born in Italy and their own children. Paradoxically, their white Italian neighbors view the elders as “Eritrean” and their Italian-born and -raised offspring, who have never set foot in Eritrea, as “foreigners”. Curiously, both groups have a longing for the city of Asmara, clearly situated in the past and revisited through songs and photographs. This creates a polyphonic narrative, not too distant from some of Fo’s episodes in ‘Mistero Buffo’ where a single narrator, Fo the actor, the only person on a bare stage, was in charge of creating different voices and setting rehearsals and paradoxical scenes based on his gestures, movement and inflections.<sup>22</sup>

### **Igiaba Scego: Living with Multiple Identities and Proud of It**

On the literary front, an artful reclaiming of a colonised past, at times ridden with ambivalences and unease, would be best exemplified by the storytelling of Italian writer of Somali descent Igiaba Scego, both in her short stories, such as her iconic ‘Salsicce’<sup>23</sup> and in her latest, more complex, historically based novel *Adua*.<sup>24</sup> In a painful retelling of the story of her paternal grandfather, who acted as a translator/interpreter for general Rodolfo Graziani<sup>25</sup>, she narrates in the vein of the

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*Practice in the Long Twentieth Century*. Liverpool University Press: Liverpool 2013, pp. 205, 209.

21 *Asmarina*. Directors Alan Maglio/Medhin Paolos. Documentary. 2015. See <http://asmarinaproject.com/it/>.

22 Fo, Dario: ‘Mistero Buffo’. In: *Compagni senza censura*. Vol. I. Mazzotta, Milano 1970.

23 Scego, Igiaba: ‘Salsicce’. In: Kuruvilla, Gabriella/Mubiayi, Ingy/Scego, Igiaba. *Pecore nere: Racconti*. Laterza: Bari 2006, pp. 23–36. English translation: ‘Sausages’. *Warscapes*, 1 June 2013, retrieved 05.06.2017 from <http://www.warscapes.com/retrospectives/food/sausages>.

24 Scego, Igiaba: *Adua*. Giunti: Firenze 2015.

25 General Rodolfo Graziani, also known as ‘the butcher of Fezzan’, was active both during the First and the Second World War, was an important leader during the Fascist period and in charge of the colonial wars waged by Italy to bring Lybia back into subjugation (1921–1931), the war against Ethiopia and the war against the resistance, both in the Horn of Africa and in Lybia.

‘tragic grotesque’<sup>26</sup> recording two voices in alternating chapters, that of a Somali daughter and father, who in an almost Foesque twist of fate is truly a translator and a traitor. The novel covers three historical moments, described by Scego as ‘Italian colonialism, Somalia in the 1970s, and our current moment, when the Mediterranean has been transformed into an open-air tomb for migrants.’<sup>27</sup> Though on a more sombre note, featuring the disturbing figure of Zoppe, the polyglot Somali father descended from a family of soothsayers, the structural elements of the story resemble that of *Johan Padan a la scoperta de le Americhe*, featuring a hungry trickster from the Po valley who sails to the Americas on a Spanish vessel. He too starts off with a rather amoral worldview bent on survival, but as his life unfolds, he acquires enough of an ethical self to feel tormented for betraying his partner by disassociating from her when she was subjected to torture by the Inquisition.<sup>28</sup>

In the case of Scego’s narration, Zoppe’s potential evolution fails to materialise, because the traumatic loss of his wife causes him an emotional block, which seems to fuel the rage of the rebellious daughter, who is the storyteller. In a way that is remindful of Scego’s narrative strategies in *Salsicce*, the protagonist seeks a friendly ear and finds it in Bernini’s *elefantino*, the marble statue of an elephant in Rome’s Piazza della Minerva fountain. However, her marble confidante cannot answer, almost a symbolic counterpart to her father’s own stone-like failure to engage in dialogue. As much the father’s emotions are knotted and locked up, the daughter’s seem to flood outside herself, and the alternating narratives which fluctuate between constriction and expansion create in the reader a feeling of unease with rare moments of relief. This underlying feeling of unease is created by the paradoxical situations which befall the daughter and the narrator from a point of view that is clearly sensitive to the complexity of gender issues (see the exploitation of the black female body in the grotesque pornographic work offers received by the daughter).

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- 26 For an explanation on the evolution of Dario Fo and Franca Rame’s carnivalesque grotesque, in a Bakhtian sense, to a more nuanced type of “tragic grotesque” relying on the lived experience of women, see Piccolo, Pina. ‘Rame, Fo and the Tragic Grotesque. The politics of Women’s Experience’. In: Valeri, Walter (ed.): *Franca Rame. A Woman on Stage*. Bordighera Press: W. Lafayette, Ind. 2000, pp. 115–38.
- 27 Hawthorne, Camilla: ‘Italian Writer Igiaba Scego Rewrites the Black Mediterranean’. *Africa Is A Country*. 14 October 2015, retrieved 05.06.2017 from <http://africasacountry.com/2015/10/italian-writer-igiaba-scego-rewrites-the-black-mediterranean/>.
- 28 Scuderi, Antonio: ‘Defining the Interpretive Frame’. In: Emery, Ed (ed.): *Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Proceedings of the International Conference on the Theatre of Dario Fo and Franca Rame*. Cambridge, 28–30 April 2000. Sydney: Red Notes 2002, p. 180.

In a more carnivalesque vein, Scego's earlier short story 'Salsicce' creates a dialogic space establishing a sort of complicity between the protagonist and the reader, by a constant deployment of seemingly rhetorical questions: '[...] So, why these damned sausages? [...] So, where was I? [...] Why the hell did I buy them? [...] Who is going to deal with Mom? [...] But how do you cook sausages in a pan?'; and so forth, in a mundane crescendo, until, through a grotesque concatenation of topics, the momentous question is uttered: 'Do you feel more Italian or Somali?'. The questions punctuate the entire narrative to create the illusion of a dialogue, a continuous plea for confirmation rather than a genuine request for information.

The sequence creates a mock dialogic mode, harkening to Bakhtin, who identified dialogue as an especially effective tool since antiquity, for focusing on philosophical questions; rather than an aesthetic device, it was part of the epistemological process itself. In fact, one of the premises set in those narratives was that knowledge was not a thing, an "object" already possessed by any of the parties involved in the exchange, but rather it was to be discovered in the process of clashing views. In the Mennipean satire, a later development of the Socratic dialogue, usually a wise man was placed in a threshold situation, such as the moment preceding his own death, no longer under the constraints of mechanical life. From this "purged" position the character would engage in a dialogue with the dead or other unusual interlocutors, debating deep philosophical questions. To counter the solemnity of the circumstance, the exchange would take place in everyday language or making references to contemporary events, resorting to what Bakhtin called 'slum naturalism'.<sup>29</sup> Winking at its resemblance to hell, the torrid Roman morning was one such day for the protagonist of 'Salsicce', a 21<sup>st</sup> century descendant of Franca Rame's *svampita*<sup>30</sup> of the 1950s and 1960s. But unlike the dwellers of the Socratic dialogue, the heroine is already a possessor of the truth, just like the *giullare* in 'Mistero Buffo': the oppressed are the holders of truth while the powerful represent its negation and forceful usurpation.<sup>31</sup>

Even in her sunnier narratives such as 'Salsicce', though exercising the grotesque and exhibiting a certain amount of candour, Igiaba Scego's protagonist manages to retain self-assurance and pride in her identity, a self-awareness that Fo's early period *giullari* lack, perhaps because their content was not lived experience, but rather

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29 Bakhtin 1973: pp. 106–10.

30 *Svampita* is an Italian term halfway between distracted and an air head, ideal for describing Franca Rame's early ingénue characters whose candour led them to situations in which the trickery of the world was revealed.

31 Piccolo 1988: p. 134.

an imaginary experience, attributed to a conveniently recreated identity needed to make an ideological point. At this juncture, a whole slew of issues come to the fore, related to artistic representation and the urgencies dictated by the times. These issues include how the experience and imagination of black artists, including both biography and creativity, can be best deployed. In a context like the Italian one, a country in flux, with a strong resistance towards acknowledging the contributions and demands of the immigrant population, how much should the biographical element count and how much should be left to the individual imagination, regardless of lived experience? Some of these issues have been at the center of debate for years in countries where migration or race-based considerations have been part of the national dialogue for a long time; in Italy, this process has started later.

On the issue of early European colonialism, one can trace an evolution in Dario Fo and Franca Rame's approach even in the technique used for conveying historical facts. For example, 'Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe', a farce-play of 1963 in which Franca Rame played both Isabella and Giovanna la Pazza (her soothsaying, mad daughter), featured carnivalesque unmasking of imperial designs on the part of the Spanish, the persecution of Jews and the economic basis for it, a critique of the Inquisition.<sup>32</sup> Turning the official story upside down unleashed great outrage among certain sections of the population to the point that both artists were attacked by a group of fascists as they exited the theatre. A similar treatment is reserved today for artists such as Bello Figo whose performances have been cancelled a number of times due to threats.

*Johan Padan a la descoberta de le Americhe*, a *giullarata* written almost 30 years later in 1992, complete with Dario Fo's own illustrations, explored the same historical period from the viewpoint of the Americas, albeit with a European trickster narrator driven by the instinct for self preservation, a picaresque character who walked a thin line in the clash between the two parties of the encounter, accidentally leading a band of indigenous people in battle against the Spaniards as he was trying to reach a port to sail back home.<sup>33</sup> At this point, in the character's evolution, more than a *giullare* Johan Padan resembled the hunger-driven trickster that Fo deployed in his farce/farcical plays, who positioned himself in the interstices of conflict, hoping for a selfish gain, but ended up acquiring a conscience and siding with the oppressed in the process.

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32 Fo, Dario: 'Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe'. In: *Le commedie di Dario Fo*. Vol. II. Einaudi: Torino 1966–1974.

33 Scuderi 2002: pp. 179–82.

## Imagination, Lies, Authenticity and Shaking Down the Truth

Dario Fo was a master at drawing from tradition as needed and mixing with the contemporary in a seamless way. And here the question of knowledge production rears its ugly head again. Most of the early scholarship on Dario Fo and Franca Rame did not look too closely into the authenticity of their sources, almost taking at face value the references the comedians made in introductory remarks. In a country where tradition is often viewed as “sacred”, they managed to claim parts of the popular tradition in a desecrating and subversive way, something that emerges clearly in Fo’s signature play ‘Mistero Buffo’. His kinship with medieval *giullari* seemed like a natural progression from his spontaneous penchant for *fabulazione* (storytelling). In various interviews, in fact, he connected this fascination to his native village, on the border between Italy and Switzerland, teeming with *fabulatori* (storytellers)<sup>34</sup>, capable of turning imaginative tall tales while keeping the rapt attention of listeners. Fo scholar Bent Holm rigorously explored the continuity between the *fabulatore* and the *giullare* in a 2002 article ‘Dario Fo – A Real Fabulatore’, introducing the paradox that while Brecht was denounced for pilfering from the work of others without crediting them, Fo would vociferously announce to audiences that he was stealing from works of the popular tradition but instead was actually mostly inventing original material. With Antonio Scuderi’s piece the observation of this phenomenon takes a decidedly pejorative route: ‘He’s very loose with facts, combining truths, half truths and falsehoods to create a history according to Fo.’ Then goes on to quote Fo himself: ‘Well it’s true, I often make things up. But beware and let it be clear: the stories that I fabricate will seem terribly authentic, almost obvious, while the improbable and paradoxical ones, the ones you’d swear were invented, are all authentic and documentable. I am a professional liar.’<sup>35</sup>

This ambivalent, somewhat “amoral” relationship with the truth is dear to the trickster, a hungry, liminal figure that exists in a great many cultures. Thus, the *giullare* has many kin scattered throughout the world ranging from African tales (especially African American ones, suffice it to think of Anansi the spider), to Native American ones (Raven, Coyote), and if we look closely, we might even find them in Roman mythology, in the figure of Hermes. Lewis Hyde’s seminal

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34 Holms, Bent: ‘Dario Fo – A Real Fabulatore’. In: *Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Proceedings of the International Conference on the Theatre of Dario Fo and Franca Rame*. Cambridge, 28–30 April 2000. Red Notes: Sydney 2002, p. 128.

35 Scuderi 2002: p. 175.

work on the subject of tricksters, *Trickster Makes the World*<sup>36</sup>, provides insights into how these types of figures co-create worlds by first throwing them into chaos. And it is not coincidental that Hyde's title refers to the relevance of this figure for artistic endeavours, in their creative aspects. Fo's *giullare* figure can be seen of as a medieval storyteller who inherited many traits from the tricksters of his earlier farce/farcical plays, which usually had as a protagonist characters like *il Lungo* (traces of which survive in *il Matto* of 'Accidental Death of An Anarchist' fame<sup>37</sup>) that embodied a rogue/cunning/hungry character, with a naive side that eventually, through the action of the play, acquires a conscience.

### Of Today's *Giullari*, Border Crossing and Consequences

In thinking about today's predicaments and potentials of young artists in Italy with immigrant or refugee roots, who are already striking out in the artistic world, facing serious challenges as far as maintaining autonomous spaces, we can take solace in the fact that a great deal of work has already been done at an international level. On the theoretical front, as far as representation is concerned, extended typologies of artistic border crossers have been recorded, they are travellers in the interstices between worlds who dismantle a seemingly unified world to take bits from one to the other, thus creating something new and changing in the process those around them. Truly a creating and a reassembling of worlds. The border of the United States and Mexico, for example, has been graced for decades by the work of such artists as performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco, who specifically address the interfacing of the heart of the empire, the native and the settler and colonial power using multimedia tools, performance art, creating situations like the 'Amerindian Couple in the Cage'<sup>38</sup> to explode deeply held racist beliefs. Their boldness and willingness to transform and position their bodies to mirror the deepest held prejudices and stereotypes helped create situations intended to force the holders of those prejudices to confront them.

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36 Hyde, Lewis: *Trickster makes the World. Mischief, Myth and Art*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York 1998.

37 Fo, Dario: 'Morte accidentale di un anarchico'. In: *Compagni senza censura*. Vol. I. Mazzotta: Milano 1970, pp. 137–82.

38 1992–1993 performance art piece by artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco for their exhibition 'The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West' toured four countries and was performed in eight different locations. For details see the following interview by Anna Johnson <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1599/>.

But just as there are unreliable narrators, there are unreliable audiences who fail to hear and receive messages; thus, there is no guarantee that an unwelcomed message will be heard by its target audience. In fact it is akin to a sort of provocative, body-inscribed *giullarata* that Bello Figo performed in December 2016 on an Italian television talk show an unrecognised trolling of right wing politician Alessandra Mussolini and the program host in which he played back and literally “embodied” all the white supremacist stock phrases concerning immigrants and blacks in particular, going so far as to even let his tongue hang out in a “animalesque” manner, as per a white supremacist script. All hell broke loose on live TV, to the point that even the cultural mediator, undoubtedly invited on the show to represent the *buonista* (bleeding heart) perspective, joined in the chorus of vociferous indignation against the parasitic ‘No pago affitto’ (me no pay rent) lifestyle of the latest horde of invaders surging from the Mediterranean, a “horde” towards which Bello Figo declared solidarity and understanding, not an automatic position among “new generation” Italians who often negotiate their identity in ways that distance themselves from the latest arrivals.

Black Italian writer and critic Reginaldo Cerolini, who has paid close attention to the Bello Figo phenomenon from his inception, offers a lucid analysis of the “threat” posed by the performance artist to today media and society:

As I said, with him, we are talking about merchandise that is hot because it cannot be classified, as people are tempted to level an immediate and superficial judgement that undermines any kind of understanding. Thus, certainly the most noticeable characteristics of this product are the contradictions and negations it unleashes. [...] Bello Figo is in fact an extraordinary objective correlative of the times in Italy, because whether we like it or not he embodies a complex irony. He is direct, irreverent, like *The Simpsons*, and stratified like the diversity that sedimenting in the country thanks to the variety of the children of first, second and by now third generation.<sup>39</sup>

Cerolini goes on to note that part of the success of Bello Figo, with audiences under 35 sharing the daily frequentation of YouTube, is the atmosphere of urgency he creates and the fact that he expresses the feelings and ethnic situation of thousands of young foreigners who retain pride in their multiple identities and are not willing to conform and adapt to the image and behaviour demanded by Italians. In fact, Bello Figo’s complex irony ends up irritating them, both because they do not get the levels of the critique and feel potentially undermined by the

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39 Cerolini, Reginaldo: ‘Italiani-Italici alla riscossa! A morte Bello Figo’ Pina Piccolo’s blog, 6 January 2017, retrieved 05.06.2017 from <http://www.pinapiccoloblog.com/italiani-italici-alla-riscossa-a-morte-bello-figo-aggiornamento-satirico-reginaldo-cerolini/> (English translation is mine).

“coolness” of the character, the fact that there can be comedy deployed by blacks and immigrants that are “autochthonous” Italians and their collective consciousness as the butt of the joke.

Some of the insights about the contradictions brought to the fore by border crossing characters like Bello Figo, brainchild of “rapper” (mock rapper in teenage lingo) Paul Yeboah were proudly claimed more than 20 years ago by Guillermo Gómez-Peña in the introduction to his book *The New World Border* where he says:

I AM A NOMADIC MEXICAN ARTIST/WRITER IN THE PROCESS OF Chicanization, which means I am slowly heading North. My journey not only goes from South to North, but from Spanish to Spanglish and then to English; from ritual art to high technology; from literature to performance art; and from a static sense of identity to a repertoire of multiple identities. Once I get “there” wherever it is, I am forever condemned to return, and then to obsessively reenact my journey. In a sense I am a border Sisyphus.<sup>40</sup>

This border Sisyphean activity brings to mind the compulsions that belie a lack of freedom and are skillfully rendered in the lyrics of Como’s hip hop duo Odio Razziale Klan, composed by Chukwemeka Attilio “Emeka” Obiarinze (born in Nigeria and raised in Italy) and Federico Saglio (his blondish autochthonous partner and best friend since kindergarten). The lyrics written by Emeka, especially in the songs *Kalahari* and *Kinder Boy*<sup>41</sup>, squarely place the issues of belonging and identity in a much broader context of alienation: paradoxical sense of emptiness within the proliferation of material goods, the dearth of technological options for connecting leaving everyone isolated, scores of *Kinder Boys*, a generation who has fallen prey to “dependency” on the *ovetto kinder* (Kinder Surprise chocolate egg)<sup>42</sup> and its plastic surprises orderly arrayed to fight ones’ battles. All of these images reflecting a neo-liberal, globalised, post-truth world are enveloped and swept by a deep wave of desire for something different that cannot be easily articulated or configured in rational terms, the very stuff that nurtures the radical imagination, with its impalpable yearning for utopian difference, pursued in a collective manner.

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40 Gómez-Peña, Guillermo: *The New World Border – Prophecies, Poems & Loqueras for the End of the Century*. City Lights: San Francisco 1996, p. i. Capitalisation in the original.

41 Cerolini, Reginaldo: ‘Recensione di “Kalahari” rap di Chukwemeka Attilio Obiarinze.’ [www.lamacchinasognante.com](http://www.lamacchinasognante.com), 30 March 2016, retrieved 05.06.2017 from <http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/recensione-di-kalahari-rap-di-chukwemeka-attilio-obiarinze-di-reginaldo-cerolini/>.

42 The Ferrero-produced hollow chocolate egg with surprise features prominently in the lives of many boys who become dependent on its consumption and collect the plastic surprises contained therein. They are usually plastic toy animals and objects and children are known to play for hours with their collection, barter them with their friends, etc.



Just as Dario Fo's whimsical *giullare*, who in turning the world topsy-turvy came to embody a demand that the world be different, that more equitable ways of interacting be found, Odio Razziale Klan has the potential of constituting an audience that includes a great number of activists engaged in some form of social, collective action. However, audiences today have distinctly different ways of expressing their dissent compared to the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. It might initially take the form of listening to podcasts, mp3s, YouTube or other "solitary" digital media, reproducing and conveying lyrics such as those of Odio Razziale Klan with their ironic mix of critiques of alienated consumerist society and desire for some sort of transcendental dimension, as noted by Cerolini in his review of the lyrics.<sup>43</sup> Of course then it becomes a question taking the next step to actual social activism, and encouragingly, a renewed participation of young rebels has been observed, both in response to racist political action, or for example in the flash mobs organised nationwide to pass the *ius soli* reform currently under discussion in the Italian parliament.

Does the border have a hand in conjuring these dissonant images? Coincidentally, Dario Fo and Emeka share at least one border, the one between Italy and Switzerland that informed Dario Fo's *fabulatori* in his native village of Sangiano and served as backdrop to Emeka's childhood in Como. Perhaps the muse of the Radical Imagination, who hides in the borders, crevices and interstices of society and culture, chose to bestow her gifts on these two, on the surface, most dissimilar artists (one who died six months ago at the age of 90 and the other still an energetic 30-year-old chap). They might not even have had an inkling of each other's existence, there might not be any decisive way of connecting their storytelling instincts, and yet, with all due respect for differences in their art, acclaim and audiences, the imaginations of both helped and continue to help make much needed changes in the minds and hearts of people.

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43 Cerolini, Reginaldo: 'Recensione di "Kalahari" rap di Chukwemeka Attilio Obiarinze'. [www.lamacchinasognante.com](http://www.lamacchinasognante.com), 30 March 2016, retrieved 05.06.2017 from <http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/recensione-di-kalahari-rap-di-chukwemeka-attilio-obiarinze-di-reginaldo-cerolini/>. My translation. Lyrics from the song are by Kinder Boyz, quoted in Cerolini. The translation is mine, authorised by the author. 'I have a big nose, a black face/ some avoid me like a leper, mental colonialism dismembers me/ between a crucifix and a stone fetish/ you want the colored man waving the tricolored flag/ or the colored man in the cotton fields?/ Alienation is my position/ a beast without a nation./ From the refrain of the song Kalahari 'There is no love, there is no sex without American Express/ there is no West, there is no East, only atomic bombs and Big Macs/ take out the futon, take out the coupon, take out YouPorn/ and half the world is out in the street protesting foaming at the mouth like a Becks .../ I fill my immense void with infinite desire.'

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Claudio Venturelli/Gokce Hazal Karabas

**From Knowledge to Practice:  
A Possible Utopia in the Global Era  
with Refugees and Social Services.  
*The Door to Door Project:  
A Network Against Tiger Mosquitoes***

**Abstract:** This chapter describes how the Public Health Department of AUSL Romagna, in the frame of the European Project Life-Conops, created 'A network against tiger mosquitoes' with refugees and social services, in order to turn the problems of the integration of refugees and of mosquito control into an opportunity. The main goal of the project was the creation of a network involving volunteers without consideration of age, race, and education. The coordinating group, in collaboration with the municipality of Cesena, focused on peer education methods by activating volunteers from different backgrounds to work in the civil society. They applied the door to door method in private areas. The results were promising, since the project helped the integration not only of refugees into the social network of the city, but also of citizens with refugees and social services. In addition, it helped to spread useful information about prevention methods. This example is offered as a simple action in the present aimed at a modest, however useful, pragmatic utopian result.

## **Introduction**

Utopia is conventionally defined as a perfect community with the highest quality of living. The interpretation of this definition may be personal, and many might argue that such a perfect state of community cannot be reached. However, everybody may have their own utopian concept. The utopia that we – the working group involved in the *Door to Door Project: A Network Against Tiger Mosquitoes*<sup>1</sup> – imagine is a city where refugees are better integrated in our society and fewer people are exposed to health problems through mosquito infection. We acknowledge that,

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1 The members of the experimental *Door to Door Project: A Network Against Tiger Mosquitoes* (Porta a porta: tutti in rete contro la zanzare tigre) are: in the Public Health Department of AUSL Romagna in Cesena, Carmela Matrangolo and Alice Maffi; in the municipality of Cesena, Environmental Bureau, Lucia Garaffoni and Massimo Moretti; in the Social Services, the Centre for Foreigners, Cinzia Pieri, Maria Cristina Capriotti and Matteo Gaggi; in Azienda Servizi alla Persona (ASP Cesena Valle Savio), Foyet Bienvenue Nzepa. The authors of this chapter wish to thank all of them.

although we have a modest vision of utopia here, in this case, it becomes essential to achieve results in our work. In fact, such utopian results may seem a difficult dream to come true. If public administrations could give their support in order to make citizens more sensitive to current issues – such as migration and the integration of migrants, and health risks from mosquitoes – a practical example of utopia might be offered.

An overview of the resident citizens' reaction to the presence of migrants in the city of Cesena revealed that superficial acceptance was followed by negative responses due to the perception of the migrants as a generic category that unduly received help without providing any social benefits. This perception was probably motivated by seeing the migrants occupying public spaces and wandering around. Therefore, they seemed lazy and somehow gave the impression of not contributing in any possible useful way to the society which had accepted them. It is true that Cesena is home to many refugees and, for lack of resources, not all of them manage to get involved in occupational activities; hence, it may seem as if the city is spending its economic resources on paying refugees without any productive advantage. It should be underlined that this perception was not contested by the media and was, on the contrary, instrumental to, and exploited for political reasons and advantages.

This biased perception was observed by the members of the Public Health Department and by the municipality of Cesena and was assumed as one of the basic standpoints for the *Door to Door Project: A Network Against Tiger Mosquitoes*. It took the lead from the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion of 1986, whose mission is quoted by the World Health Organisation as follows:

Good health is a major resource for social, economic and personal development and an important dimension of quality of life. Political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, behavioural and biological factors can all favour health or be harmful to it. Health promotion action aims at making these conditions favourable through advocacy for health.<sup>2</sup>

This vocational statement underlines that health rights do not only depend on medicinal treatments for diseases, but also on the improvement of the quality of individual and social life. Hence, the double focus of the project aimed both at respecting health rights and encouraging social acceptance in an inclusive and healthy society. Mosquito control for sanitary purposes then became the leitmotif of the project. It allowed us to pursue its double purpose: to employ political refugees in socially useful activities, and to fight the spreading of mosquitoes.

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2 See <http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/>.

Political refugees are the specific category of migrants that the project addressed. In the Italian system, they are registered and hosted in centres for migrants (Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo, CARA). They are on a waiting list for being accepted as political refugees. Those who attend an Italian language course manifest their intention to work and remain in Italy. In this list, the participants in the project were selected among those who voluntarily accepted the offer by signing a specific protocol which constituted a formal engagement (as the following description of the project will explain in detail). For the refugees practically involved in the project, the conclusion of the project did not only guarantee social acceptance, but also provided them with an official document stating their acquired proficiency that they may now use to find a job. Refugees will then be recognised with a publicly useful professional role. The project had additional value, benefitting both migrants and the host society by making the general idea of inclusion practically viable through the construction of productive figures, that will hopefully induce a change of perception in ways in which resident citizens perceive migrants.

From the Public Health Department and the municipality of Cesena's point of view, *Aedes albopictus*, known also as the Asian tiger mosquito, is a high-risk factor for the population, because the insects reproduce and settle easily during the warm season in the geographical area of Italy (and Europe). They increase the risk of diseases through mosquito bites which transmit chikungunya<sup>3</sup> and dengue<sup>4</sup> viruses. In the summer of 2016, an additional major preoccupation was caused by the Zika virus, which was announced by an alert of the World Health Organisation. This urgent sanitary problem is one of the reasons why the Public Health Department has numerous prevention programmes, and searches for innovative methods to be able to face new health challenges. Currently, a collaboration between Italy and Greece is active within the project LIFE CONOPS: Development & demonstration of management plans against – the climate change enhanced – invasive mosquitoes in Southern. Europe.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Angelini, P. et al.: 'Chikungunya epidemic outbreak in Emilia-Romagna (Italy). Summer 2007'. *Parassitologia* 50, July 2008, pp. 97–8, retrieved 01.06.2017 from <http://www.cdc.gov/chikungunya/geo/index.html>.

4 See <http://www.healthmap.org/dengue/en/>.

5 See <http://www.conops.gr/?lang=en> and <http://www.conops.gr/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/kick-off/CONOPS%20-%20PH%20E-R.pdf>.

## A general introduction to Asian tiger mosquitoes

The Asian tiger mosquito arrived in the United States and then in Europe through the commerce of used tires from the Asian continent (zoo-geographic Oriental region). In Europe, its presence was signalled for the first time in Albania in 1978, then it conspicuously reached Europe at the port of Genoa, in Italy, in the summer of 1990. The environmental conditions of Italian cities are ideal habitats for these insects. Their place of origin is rain forests where still water can easily accumulate in tree-holes. In the city, micro-habitats suitable for the development of the Asian tiger mosquito population may be found in private and public areas where patches of still water and manholes, which citizens hardly care about and eliminate, are present. In this chapter, references to “still water” mean accumulated water which stays still for more than 5 days in summer. Still water accumulation may not only depend on meteorological conditions, but also on artificial resources created by humans.<sup>6</sup> Municipalities intervene on public territory, but they do not have sufficient resources to check and sanitise all potentially infected private areas. This practical emergency concerns private citizens and, in the case of the project here described, calls political refugees and social services to action for public utility, and for dissemination of best practises. This is achieved by the people involved in the project, namely political refugees and social services, who purposely put into practice the following educational strategy: ‘dimmelo, lo dimentico; mostramelo, lo ricordo; coinvolgimi, lo comprendo’ (‘tell me and I’ll forget, show me and I’ll remember, involve me and I’ll understand’). As a matter of fact, resident citizens were directly involved in the sanitary action. There would be no point for every infected municipality to intervene in public areas at high costs if private areas continued to have patches of still water where mosquitoes can proliferate.

In order to better understand the value of the *Door to door Project* as an everyday utopian action aimed at common good, some information on Asian tiger mosquito is needed. The life cycle of mosquitoes is in four phases: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Most mosquitoes need animal proteins, which can be found in the blood of living species, for the development of their eggs. For reproduction, most of these insects deposit their eggs in water. When adult, their wings allow them to fly, therefore it is important to control the larva stage because larvae only live in water. However, Asian tiger mosquitoes are an exception: they lay eggs on

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6 Some recurrent habits, like keeping water in gardens and putting flowerpots under vases, increase the possibility of having mosquito breeding sites in domestic areas. Recent studies in Emilia-Romagna have shown that 70% of these sites are found in private gardens and allotments.



dry surfaces even though the larvae need water for their growth. The eggs will hatch when water submerges them, even months later. The passage from natural rain forest to urban environment has modified the choice of “guests” from whom Asian tiger mosquitoes suck blood for the growth of their eggs. They have turned anthropophilic, in other words, they started feeding on human beings when they first fed on animals, mainly monkeys. The Asian tiger mosquito population that is now present in the United States and Europe has reached ecologically strategic results of adaptation. The insect’s eggs are now able to survive the cold winters of the United States and Europe.<sup>7</sup>

Preventive health education is essential for the reduction of the areas of the Asian tiger mosquito’s adaptation, of the sanitary damage that they can provoke, and of the related costs of intervention in cases of widespread infections.<sup>8</sup> To provide the correct instruments and spread information about the best preventive methods has become an essential goal for health administrations.

## A network against Asian tiger mosquitoes

In 2007 in Italy, an outbreak of chikungunya occurred. Just before, there had been an important epidemic occurrence in the Indian Ocean area, mainly in La Reunion, where one third of the population was struck down by the disease, which had painful symptoms.<sup>9</sup> There was no doubt that *Aedes albopictus* was the main infection vector. To isolate and contrast the infection, the Public Health Department of Romagna needed to find instruments for its main objective: spreading information about prevention methods in a language comprehensible to everyone. In the global era, multicultural methods may certainly improve the quality of information and allow it to reach the majority of citizens. The municipality of Cesena had the resources and the triggering question was: why not combine mosquito control activities with integration projects? This could be a practical

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7 See Severini, F./Di Luca, M./Toma, L./Romi, R.: ‘Zanzara tigre: un nemico sottovalutato’. *Le Scienze* 456, 2006, pp. 102–5.

8 Canali, M./Rivas-Morales, S./Beutels, P./Venturelli, C.: ‘The Cost of Arbovirus Disease Prevention in Europe: Area-Wide Integrated Control of Tiger Mosquito, *Aedes albopictus*, in Emilia-Romagna, Northern Italy’. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14, 2017 pp. 1–22, retrieved 01.06.2017 from [http://www.conops.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Claudio\\_cost-Albopictus-plan-E-R\\_2017.pdf](http://www.conops.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Claudio_cost-Albopictus-plan-E-R_2017.pdf).

9 Thuilliez, J./Bellia, C./Dehecq, J.-S./Reilhes, O.: ‘Household-level expenditure on protective measures against mosquitoes on the island of La Réunion, France’. *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* 2014, retrieved 01.06.2017 from <http://journals.plos.org/plosntds/article?id=10.1371/journal.pntd.0002609>.

step towards the realisation of a utopian scenario. However, the project could not be carried out by just one department of the public administration, since a programme of integration requires common effort and participation. The municipality of Cesena and its branches of social services – the Centre for Foreigners (Centro Stranieri), and the Public Office for Personal Services in the Social and Health Fields (Azienda Servizi alla Persona, ASP)<sup>10</sup> – discussed and reviewed the possibilities for the accomplishment of the project, and considered their available human and economical resources.

The main problems were two: the mosquito season was about to begin, and the Department of Public Health estimated the arrival of a large number of mosquitoes based on the population of the previous year and on the zika virus alert. In an apparently incongruent context, the municipality had to manage the number of political refugees who were not involved in significant social activities, but who would be enthusiastic about doing something useful for the city that hosted them.

Political refugees offered the opportunity to manage the educational part of the project by employing them as cultural mediators. They would prove particularly useful with naturalised citizens. The project aimed at mosquito control through a close monitoring of water conservation in open air. Critical situations had emerged regarding the conservation of water supplies, following warnings by native citizens to the Public Health Department, which had triggered conflicts among neighbouring residents, native and naturalised. The Public Health Department was meant to intervene to settle the dispute. Their survey revealed that, for cultural reasons, the attitude to and the use of water varies in culturally diverse communities and family units. However, the *pubblico ufficiale* (UPG, public sanitary authority) was not able to diplomatically solve the problem without using sanctions. Facing a choice, the Public Health Department deemed it wiser to use a different approach which would maintain peace while also solving the problem of water conservation, and, therefore, of pest control. The keyword of the project then came to be education, which addressed every citizen in the municipality. It was clear that the two so-called problems could be turned into an opportunity. Of course the political aspect of the integration programme had to be taken into consideration. Immigration is a delicate issue that needs to be handled with great care.

The municipality of Cesena has an established mosquito control programme which regularly operates in public areas. However, considering the large mosquito

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10 The social services, namely the Centre for Foreigners and the Public Office for Personal Services in the Social and Health Fields, employ public resources to assist people in need and difficulty, be they physical, mental, social, and economic.

population, working only in public areas is not enough. Hypothetically, if the environmental conditions were perfect, two mosquitoes could reproduce 2,500 billion mosquitoes from April to October. However, interventions in private properties are not easy, and there also is a considerable lack of public resources. And to draw the citizens' attention to the importance of mosquito prevention and control is a difficult task, too. Currently, the local law imposes an ordinance on private citizens, but most of them neglect to conform. In fact, the citizens' attitude towards prevention methods was at times a node of conflict, because they were either hesitant or resistant about applying the ordinance. Recent experiences had shown that the issue had to be handled with care, and the method chosen carefully. The best one seemed to be peer-to-peer, namely the educational strategy which aims at spreading knowledge among people who share similar concerns and goals.

The Public Health Department appointed a group of experts in various fields (an entomologist, a biologist, a psychologist, and a sociologist). The coordinator and expert of the project was an entomologist. He had to find a way of reaching the citizens in order to explain the importance of prevention and to show them some simple methods of pest control. The idea of "door-to-door" was put forward and some basic steps were planned: to form a group of volunteers, devise an educational strategy, arrive at citizens' houses, identify mosquito breeding sites with them, show how to implement preventive methods. The goals of the projects were defined as follows:

- General goals:
  - Diffusion of best practices for the management of private open areas
  - Prevention in private gardens (voluntary operators could not enter houses)
  - Knowledge of the more effective methods of application
  - Help citizens to develop the ability of locating a breeding site
  - Involve native Italians and naturalised citizens as peer educators
  - Reinforce community action
  - Develop personal abilities.
- Specific goals:
  - Preparation and distribution of questionnaires to evaluate the project and the knowledge of the volunteers
  - A formation course with the volunteers to share didactic methods
  - Sampling of larva and adult mosquitoes in fields to help the volunteers recognize different types
  - Master the methods to reduce breeding sites
  - Diffusion of best practices for mosquito control and appropriate solutions for the citizens' needs and requests.

The achievement of these goals depended on having volunteers who could perform such activities: the volunteers had to be trained and a selection process was necessary. Selection criteria were based on the respect of precise regulations such as attending the entire training course, being present and on time at working hours, attend the Italian language school course for foreigners offered by the Centro Stranieri. Actually, volunteers were selected among the refugees who had applied and were attending it. Only the refugees who had decided to live in Italy were admitted to the selection process.

By the end of the selections carried out by the Centre for Foreigners and the social services of the municipality of Cesena, five Italian volunteers from the social services and five volunteers among the political refugees were selected. They were Andrea Castagnoli, Annalisa Fontana, Lorenzo Huby Meres, Maria Angelini and Enrica Parisini. During infield work, Maria and Enrica left and were substituted by Emanuele Antolini and Lucia Serra. In addition: Daouda Keita from Mali, Emwenosa Imasuen Wisdom and Omoh Isah Prince from Nigeria, Abdrahman Abdou Salam from Niger and Ul Mustafa Nauman Iman from Pakistan. Political refugees are assisted by a national law which is implemented through the Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati (SPRAR, Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) and the Centri d'Accoglienza Straordinaria (CAS, Extraordinary Hospitality Dormitories) both managed locally by Azienda Servizi alla Persona. Once accepted in the project, the volunteers had to sign a contract with the Public Health Department AUSL of Romagna and the municipality of Cesena to commit themselves to the entire training course and to work for four days a week. It was specified that if the contract was not respected, they would be cancelled from the project. This contract was prepared as a preventive measure for the possible departure of volunteers, as a guarantee for a real durable commitment to work.

Project indicators were:

1. Project approval by March 2016.
2. Theory and practice meeting by April 2016.
3. Selection of 10 volunteers (in collaboration with the municipality of Cesena).
4. Work infield in at least 100 houses
5. Report fill up.

The 40-hour training course was managed by experts of the AUSL Romagna and was over by the end of April 2016. A 10-hour practical course took place in May in order to keep the volunteers updated. They went to visit some risky areas and gardens with the experts, and had specific training on filling in checklists and completing their reports on mosquito breeding. The course was divided into three phases: theoretical lessons on the biology of mosquitoes, prevention and control

methods; communication techniques and Italian language skills; practical lessons about intervention methods in field with experts. Upon request of the refugees who had language problems, extra hours of training on the theoretical part of the course were given, mostly focusing on Italian language skills. Part of the training on communication techniques included lessons on conflict management. This was carried out by a Turkish graduate in psychology who collaborated in the project as cultural facilitator. The cultural differences among the volunteers could cause conflict, so cross-cultural work during the whole training phase was needed. This role was taken by Foyet Bienvenue Nzepa, a Camerunese migrant on the waiting list for permit to stay, who was part of the coordinating group as cultural mediator and interpreter, and was also the teacher of the Italian language course. Her presence was essential in this phase, because she has significant knowledge of Italian and African cultures, and can speak European and African languages. Her dialogue with the volunteers was mainly in Italian, French, and broken English. She was in charge of the weekly timetable and was the direct reference person for the volunteers. Working in team was not easy at the beginning. It meant communication, task distribution, time management, and mainly cooperation and problem solving. The settlement of internal conflicts was a precondition for their work in the field where volunteers went in pairs.

### **From knowledge to practice**

By the end of the training course, the volunteers were ready to go out, but probably the city was not yet ready. The volunteers were well prepared to deal with eventual unpleasant situations like acts of racism, discrimination, and inhospitality. At the beginning of the project, some had been chased away with the slogan ‘immigrant go home’, and some had been simply asked to go away and never come back. Luckily, these were rare occurrences and the positive spirit of the teams played an important role in the management of these situations, also because the Italian volunteers were touched by these episodes and defended their colleagues. Cesena is a small city, and in recent years, the flow of immigration has become a relevant issue. Sending refugees to the citizens’ houses was a challenge and required careful preparation.

The project was experimentally carried out in one central area of the city of Cesena, called Quartiere Fiorenzuola. The first step was to send an official letter signed by the mayor of the city to each citizen’s address. The letter briefly explained the goals of the project and asked for the citizens’ collaboration. In order to avoid unpleasant situations, it was clearly specified that the volunteers did not have permission to go into the houses, but should remain in the gardens. The letters were personally distributed by the volunteers themselves in the mailboxes of all

the houses in the project area. In this way, the volunteers got to know the city and the neighbourhood, and the citizens began to see them on the streets. It was a kind of first meeting. On 22 May 2016, the volunteers introduced themselves to the citizens during a theatre play by the local performer Roberto Mercadini, with the participation of Claudio Venturelli. The script play was based on *Questione di Culex*, a book on mosquito life stories written by Claudio Venturelli and Marina Marazza.<sup>11</sup> Just before the activities officially started, an informative article was published in the local newspapers and on the municipality's website.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Door to Door Project: A possible utopia in the global era**

At the end of the formative phase, the activities officially started, though the whole idea still seemed an impossible utopian one. The expectations were high but it was clear that the experimental project would not be trouble-free. The training course had gone well, but ringing the doorbells of strangers and getting them to open the door was not a simple mission. The volunteers had trolleys with the materials – like gloves, pills, sampling boxes, and observation sheets –, wore high-visibility (life protection dispositive) jackets, and had identity cards. This was specified in the letters sent to the citizens in the first phase of the project and it should have made it easier for the citizens to open their door. Cesena has a large elderly population that may be suspicious of strangers. This was also due to recent episodes in the city, where robberies were organised by people who presented themselves as social workers. Elderly people are warned about not opening their doors to strangers in order to avoid unpleasant episodes. In fact, during the project, the hardest target to reach was the elderly living alone. However, they were among the most important citizens to be reached, since they are among those who need more support and help. In the meanwhile, one of the volunteers had been stopped by the local police, because they had become suspicious about the frequent presence of refugees in the area. As this was unexpected, the municipality of Cesena immediately intervened by sending the documents of the project and the identity kits of all ten volunteers.

About ten days later, another unexpected problem occurred: two of the Italian volunteers left the project because their physical conditions did not allow them to walk too much, and were replaced by two other members. On the other hand, among the refugees, Abdrahaman Abdou Salam had to leave the project because he

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11 Venturelli, Claudio/Marazza, Marina: *Questione di Culex*. De Agostini: Novara 2014.

12 See <http://www.comune.cesena.fc.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/28395>.

had been admitted to a training school. His place was taken by Otoibhili Ahmed Lawrance from Nigeria.

Satisfactorily, towards the first half of the project, it seemed that an almost-utopian goal was about to be reached in Cesena: some citizens started calling the municipality to fix an appointment with the volunteers. They had heard about their visits from their neighbours, and since they were not home at that moment of the visit, they were calling to inform of their availability. In similar cases of welcoming, citizens would offer coffee to the volunteers to show their appreciation. They were informed that the volunteers were not allowed to accept anything else. Some called the municipality to thank them for the activities and asked for it to be repeated the following year. In addition, some citizens asked the volunteers to come back to help them keep the breeding sites under control.

Since this was the first work experience for the refugees and the first experience of collaboration with them for the Italian volunteers, the coordinating group organised periodic meetings with all the members of the project. During the meetings, the volunteers talked about their experiences and doubts about the project. Sometimes it became necessary to swap the members of teams to increase the quality of work and the well-being of the members. The members worked interdisciplinarily by sharing their knowledge and rethinking the project critically. The volunteers took their work seriously and were careful about having a professional approach, even if there were remarkable differences. One aspect was related to physical resistance to the stress of the door-to-door activity. Mosquitoes are active from April to October, having a peak during the warmest period from June to August. The project activities were concentrated in that period. The climate was hot and humid, and the volunteers had to walk from house to house. The refugee volunteers were strong young men. But it was not the same for the Italian volunteers, who were under the assistance of Social Services, they were not so young, and some had trouble finding a job because of their physical condition.

## Results

The project lasted from 1 March until 10 October 2016. By the end of the project, the volunteers distributed a brief evaluation and satisfaction questionnaire to the citizens in which they were asked to answer three questions by scoring their level of satisfaction with reference to the project, their evaluation of the project, and of the volunteers' work.

The evaluation of the project was carried out with result indicators. They were:

1. The project was approved by March 2016.
2. Theory and practice meeting were carried out by 30 April 2016.
3. 13 volunteers were involved on the whole.
4. They visited 1,031 houses.
5. All reports were filled and data were elaborated.

The volunteers visited 1,031 houses. They found and eliminated 1,685 active breeding sites and identified 2,027 potential breeding sites which, at the moment of observation, did not contain any larva. The visits were repeated in 105 houses, double checking the success of the project, which was measured according to the indicators that had been previously fixed in the project. Results proved that the indicators have not just been matched, but exceeded. Additional positive and encouraging results were observed in that the citizens remembered the volunteers' advice and they became proficient in taking preventive measures against mosquito breeding sites.

The project also included filling in a questionnaire about the citizens' knowledge about mosquitoes and pest control. This was useful not only for estimating the success of the education strategy, but also for creating a moment of dialogue and information exchange between citizens and volunteers. The questionnaires were not compulsory, but 135 citizens wanted to take it. As a result of the analysis, it can be concluded that the citizens have a general knowledge about the biology of mosquitoes, but they find it hard to take preventive measures: 123 (93%) citizens over the 135 who filled the questionnaire can recognise the main breeding sites and know that mosquitoes grow in water, but only 50% are aware that the most critical period for their development is from April to October. 29% believe that mosquitoes can move as far as 1 km while 24% think that the maximum flight distance is no more than 100 metres (correct answer). Regarding preventive measures, even if 86% know that their behaviour has important impact on the presence of mosquitoes, 38% believe that most people do not know which measures to take (14% did not answer the question). 56% know that a correct pest control procedure can affect mosquito development up to 70%, but only 64% are aware that the most efficient treatments are on larvae. 90% believe that mosquitoes are a big problem. Finally, 75% stated that they need to change their habits of living outdoors, especially in green areas. In addition to the scientific results, an improvement could be observed in the Italian language skills of the refugees. Also, a better relationship with the citizens was evident.

The project was successful and was presented in international conferences such as the European Society for Vector Ecology (E-Sove) Conference in Lisbon



on 2–7 October 2016, and in the International Symposium ‘Practising Utopia in the Intercultural Present’ on 26 October 2016 at the University of Milan. On 21 December 2016, the Public Health Department AUSL of Romagna and the municipality of Cesena organised a ceremony for the conclusion of the project and for the distribution of the work certificates to the volunteers.

## Conclusion

‘Think globally, act locally’ was the motto of this project. Even if the global era united the Greek and the Italian Public Health Departments in the Life-Conops project on an international level, local work was essential to carry out the experimental practices, which would benefit people on a larger scale in different geographical areas and life conditions. The utopian practice we had dreamt of at the beginning of the project was almost reached in Cesena. At the end of the project, the political refugees were recognised as community members by the local citizens. The refugees noticed that the citizens’ attitude towards them had slowly changed and improved throughout the project. For them, it was not about being accepted in the community, but it was also about being appreciated for their contribution to the host society. They shared their knowledge about mosquitoes and pest control with the citizens and, as a result of their work, people became more informed and careful about mosquito control actions. The volunteers received a formal reimbursement for their expenses, in order to give official recognition to their work, in addition to the professional certificate. From the success of this utopian local action, the project gained political importance. In fact, there is express interest in making it a regional project. What started as a local experiment, is about to become a regional project, and the next goal may be the diffusion of the project on both national and international areas within the Life-Conops frame between Greece and Italy. The success of the project is proof that certain doubts about the refugees’ presence and contribution to the host society can be put aside and the wall of prejudice can be broken in order to build a present utopia.

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### **3. Utopia and Localities: North America**



Maureen Matthews – Roger Roulette

## ***Minongeng, an Anishinaabe Utopia:* A. I. Hallowell's Contribution to a UNESCO Anishinaabe Cultural Landscape**

**Abstract:** Utopias, especially those which articulate model societies, would seem to be an ideal reference for claims of UNESCO World Heritage Status, particularly when the claim is being made for an enormous integrated cultural and natural site, which is meant to facilitate indigenous ecological control and privilege Anishinaabe understandings and knowledge production, as is the case with Pimachiowin Aki in northeastern Manitoba. The UNESCO process is a unique opportunity to articulate indigenous perspectives on land and life and the ideas which instantiate connectedness to landscape. However, notions of a pristine natural utopia in the minds of those judging the claim confound this process with the assumption that nature is only secure in the absence of humanity. This chapter demonstrates that in the case of a cultural landscape, utopias work both to facilitate and impede indigenous claims. When A. Irving Hallowell first ventured up the Berens River in the 1930s, he was looking for “the real Indians”, and did not want the subjects of his anthropological study to be too acculturated, too Christian in their beliefs, too compromised by modernity. On the upper Berens River, he was directed to a people who were living in a way that even other native people admired as authentic. The people of the upper Berens River resisted Christian and colonial influences when Hallowell was there. They are deliberately defending their cultural heritage now, acting politically in a creative attempt to maintain language, community and relations with their homeland. The Pauingassi First Nation and four other First Nations have proposed that their tribal lands, a total of 4.3 million hectares, be set aside as a UNESCO World Heritage cultural landscape site. This chapter looks at the role of A. Irving Hallowell in supporting the culture they now wish to protect and providing the words they now use to explain themselves to others.

### **Introduction**

Irving Hallowell was an astute anthropologist. In the course of 10 years of field-work among the Anishinaabe<sup>1</sup> on the upper Berens River in Northern Manitoba,

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1 Anishinaabe is the name the people call themselves. The plural is Anishinaabeg. The Anishinaabeg, who occupy the area delineated by the Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Site, speak Anishinaabemowin and the act of speaking is Anishinaabemo. Ojibwe is the contemporary iteration of a historic name for the Anishinaabeg which has been rendered for many years as Ojibway, the use of which was traditionally restricted to tribal groups

he focussed on ideas which were important to the Anishinaabeg. In an essay written in 1947 about Anishinaabe family hunting territories, the American anthropologist observed that the historical depth and continuity of occupation of these territories reflected both their ideas about life and their response to the physical environment. He saw that the Anishinaabeg had an ecologically responsive system of family trap lines, an orderly method of reorganising them from time to time, and that the Anishinaabe vocabulary effectively expressed ideas about land tenure and trespass.<sup>2</sup> Hallowell argued that the Anishinaabeg had firm ideas about the ownership of use rights to trapping areas, including individual and family held hunting territories. They valued their territories in terms of productivity, not dimensions, and a smaller, but productive trap-line was an appealing idea, but this did not mean that they had no idea about the scope of family and group territorial claims.

In asserting this, he was challenging an old stereotype, a utopian idea about the supposedly communal nature of humanity before the corruption of politics and industrialisation. Early, fanciful contact stories about Native North Americans extolling their simple generous lives, benign approach to visitors and their apparent indifference to the ownership of land were deployed as a critique of the injustice, inequality and religious violence of Europe at the time.<sup>3</sup> This idea of original communality among indigenous peoples retains an appeal to contemporary scholars.<sup>4</sup> It is a part of the explanation used to justify why indigenous people are so easily

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living along the shores of Lake Superior. Linguistically, these groups form a chain of dialects which now extend across Canada from Quebec to Alberta, and from Michigan into Montana in the United States. Regional variants of the language are identified in English with a variety of names, including Algonquin, Nipissing, Mississauga, Ottawa, Odawa, Potawatomi, Chippewa, Saulteaux, and Oji-Cree. While some of these dialects use distinctive terms, Anishinaabemowin is the most widespread self-designation, and is derived from the common term for a tribal member, Anishinaabe. From the southernmost speakers in Michigan and Montana to those in the northern reaches of Manitoba and Ontario (approximately 20,000 speakers) the language is referred to as Anishinaabemowin and the speakers are the Anishinaabeg. They are the second largest language group among the Algonquian speaking family of languages which ranges from the Rocky Mountains to Newfoundland and down the coast as far as Virginia.

- 2 Hallowell, A. Irving: *The Ojibwa of the Berens River, Manitoba: Ethnography into History*. Harcourt Brace College Publishers: New York 1992, p. 161.
- 3 de Montaigne 1580, Rousseau 1755.
- 4 Leacock, Eleanor: 'The Montagnais "Hunting Territories" and the Fur Trade'. *American Anthropologist* 56 (5), Part 2, 1954.

dispossessed; that it is their naiveté which makes them vulnerable, even when iniquitous power relationships are overwhelming at play.<sup>5</sup>

But Hallowell, who admired the generosity of the Anishinaabe and saw it reflected in the actions of the smallest child, did not see this as evidence of their carelessness about ownership. Rather he saw it as a manifestation of the ordering and reinforcement of social relationships through gift giving, a sentiment which is still observable. Roger Roulette, co-author on this chapter, frequently tells his students that ‘we are a society which celebrates life with a Give-away Dance. It wouldn’t mean much if we didn’t own the things we give.’<sup>6</sup> Seventy years later, Hallowell’s descriptions of the lives of the Anishinaabe people of the upper Berens River are being redeployed to support a bid by four Anishinaabeg communities, two on Lake Winnipeg (Poplar River First Nation and Bloodvein River First Nation) and two upriver (Pauingassi First Nation and Little Grand Rapids First Nation), and the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario, to have their traditional territories declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site Cultural Landscape. Pimachiowin Aki, “the land that gives life”, is comprised of 29,000 km<sup>2</sup> of contiguous boreal lands, forests and waterways on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba. Pimachiowin Aki is being nominated for World Heritage status by the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation, an unprecedented partnership of these four Anishinaabeg First Nations communities and two provincial governments. The corporation will establish and manage the Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Site according to shared principles of mutual respect and collaboration.

Pimachiowin Aki is being nominated as a site of ‘Mixed Cultural and Natural Heritage’<sup>7</sup>, under criteria that now recognise both the natural values of this

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- 5 It is a core part of a stereotypical portrayal of the beliefs of “traditional” indigenous people, which includes the transposition of the very European idea that the earth is a female figure – Mother Earth or Gaia – and cannot be possessed. See Bopp, J./Bopp, M./Brown, L./Lane, P.: *The Sacred Tree*. Lotus Light Publications: Twin Lakes, Wisconsin 1984, p. 10; Kaiser, Rudolph: ‘Chief Seattle’s Speech[es]: American Origins and European Reception’. In: Swann, Brian/Krupat, Arnold (eds.): *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*. University of California Press: Berkeley 1987 pp. 497–536; Krupat, Arnold: ‘Chief Seattle’s Speech Revisited’. *The American Indian Quarterly* 35 (2), 2011, pp. 192–214; Matthews, Maureen: Mother Earth. *IDEAS* transcript. CBC Radio One. Sounds Like Canada. 2003.
  - 6 See Matthews, Maureen/Roulette, Roger: ‘Mapping the Ojibwe Universe, *Giishkaana-dong*: Ojibwe Cosmology Discussion Paper’. Discussion Papers for the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site proposal. 2010a.
  - 7 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation. *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Intergovernmental

extensive boreal shield landscape, and the cultural values of the indigenous Anishinaabe communities. Pimachiowin Aki ‘represents the combined works of nature and man’, and while the integrity and vitality of the natural world are essential features of the Pimachiowin Aki bid, the sponsoring First Nations would argue that the ‘outstanding universal values’<sup>8</sup> of the region as a whole are related to Anishinaabeg occupancy of the Pimachiowin Aki region. It is their several thousand years of stewardship of traditional hunting territories which have left the natural world in the excellent health in which we find it and it is their ongoing leadership in land management and governance of the region which the bid seeks to consolidate for the future.

In making the case for the inscription of their cultural landscape on the World Heritage List, the communities are called upon to articulate a claim that their traditional territories form a kind of present day cultural landscape “utopia”, an exceptional combination of natural and cultural elements. It is a rhetorical mode which is completely foreign to these First Nations people and which they avoided to the furthest extent possible. They were unwilling to claim any kind of cultural superiority over other Anishinaabe peoples, or any other indigenous peoples in the world for that matter. When an earlier application to UNESCO was deferred on the grounds that the Anishinaabe relationship with the land was ‘not unique and persists in many places associated with indigenous people in North America and other parts of the world’<sup>9</sup> Sophia Rabliauskas spoke up for the communities, saying: ‘We have a world view that everybody’s equal and we’re not superior to any indigenous equal groups or communities, so, yeah, I found that insulting.’<sup>10</sup>

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Committee for the Protection of the World’s Cultural and Natural Heritage. UNESCO: Paris 2015 [2008], p. 14.

8 UNESCO 2015, p. 15.

9 ICOMOS report cited in Feneley, Rick: ‘Indigenous leaders told of “insulting” UN rule on World Heritage listing’. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 2013, retrieved 01.06.2017 from <http://www.smh.com.au/national/indigenous-leaders-told-of-insulting-un-rule-on-world-heritage-listing-20130527-2n7ac.html>.

10 Lambert, Steve: ‘UNESCO Designation on hold. Special recognition for Manitoba forest reaches stalemate’. *Winnipeg Free Press* 06.03.2013, p. 6. A big part of the issue was that at the time, a cultural landscape argument involved making both a natural and a cultural argument. An Australian newspaper reporter at the time wrote that ‘[t]he council also noted that the First Nations’ refusal to be seen as exceptional presented a “difficult dilemma” that might require further consideration “upstream”, (Feneley 2013) and indeed changes were made in the UNESCO criteria after 2008, and although superlatives are still called for, it is much easier now (in 2017) to argue for a



On the other hand, the Pimachiowin Aki board are very proud of their boreal forest home and were happier engaging in the modest hyperbole of this aspect of the application process. They had no trouble mounting arguments that their boreal forest homeland is uniquely wonderful. They were even happier countering ideas of natural “utopias”, imagined as pristine only so long as they are exclusively natural and contain no people. As a people who have lived in the region for thousands of years, they feel they have significantly contributed to the ecological harmony which is being valorised.

As the Pimachiowin Aki bid moves forward, the UNESCO World Heritage assessment system has been altered to accommodate their combined cultural/ecological argument. At one time, UNESCO offered only separate natural or cultural protection alternatives, but they have gradually made room for applications like the Pimachiowin Aki bid, which combine both. In their gentle way, the people of the Pimachiowin Aki region have been pushing back against the idea of the pristine, people-less wilderness as ‘utopia’. It is an idea which has victimised indigenous people for many years. They have countered the argument that their lives, or anyone’s for that matter, can be lived in an “ecological vacuum”, an idea Hallowell resisted on their behalf seventy years ago, while pushing forward the boundaries of ecological protection and respect for indigenous management rights.

## Being there

There is a memory exercise which Ojibwe children who live in the Pimachiowin Aki region are encouraged to practice. It is called *mikawiwini*.<sup>11</sup> In this exercise, relatively young children are taught to fix particular landscapes in their mind. They stand in one spot and rotate 360 degrees while focussing their attention on the sights, sounds, smells and feel of the place. These observations become lifelong multi-dimensional memories that can be brought to mind on demand. The places Anishinaabeg children are expected to memorise in this comprehensive way are the scenes of legends or the place where a particular event in their family’s history has taken place. Over time, the mention of a particular place becomes a kind of verbal shorthand for the story, an oblique way to refer to the moral lesson or territorial claim which derives from the story’s recitation. Families travelling in the

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cultural landscape as an integrated whole rather than as a meshing of two categories with separate criteria.

11 Roulette, Roger: Personal Communication, June 2004. Local people from the Pimachiowin Aki area also use this word to refer to the memorisation of associated history, stories and legends.

bush often tell particular stories as they pass by particular sites. The sites themselves provide the impulse to relate the story, acting to ensure the survival of the story which gives the site its social meaning. Storytelling in this mode is not just an amusement, but also a political act; storytelling is a way of declaring a territorial interest or expressing an Anishinaabe understanding about pre-existing claims regarding particular places.<sup>12</sup> So it is no surprise that techniques for remembering place and space are taught to the young, nor that historic Anishinaabe ideas about landscape, embedded in the seasonal round, are grounded in the intimate details of the natural world.

This kind of imaginative and emotional engagement by the Anishinaabeg with the Pimachiowin Aki region is a defining feature of a “cultural landscape”; it is not just a landscape which has been altered by its occupants, but one which is given meaning by its occupation. The landscape has been physically changed by hunting and harvesting practices<sup>13</sup> and this altered landscape is more than a physical backdrop for life, a sort of stage upon which life happens; it is an actor, providing the necessities of life, evoking memories and eliciting stories.<sup>14</sup> In choosing to seek a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation on this basis, the Anishinaabeg of the region are claiming that their lands and waters have made them who they are; that the landscape “collaborates” in the production of their culture, and that it is supporting and engaging them still. There is a profoundly deep relationship with this watery landscape, and they believe they have an obligation to protect and manage it for the benefit of their grandchildren. When the Anishinaabeg make the claim that their cultural landscape is worthy of international recognition, they are referring to this broader meaning of a cultural landscape.

Cultural landscapes which engage continuously with humanity are full of the artefacts of this relationship, especially among a people who attribute life to stones,

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- 12 For example, in Pauingassi, a sandy hilltop had been the scene of extremely impressive and important ceremonies in the community. Elders spoke of the distress caused when a school was built there. It was viewed as an inappropriate use of land which had formerly been kept “clean”. The animate stones which lay on the ground were buried in place to protect them, but no thought was given at the time to moving them. The place remains, in Pauingassi stories, the central cultural site, and there was little surprise when the school built there burnt down some years ago.
  - 13 Davidson-Hunt, Ian/Berkes, Fikret: ‘Learning as you Journey: Anishinaabe Perception of Social-Ecological Environments and Adaptive Learning’. *Conservation Ecology* 8 (1), 2003, retrieved 01.06.2017 from <https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol8/iss1/art5/print.pdf>
  - 14 Denning, Greg: ‘A Poetic for Histories’. In *Performances*. Melbourne University Press: Melbourne 1996, pp. 35–63.

trees and thunderclouds, and share their landscape with powerful other-than-human persons upon whom their health and well-being depends.<sup>15</sup> These artefacts offer material confirmation that Anishinaabeg land tenure is distinctive, and that it has been continuous and of long duration. It is through Anishinaabeg eyes and through Anishinaabeg histories that this area takes on its unique meaning and it is from the Anishinaabeg that it derives its authenticity.

Anishinaabeg storytellers tell versions of a story about a great flood which once destroyed the known world. In the story, the hero, trickster Wiisakejaak recreates a land to live on from a handful of mud retrieved by a muskrat.<sup>16</sup> There are other stories about a time before humans when giant animals, the Giant Skunk and the Giant Frog among others, held sway in the universe. There are stories of overcoming an ancient and disgusting people, the Hairy Hearts, cannibals so devious that they hid their hearts in a nest far away from their bodies which made them extraordinarily hard to kill<sup>17</sup>; the heroine of the Ojibwe version of these stories is a woman named Gezhizhwazh, who teaches the Anishinaabeg how to kill the cannibals by cunning. She is a stirring role model of bravery, humour and wit.<sup>18</sup> The overarching trajectory of these Algonquian<sup>19</sup> stories is that, over time, chaos yields to order, the world becomes more predictable and a safer place to live for those who respect the protocols learned by their ancestors. These social lessons are passed on in the form of stories told about the hero/trickster Wiisakejaak who, in the course of various adventures, discovers rules of conduct and technical

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15 See Matthews, Maureen: *Naamiwan's Drum: The Story of a Contested Anishinaabe Repatriation*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto 2016; Latour, Bruno: 'When things strike back: a possible contribution of "science studies" to the social sciences.' *The British Journal of Sociology* 51 (1), 2000, pp. 107–23; Hirsch, Eric/O'Hanlon, Michael (eds.): *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*. Clarendon: Oxford 1995.

16 Norman Quill quoted in Matthews, Maureen/Roulette, Roger/Valentine, Rand: 'Anishinaabemowin: The Language of Pimachiowin Aki'. Discussion Papers for the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site proposal. 2010, pp. 41–4.

17 Brown, Jennifer S. H./Brightman, Robert: 'Orders of the Dreamed': *George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823*. University of Manitoba Press: Winnipeg 1988.

18 Matthews 2003.

19 Anishinaabemowin, Cree, Blackfoot, Inu, Malaseet, Mig'ima are all languages of the Algonquian family which stretches from the Rocky Mountains in Canada across the Canadian north to Newfoundland and all the way down the U.S. east coast as far as Virginia. The Powhatan, the people of Pocahontas, spoke an Algonquian language. These languages are related to one another in the same way that Romance languages like French and Spanish are related. They tend to have similar, although not identical stories.

innovations like the introduction of fire which help to make the world easier to live in. In some stories he causes the animals to develop distinguishing attributes; in one story Maang, the Loon, gets his white necklace and, in another, a broken back which causes his characteristic awkwardness on land. The stories reinforce the idea that the technical and moral sophistication of contemporary Anishinaabeg and the resulting order and predictability of the world are hard won prizes.

## An Ojibwe Perspective

As I mentioned earlier, Algonquian stories are often told and wherever they are told, they are located specifically. This rock, that lake, these islands are the spot where Wiisakejaak does a brave or silly thing. He often leaves signs of his passing. The Manitoba Museum has an immersive boreal forest diorama set near Footprint Lake and they actually cast the cliff that rose out of the water to record the moccasin footprints on it which are said to have been made by Wiisakejaak in the course of some adventure. They are amazingly convincing! The footprints support the claim that Anishinaabeg tenure has been continuous and of long duration, and they also raise the question of the Ojibwe nature of land tenure in the Pimachiowin Aki region; we know from Naamiwan's grandson Omishoosh Owen, that it derives from the Ojibwe concept, *nametwaawin*, making one's claim to a particular place known through a memorable act and to the related idea, *nametoowin*, making one's family's claim to a territory known by leaving marks or overt evidence of occupation. Naamiwan was involved in several memorable acts during his lifetime. The site of a 100-year-old dream, which resulted in his owning a famously powerful dream dance drum, is still well known in Pauingassi.<sup>20</sup> The stories told about that dream continually reinvest the site of the dream with meaning and the site itself reminds people of the old man's power, power he is still presumed to be exerting from beyond the grave.<sup>21</sup> Naamiwan's dream is a classic example of *nametwaawin*, the claim to a particular place through a memorable act, and his exacting of "tolls" is related to the assertion of broader Ojibwe territorial claim, *nametoowin*, which he would have been making on behalf of his extended family.

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20 Matthews, Maureen/Roulette, Roger: 'Aaqjitaawinan izhiitwaawining: Material Culture of the Pimachiowin Aki Region'. Discussion Papers for the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site proposal. 2010b. pp. 36–8.

21 Matthews, Maureen/Roulette, Roger: 'Fair Wind's Dream: Naamiwan Obawaajigewin'. In: Brown, Jennifer S. H./Vibert, Elizabeth (eds.): *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*. Broadview Press: Peterborough, ON 2003, p. 266.

As Nathan Deutch points out, Frank Speck, in his Naaskaapi research, found comparable evidence of ownership claims<sup>22</sup> made by what he called ‘family hunting groups.’<sup>23</sup> Deutch’s recent research in Anishinaabe communities confirms the continued importance of family hunting groups as a basic unit of economic production. He cites Hallowell, who, in the 1930s, found that hunting areas averaged 93 square miles and that ‘[r]ights to these tracts were recognised and trespass resented.’<sup>24</sup> While not exactly replicating aboriginal understandings of land tenure, registered traplines (*wenii’igeng*) have reinforced the broader and more geographically flexible Ojibwe idea of family hunting grounds (*endawenjigeng*).<sup>25</sup> There is no doubt that the idea of trespass (*bazhishkaawin*) is Anishinaabe, as it is so easily and forcefully expressed. Although registered family hunting areas were first suggested by Hudson’s Bay Company Governor, Sir George Simpson, at the time of the union of fur companies in 1821<sup>26</sup> as a means of rebuilding the population of furbearing and game species, they were accepted because they roughly paralleled existing Anishinaabe concepts. Native leaders were active in promoting the idea of registered trap lines again in the 1930s, when white trappers moved aggressively into the area during the depression. The ruthlessly efficient trapping methods of white trappers and their complete disregard for native trappers led to a catastrophic collapse in the beaver population, after which beavers had to be imported from the north to restore the species.<sup>27</sup> Registered trap lines and beaver quotas were formally instituted in the Pimachiowin Aki region in both Manitoba and Ontario in 1947.<sup>28</sup> Deutch and Hamilton argue that the boundaries and inheritance conventions associated with registered trap lines are now thought to be more rigid than older cultural practices and, because registered trap lines are

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22 For a discussion of concepts of ownership, see Matthews/Roulette 2010b, p. 37.

23 Frank G. Speck quoted in Deutch, Nathan: ‘Land Tenure Report for Pimachiowin Aki’. Discussion Papers for the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site proposal. 2010, pp. 8–9.

24 Hallowell 1992: p. 45, Deutch 2010: pp. 8–9.

25 *Wenii’igeng*, and *endawenjigeng* are locatives. The first word is the conventional way to refer to the place where a family or hunting group traps and the second refers more broadly to their hunting grounds.

26 Lytwyn, Victor: *Muskegowuck Athinuwick: Original People of the Great Swampy Land*. University of Manitoba Press: Winnipeg 2002, p. 16.

27 Barker, George: *Forty Years a Chief*. Peguis Publishers Limited: Winnipeg 1979, pp. 58–64.

28 Barker 1979: p. 62, Deutch 2010: p. 18.

now being used as the basis for land use planning, promise to be ‘an enduring source of local contention.’<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of their limitations, registered trap lines approximate Anishinaabeg ideas about family hunting grounds, *endawenjigeng*. They also reflect a traditional seasonal round first recorded by Hallowell in the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> He found that gatherings of more than 200 people could be found at good fishing sites in summer, but that in the winter, these groups broke up and ranged over a very wide territory. He counted 32 independent winter hunting groups on the upper Berens River, with an average of 16 members in each group moving three or four times through the fall, winter and spring.<sup>31</sup> This movement was patterned on the presence of large game animals, fur-bearing animals and fishing opportunities. In following this round, hunters did not stray far from territory they knew well. In spite of their reputation as wanderers, as Hugh Brody has pointed out, hunter-gatherers are inherently ‘geographically conservative.’<sup>32</sup> Their material well-being, he argues, depends on familiarity with the environment. ‘Given that success in hunting and gathering depends on a detailed knowledge of specific territory, and that the resources of this territory are shared among all its harvesters, geographical conservatism is intrinsic to hunter-gatherer [economic and spiritual] systems. They are in their idea of paradise. To go elsewhere is to face extreme risks.’<sup>33</sup>

As part of preparing this World Heritage Site bid, the communities have made new maps of their historic hunting territories, work which brings together their own experiences and stories about spaces and places with their knowledge of bureaucratic structures like registered trap lines. As we have written elsewhere Matthews and Roulette, property law does not provide an appropriate paradigm for Ojibwe understandings of land titles.<sup>34</sup> While ownership rights to hunt and trap in particular areas are asserted and defended in terms of *dibendan*, to own something (inanimate), or *dibenim*, to own someone (animate) (like game), the idea of making one’s claim known, *naametwawin* (from the regular verb *naameto*, [verb animate

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29 Hamilton, Scott: ‘Recent Aboriginal History in Pimachiowin Aki’. Discussion Papers for the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site proposal. 2010, p. 27. See also Deutch 2010.

30 See Petch, Virginia: ‘Cultural Landscape: Macro Scale Document’. Manitoba Discussion Papers for the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site proposal. 2010, p. 12.

31 Hallowell 1992: p. 45.

32 Brody, Hugh: *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers and the Shaping of the World*. Douglas and McIntyre Ltd.: Vancouver 2000, p. 119.

33 Brody 2000: p. 119.

34 Matthews/Roulette 2010b.

intransitive (vai)] to make a presence known), applies to both people and other entities who may have superior rights. The names of places in the Pimachiowin Aki region reflect this Ojibwe reality. References to spirits with these kinds of superior claims, *manidoo*, are everywhere, as a map of the Pauingassi area shows.<sup>35</sup> Within 20 miles, there are many references to the presence of various spirits, and there are named sites made important by the ceremonial or magical events which took place there. These places are thought of as “owned” by ceremonial institutions or sponsoring spirit entities. Brown mentions the names of rapids on the Berens River which bear the names of spirits, including *Mishubizhu*, the underwater lynx.<sup>36</sup> Even places with anglicised names still have spirit connections; Weaver Lake near Poplar River has an older Ojibwe name, *Binesiwaabiko-zaaga’igan*, Thunderbird Rock Lake, because of the giant Thunderbird nest on a nearby cliff.

Any given trap line will include some of these sites, claimed by spirits through their memorable acts or remembered as the scenes of legendary events; rather like the Euro-American idea of mineral rights, Ojibwe land claims coexist in multiple layers. It follows that if there are multiple claims being recognised in a particular landscape that Anishinaabe claims regarding personal land ownership/use rights will necessarily be conditional. Allowing for the occupation and prior claims of the spirit entities upon whom the Ojibwe depend and who share with them what Hallowell identified as the ‘unified spatio-temporal sphere’<sup>37</sup>, means that the familiar geography shared by people and spirit entities is a crowded space full of overlapping spatial ownership claims within a shared geography.

One of the most distinctive features of Anishinaabeg cultural ecology is a rejection of the dichotomy between man and nature in favour of an extension of the category “person” to include many entities normally thought to belong to “nature”. These concepts are embedded in the Anishinaabe language, which is predominant in the area. Pimachiowin Aki is home to approximately one fifth of these Anishinaabemowin speakers (5,000).<sup>38</sup> Within the Pimachiowin Aki region, the cultural landscape which these people are intending to preserve is one which is expressed, imagined and lived in Anishinaabemowin. It is the one of the principal strengths of the UNESCO bid that this ancient language is in vibrant

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35 Matthews/Roulette/Valentine 2010: p. 31.

36 Brown, Jennifer S. H.: ‘A. Irving Hallowell on the Berens River in the 1930s: Culture and Experience in Pimachiowin Aki’. Discussion Papers for the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site proposal. 2010, p. 7.

37 Hallowell, A. Irving: *Contributions to Anthropology: Selected Papers of A. Irving Hallowell*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1976, p. 486.

38 Matthews/Roulette/Valentine 2010: p. 4.

everyday use. Historic world views are maintained by the linguistic proficiency of the Anishinaabeg of this region. Relevant ecological and cultural concepts about the contemporary natural world are currently being interrogated by deft speakers of Anishinaabemowin who have initiated this World Heritage project as part of their engagement with political modernity.

The grammatical structure of Anishinaabemowin with its compulsory assignment of animate or inanimate status has implications for the conceptualisation of the Ojibwe world, as we have written in collaboration with Rand Valentine (2010). We observe that while grammatical animacy does not mean that stones (*asiinig*), for instance, which are grammatically animate, are categorical persons or will act in the world; it opens a door to the possibility that they could. There are, in fact, stones with just such a reputation, but not all stones are expected to behave in this remarkable way. The animate class in Ojibwe includes many entities which are conventionally thought to be animate – humans, animals and many plants – but it also includes a class of entities known as ‘other-than-human persons’<sup>39</sup> which includes dream visitors (*bawaaganag*), the spirits of the dead (*djibayaag*), and legendary ancestors (*aadizookaanag*). These three types of entities are not just grammatically animate, but are consistently treated in conversation and in terms of social protocol as if they were alive. They are often referred to as ancestors or grandparents and their feelings toward their human charges are so affectionate that speakers use the Ojibwe verb *zhawenim*, to cherish someone, to describe the relationship. It is such a close relationship that elders also use an Ojibwe expression, a euphemism for pregnancy, *gigishkaw* (verb animate), to settle in one’s body.<sup>40</sup> The role of the *aadizookaanag* is to look after the Anishinaabeg, and their help is sought in dreams and vision quests. They live in the parallel spatio-temporal sphere mentioned above, which can be accessed in dreams. The barrier between the here and now and the interactive (but normally inaccessible) world in which these spirits are said to live is sometimes perceptible as mist. The name of the province of Manitoba refers to this ephemeral demarcation. Roger Roulette translates the word Manitoba (*manidoobaa*) as ‘where the spirits exist’ and explains that it refers to the morning mist on lakes and rivers signifying the presence of spirits while it hides them from sight.

The easy attribution of animacy is not the only relevant feature of Anishinaabemowin; it is a type of language known as “agglutinative”. This means that words are modified and meanings constructed by adding multiple suffixes and

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39 Hallowell quoted in Brown 2010: p. 12.

40 Matthews/Roulette, 2010a, p. 14.



prefixes to a root verb. Whereas, in English, the genius of the language is said to be that there are an infinite number of possible sentences, speakers of Ojibwe have an essentially unlimited capacity to coin new terms. The renowned linguist and anthropologist Edward Sapir said of Algonquian languages, '[s]ingle Algonkin words are like tiny imagist poems'. He went on to say, '[w]e must be careful not to exaggerate a freshness of content that is at least half due to our freshness of approach, but the possibility is indicated none the less of utterly alien literary styles, each distinctive with its disclosure of the search of the human spirit for beautiful form'.<sup>41</sup>

The speakers in this region have at their disposal an extraordinary Ojibwe vocabulary for articulating an Ojibwe world view. The elderly readily debate points of philosophy and explore the metaphysics of life in the language, and all hunters have an enormous and nuanced vocabulary associated with the natural world. The prodigious vocabulary of the Inuit for talking about snow conditions is matched by the snow-related vocabulary of the Ojibwe, and the Ojibwe facility for describing and identifying aspects of the environment applies equally to flora and fauna, geography and mapping. The Ojibwe language used by elders reflects the precision of their biological knowledge and is informed by the broader Ojibwe world view.<sup>42</sup>

The cultural patterns which typify this Anishinaabemowin inflected world have remained strong, in spite of sporadic fur trade activity for over 200 years. A persistent cosmological ontology has retained relevance in the Pimachiowin Aki region. A cosmology is an account of the phenomenal world as an ordered whole in space and time. It includes behavioural and moral protocols which shape ecological relations with persons, animals, plants and the weather and provides explanations about power and fate which frame experience of the social and the natural world; in the instance of Anishinaabe cosmology, there is an extension of the category "persons" to include entities which are, in Western society, thought to be part of the natural world, thus destabilising conventional scientific distinctions between social and physical worlds.

One of the features of cultural communities is that within any given culture, there are ideas about life and the world which are taken completely for granted by practically everyone and there are also contested ideas which are subject to debate. Speakers of Anishinaabemowin have a conceptual framework which enables them to make this distinction between inarguable facts (*gikendamaa'igooziwin*), and

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41 Sapir, Edward: *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. Harcourt Brace and Company: New York 1921, p. 244.

42 Matthews/Roulette 2010b.

contested ideas (*waabanda'igoziwin*)<sup>43</sup>, and the Ojibwe are well known for their sceptical and rigorously empirical approach to the world.<sup>44</sup> There are two caveats which emerge from the academic discussion of Ojibwe cosmology and ecology. The first is that, although Ojibwe cosmology differs from a contemporary scientific understanding of the world, the Anishinaabeg are not, as Michael Jackson reminds us, participating in a form of collective “false consciousness”. There is an internal culturally-ordered logic which underlies their understanding of the world and these ideas are constantly subject to manipulation and open to change because they are grounded in the everyday experience of people.<sup>45</sup> The second caveat is that examining cosmologies is a comparative mode, an outsider’s view, and especially when it comes to examining relations with the natural world, it is often tempting to frame the comparison in terms of historic aboriginal ethnosciences versus modern science. As Andrews and Buggey remind us, quoting Melford Spiro, ‘all science is ethnoscience. Hence, since modern science is Western science, its truth claims (and canons of proof) are no less culturally relative than those of any other ethnoscience.’<sup>46</sup> This has important implications for discussing cosmology and for asserting cultural and ecological “authenticity”, a requirement of the World Heritage Site process.

It is very hard to do justice to the Ojibwe ethnoscientific model, but one of the key ideas is the attribution of animacy to objects in the natural world and the extension of the social category of persons to include objects normally considered part of nature, like stones (*asiniig*), as well as legendary beings or ancestors (*aadi-zookaanag*), like *binesiiwag*, Thunderbirds. For northern Algonquian speakers, legendary beings and the spirits which control the natural world are not confined to the other or an ancient world, and their revelations are ongoing. Such beings appear in dreams and visions, and through metamorphosis, they may take on a

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43 *Gikendamaa'igoziwin* is literally ‘the knowledge which is made known to you by the divine.’ These are ideas that are accepted without question whereas *waabanda'igoziwin* is knowledge that is ‘shown to you’, it may be personal, possibly uniquely personal. These later ideas may not apply to others and since it is considered possible that even a dream spirit may be duplicitous, it is almost an obligation to be sceptical, to wait and see how events transpire. Roulette, Roger: Personal Communication. May 2010.

44 Hallowell, A. Irving: ‘Some Empirical Aspects of Northern Sauteaux Religion’. *American Anthropologist* N. S. 38 (1), 1934, pp. 32–51.

45 Jackson, Michael: *Paths toward a clearing: Radical empiricism and ethnographic inquiry*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1989, p. 66.

46 Andrews, Thomas D./Buggey, Susan: ‘Authenticity in Aboriginal Cultural Landscapes’. *Association for Preservation Technology International Bulletin* 39 (2/3), 2008, p. 11.

variety of human, animal, and other forms in real-life encounters. Since they participate in the social and mental life of ordinary human beings, they are thought of as persons and classificatory relatives.

This is one of the essential features of Ojibwe cosmology – the association of power with metamorphosis. All of the entities described as *aadizookaanag* can change their appearance at will. An unusually confident fox might be a human spy, a too handsome man might be the beaver spirit looking for a wife among mortals, a too familiar bird is presumed to be a relative visiting from the land of the dead. In *Naamiwan's Drum: The Story of Contested Anishinaabe Repatriation*, Matthews presents the story of the Pauingassi medicine man, Naamiwan, who took on the form and attributes of a wolverine to bring his grandson back from the land of the dead.<sup>47</sup> As a result of this presumption about metamorphosis, Ojibwe speakers are often surprisingly conditional even when describing events they have witnessed first-hand. The possibility that they may have encountered dream spirits, says Brightman,

lends a quality of indeterminacy and potentiality to everyday life; seemingly ordinary events and encounters may turn out to be quite otherwise. Familiar entities animate or inanimate (stones, for example) may prove to have surprising properties. It is unwise to make up one's mind too soon about any object of perception; it may have hidden attributes and could later reveal itself to be quite different. Patience and the suspension of a too-ready belief or decision about what one is perceiving are appropriate tactics in these situations of "percept ambiguity" as Mary Black-Rogers has termed them.<sup>48</sup>

This state of 'percept ambiguity' is aptly expressed by the Ojibwe word, *obagasedamowinish*, 'what he/she expects may not be reliable'.<sup>49</sup> As Ingold points out, this is an extremely useful mode for hunters who must constantly adjust to a changing environment, and it is a very useful one as well in conceiving and responding to the effects of global warming in a fragile ecosystem. It is a mode which derives from Ojibwe cosmology with its overlap of the social and the natural worlds, and it has important implications. Ingold has observed that in this regard, the Ojibwe self is "relational".

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47 Matthews 2016, pp. 45–6.

48 Brown/Brightman 1988, p. 120.

49 This word is related to others which explore the idea of taking things for granted. *Odaabidawinendaan* means that he/she believes there will always be the same outcome, i.e. that things will be predictable. *Onitaa-onwaataan* means that he/she believes he/she will predict an outcome. The implication is that they have sufficient power to guarantee a particular result, but there is also always the possibility that this is mere bravado and they may be mistaken. Roulette, Roger: Personal Communication, May 2010.

The Ojibwa model of the person [...] does not posit the self in advance of the person's entry into the world; rather, the self is constituted as a centre of agency and awareness in the process of its active engagement within an environment. Feeling, remembering, intending and speaking are all aspects of that engagement, and through it the self continually comes into being.<sup>50</sup>

Ingold says that through this mode of 'being *in* the world ... what the Ojibwa have arrived at is not an alternative science of nature but a poetics of dwelling. Far from having been superseded, in the West, by the rise of modern science, such poetics is the necessary ground for all scientific activity'.<sup>51</sup> Ingold's 'dwelling' perspective, which grew out of his understanding of the Ojibwe way of being in the world (via Hallowell), has been extremely influential in helping to understand the ecological relations of subarctic peoples and in the course of making his theoretical arguments, Ingold, a leading British anthropologist, has made the Ojibwe and Hallowell moderately famous.

## Conclusion

The fragility of this Anishinaabe cosmology is evident. It is difficult to ignore the negating frame of contemporary scientific perceptions. This is why the spirit entities, the *aadizookaanag*, who populate Anishinaabe cosmology, although they account for nearly every Ojibwe place name in the region and are the source of so much Ojibwe health and happiness, are vulnerable where the language is vulnerable. They have little force in urban situations, and where contemporary political confrontations are being played out. They still animate moral arguments among Ojibwe people, reinforce teaching and provide guidance in dreams, but they are not deployed politically in negotiations with the larger Canadian and international community and their social role among the Anishinaabe is not generally known. They are nevertheless an essential part of the Ojibwe experience of Pimachiowin Aki and offer a critical way of looking at the world which has some lessons for us all. Careful continuous observation, relative comfort with 'percept ambiguity', tentative conclusions confirmed as events transpire and an openness to the

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50 Ingold, Timothy: *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. Routledge: London 2000, p. 103.

51 Ingold 2000: p. 11. Poetics in this instance has to do with authenticity of experience and includes the practice of timely and considered reflection on experience as it happens (Dening 1996, pp. 35–6). In the quotation, Ingold uses Hallowell's spelling for Ojibwa. In the chapter, the more contemporary spelling Ojibwe is used.

possibilities of the natural world, a ‘poetics of living’ as Ingold has called it, is a gift Ojibwe cosmology offers to the world.

In Anishinaabemowin conversation, the cosmological understandings of obligations and protocol related to the *aadizookaanag* are intact. In a political sphere and among well-educated younger people, scientific concepts such as global warming are also well understood. Those with a sense of the history of the region will be aware of several ecological near misses, when extirpations were narrowly averted or when the environment took many decades to recover from a pointed assault. In making the case for a world heritage designation to a Euro-American audience versed in ecological science, all of these understandings are being evoked and all will guide the Anishinaabeg who assemble to decide on the future of the Pimachiowin Aki region. The older Anishinaabe cosmological understandings may take a back seat in political situations, but they are the key values that the people seek to preserve. Ecological ideas and sustainable economic projects exist elsewhere; what the Anishinaabeg want to preserve is the heartland of a unique and endangered cosmology where Ingold’s ‘poetics of dwelling’ is an everyday practice. This is the utopia to which Anishinaabe residents of Pimachiowin Aki aspire.

In this Hallowell would agree.

A bit of tobacco left in a tiny hole when a medicinal plant is gathered, the response Fair Wind made when he thought the Thunder Bird had spoken to him, the hanging of a skull of a slain animal in the branch of a tree; all these offer behavioural testimony to the existence of other than human persons and man’s dependence upon them.<sup>52</sup>

This understanding is still in evidence. When Sophia Rabliauskas<sup>53</sup> father returned from the bush he would often use a very common idiomatic Ojibwe expression. He would say, “*Giiyaabi nametwoowag anishinaabeg akiing*. They are still making an impression on the land, the ancient *Anishinaabeg*”, a reference to the legendary ancestors, *aadizookaanag*. These are the other-than-human persons whose presence can still be felt in the bush and to whom the Anishinaabeg are indebted for the gift of a good life, *bimaadiziwin*.

A measure of this good life, *bimaadiziwin*, is to be found in the strength of the Ojibwe language, the tenacity of cultural practices and understandings, and in their expert traditional ecological knowledge and successful customary land tenure. The Anishinaabeg cultural landscape shows continuity and resilience, while remaining vulnerable to irreversible change from outside social, economic, and

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52 Hallowell 1992: p. 81, also in Brown 2010: p. 16.

53 Sophia Rabliauskas is a member of the Poplar River First Nation and is employed by the Pimachiowin Aki Corp. as Community Coordinator.

political forces. The Anishinaabeg people show creativity and resolve in the face of social change and economic pressures. This World Heritage Site bid is their expression of an achievable Anishinaabe utopia, where the future will be theirs to shape, where the lessons and concepts of the past may be applied creatively in the future to preserve both a uniquely Anishinaabeg cultural landscape and a landscape which is a model of ecological foresight and wisdom.

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Francesco Meli

# Euro-American Utopia and Native American Ethics: A Comparison<sup>1</sup>

No-one can call himself conqueror unless the conquered admits defeat.

Quintus Ennius, *The Annals*

**Abstract:** America was not merely discovered and conquered, it was invented through a particular and precise narrative that struggled to infuse it with a mythical and symbolic ethos. From this springs the obstinate conviction of the Western hemisphere's unique destiny. America was neither seen nor represented as just another continent, similar to all the other known continents. The decisive element, both physical and symbolic, in its being attributed a quasi-messianic-utopian character derived from the association of the land with the concept of *wilderness*. The puritan worldview, matrix of American culture, focuses on the risks lying in wait for the soul: wilderness, the wild and desolate waste, is the arena where the Christian must face the struggle of his internal conflict and where he, therefore, is in danger of going astray. From the very beginning, however, the term itself presented an intrinsic ambiguity: it was a space fraught with dangers, and it was the primordial space, the pristine fruit of creation, still uncontaminated by man, hence invested with the sacred power of the Garden of Eden. This polarity gives rise to two, apparently opposite, visions of America, which are, in reality, interconnected. This chapter looks at the colonial imagination of the New World as an inextricable paradox, which held the promise of what men and women had always desired and, at the same time, the means to wipe out the best of what they had already accomplished. In contrast, the native vision of the "ethics of the land" points out several contradictions linked to what we could call an "ecological vision". Although no single vision exists, there does exist a common ethos, a sort of respect for all the life forms present in a particular space, which characterises the native vision. This chapter sets the European colonial vision against the native by referring to some native American texts.

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America was not merely "discovered" and conquered, it was "invented" through a particular and precise narration that struggled to infuse it with a mythical and

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1 The author wishes to thank Loraine Willis for the translation of this chapter.

symbolical ethos. From this springs the obstinate conviction of the Western hemisphere's unique destiny. America was neither seen nor represented as just another continent, similar to all the other known continents.<sup>2</sup> The decisive element, both physical and symbolic, in its being attributed a quasi-messianic-utopian character derived from the association of the land with the concept of *wilderness*. The puritan worldview, matrix of American culture, focuses on the risks lying in wait for the soul: wilderness, the wild and desolate waste, is the arena where the Christian must face the struggle of his internal conflict and where he, therefore, is in danger of going astray.<sup>3</sup>

From the very beginning, however, the term itself presented an intrinsic ambiguity: on the one hand, it was a space fraught with dangers and difficulties where the individual could count only on his own inner strength. On the other hand, it was the primordial space, the pristine fruit of creation, still uncontaminated by man, hence invested with the sacred power of the Garden of Eden. This polarity gives rise to two, apparently opposite, visions of America, which are, in reality, interconnected.<sup>4</sup>

William Bradford's account of the crossing of the Mayflower refers to that which lies on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean as a 'hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men.'<sup>5</sup> The ocean crossing, highly dangerous and frightening in itself, represents a clear separation from the "civilised" part of the world. Bradford's first glimpse of American soil brings to his mind a checklist of desirable and indispensable signs of civilisation ("friends" offering a warm welcome, inns providing food and drink, houses offering shelter and help, and so on) which, instead, do not exist in the wild place before him. America, in Bradford's eyes, is a land of hardship, suffering and danger.

In his description of Virginia, Sir Walter Raleigh, instead, adopted a metaphor, which was to become a cardinal point in the imagination of the country, 'an immense garden of incredible abundance' (Raleigh quoted in Marx 1964: p. 37): America as a Garden of Eden, a place inducing a simple and natural way of life, associated with the idea of Arcadia. Furthermore, the "simplicity" of the natives,

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2 See Bercovitch, Sacvan: *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. Yale University Press: New Haven 1975.

3 See Nash, Roderick: *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 1967; and Oelschlaeger, Max: *The Idea of Wilderness*. Yale University Press: New Haven 1991.

4 Marx, Leo: *The Machine in the Garden*. Oxford University Press: New York 1964.

5 Bradford, William: *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York [1856, 1912 final authorised version of the text] 2002, p. 62.

typical of the state of nature, produced a relatively modest impact on the environment and thus appeared to confirm the idea that the New World reflected a primordial condition. This was part of a utopian vision, initiated by Virgil in the Old World, which saw the rural, pastoral environment as the best possible condition for man: an ideal used to define the very meaning of America. This ideal has never really lost its momentum or imaginative suggestion.

However much these two early visions of America – wilderness and/or Garden of Eden – may appear contradictory, together they laid the basis for the effective and symbolic *flowering* of the country. This flowering of the land was to become the primary objective of the New World “mission.” The Puritans took upon themselves the heavy and exceptional task of carrying out this mission, with the aim of thus advancing Western history. Within an imposing framework of regeneration and rebirth, America thus came to take on the characteristics of a Promised Land, a place where utopia was feasible. A fascinating interweaving of reality and rhetoric took place, whereby the facts and the interpretation of these facts or events became one and the same thing. The Promised Land, however, was not a gift simply handed out to one and all, it had to be won through hard work, steadiness and sobriety. The two images of America reflect two different ways of relating to the environment, which are, therefore, complementary. Both, in fact, represent a value system, which embodies and assigns to America a notion of destiny and a specific social ideal.

Envisioning the New World as a Garden of Eden meant celebrating an ideal of immediate fulfilment, far removed from the complex and artificial process of civilisation. It was an expression of the utopian aspirations of abundance, freedom and harmony. Envisioning America, on the other hand, as a frightening wilderness signified prefiguring another arena for the affirmation of both the individual and the community. Images of uncontrollable, dark and dangerous forces made it imperative for the community to rally, to defend itself and attack, following a common plan. The colonies founded by the Puritans, therefore, imposed control, discipline and aggressiveness as the necessary means to face the dangers, which, they feared, could destroy them as civilised beings. It is, consequently, not surprising that the New England Puritans favoured the image of American soil as a horrendous and intimidating wilderness.<sup>6</sup>

These two conceptions offer few real clues as to the actual topography of the continent. They are in no way precise or exact representations but, rather, metaphors, imaginative constructs, narrations dense with meaning well beyond the

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6 See Marx 1964.

real facts. Nonetheless, because they are powerful metaphors, they have a base in reality. We could say that America was neither an Eden nor a land of terrifying desolation; or that, better still, in a certain sense, it was both Eden and howling wilderness. The actual conditions of life in the New World would fit either of the two images. Its apparently limitless resources, as seen against the inevitable scarcity of the Old World left behind, made the dream of a harmonious and satisfying life possible. However, its enormous spaces, so far beyond anything ever encountered, its natives seen as wild children of the devil and its extreme and harsh climate all presented a serious threat to the survival of civilisation itself.

The New World, therefore, presented an inextricable paradox: it held the promise of what men and women had always desired and, at the same time, the means to wipe out the best of what they had already accomplished. The early vision of America swung between a progressive impulse towards the best of utopias and a regressive pull, which threatened to drag the individual back to a primordial era. Both high and low American culture believed that it was possible to combine ongoing expansion into the wilderness while, at the same time, preserving cultural models and life styles that were more simple and natural than those of the hyper-civilised and decadent Old World.

Over time, however, the new nation's "mission" acquired an increasingly secular emphasis. The means adopted became more violent, fed by a rampant acquisitive drive based on the myth that available resources were infinite. The colonists had no doubts about the total availability and abundance of the land: more, so much more, than a European could ever imagine. The men of culture and religion, largely exponents of the Protestant reform, were soon joined by exiles, who were ready to use any means available in their search for the immediate advantages accrued by the exploitation of both human and natural resources. They were fugitives from both injustice and justice. Some fled from poverty, from the injustice of their low status in society, but some escaped justice by leaving England forever to distant colonies as a form of compensation for their crimes.

The travel logs and diaries of explorers spurred curiosity and the desire to reach the new American colonies. The various reports and descriptions tended to stress the positive aspects of the American scene: its uncontaminated nature, fertile land and enormous spaces open to all and everyone, irrespective of social status. In other words, what was offered to incredulous Europeans was a form of propaganda, linking the transatlantic crossing to the image of America as the New Eden. The ever-increasing numbers of new arrivals led to the ongoing development of settlements westwards. This gave rise to a "moving frontier", which signalled the meeting point of civilisation and wilderness, creating an evident paradox. The colonists

became the outpost of the civilisation they had left behind when they abandoned the Old World. This meant suppressing their aspirations for independence and freedom, but also the inexorable disappearance of the wilderness.

At this point, around the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first voices rose in defence of the preservation of what remained of the wilderness. The most famous and qualified of these is that of Henry David Thoreau. He laid the basis for what is now termed environmentalism, following in the footsteps of Sir Walter Raleigh, not those of William Bradford. In fact, the *wilderness* came to be seen as a priceless asset rather than a threatening and savage land, as it stripped “civilised” man of all that was superfluous and artificial. This led the way to a closer relationship with all that was original, primordial and essential. Both Emerson and Thoreau maintained that since America had no history, it was a land where elementary questions could be addressed.<sup>7</sup>

The constant move west was a determining factor in forging the spirit of the nation. On the one hand, it was a source of new virtues – independence, courage, skill, ingenuity – and, on the other hand, it fostered progressive cultural/spiritual impoverishment and a high level of violence involving both colonists and natives.<sup>8</sup> It also had grave consequences on people’s relationship with the environment. This aspect of extreme mobility meant that the urge to be rooted in a place became short-lived and ephemeral. This rootlessness implied a sort of divorce from the surrounding space. Feeling that he was only “passing through”, the colonist felt that he only had limited and temporary responsibilities, linked to predatory utilitarianism.

We must now turn to a basic question that arose on the arrival of the Mayflower. Seen either as frightening wilderness or reassuring Arcadia, America placed the Europeans in a stance of confrontation with the native peoples. It was of extreme cultural importance that, from the very beginning, the Puritans took for themselves the name of the entire continent. Only they were, at first, Americans, though the term was later to include (even if in hyphenated form) all immigrants of European origin. They never extended it to the original inhabitants of the land they were occupying. This was a significant negation, as it failed to take into account an essential fact which, in itself, marks a starting point for entry into the native world.

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7 See Botkin, Daniel B.: *No Man’s Garden: Thoreau and a New Vision for Civilization and Nature*. Island Press: Washington 2000; and Buell, Lawrence: *The Environmental Imagination – Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA 1995.

8 See Slotkin, Richard: *Regeneration through Violence*. Wesleyan University Press: Middletown, Conn. 1973.

That is to say, the land itself was, and continues to be, crucial for both the cultural and physical survival of this world.

Let us now consider for a moment the salient characteristics of the native vision of the land and, in particular, one intrinsic element of native identity, namely the ethics of the land. This brings us up against several contradictions and paradoxes linked to what we could call an “ecological vision”. Although no single vision exists, there does exist a common ethos. This is a sort of respect for all the life forms present in a particular space. The sense of place is found in the linguistic terms adopted in native oral narratives and ceremonies: that is to say, in all those cultural expressions, which strengthen identity. As Vine Deloria says, the Natives felt that it was their duty to protect and defend their lands, their ancestors’ burial sites and the sacred places where they communicated with the Great Spirit (amongst others Mount Graham in Arizona, the Black Hills in South Dakota, Taos Blue Lake in New Mexico). This was because without these ancestral spaces their physical survival and identity was not possible.<sup>9</sup>

Collective identity sprang from a vision, which implied union, the kinship between human and all other living beings. Consequently, their belonging was not only to the human community, but also to a larger community, which we could term universal or cosmic. This gave rise to a sense of responsibility, reciprocity and interaction. Animals, minerals and plants, were considered living creatures, members of a natural order that had to be preserved. Being custodians of the native lands implies, even today, upholding an ethical vision, which invests all living forms with the status of other peoples. In fact, native ceremonialism includes and invokes every living being as an active and present participant in the rituals, thereby recognising the wholeness and indivisibility of creation.

We could say that this is simply in line with environmental conservation, without capturing its distinctive ethical trait. A true ethics of the land, born of a spiritual investment in a specific space entails responsibility towards the land as also towards the people who live there. Environmentalism dissociated from spiritual understanding of the interconnection of all living forms results in being a sublimated form of the very culture that has brought about and promoted the profanation of the land itself. At best, it is merely a sterile tribute to a mode of political correctness, dictated by passing interests and fashions.<sup>10</sup>

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9 Deloria, Vine Jr.: *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*. Routledge: New York 1999.

10 See Deloria 1999.

The centrality of this interconnectedness between the native world and those strips of land that still remain of their original homelands, known as reservations, is confirmed by contemporary native literature. *House Made of Dawn* by Navarre Scott Momaday is rightly considered the masterpiece of the so-called Indian Renaissance, which, from the 60s on, has made headway in the American literary panorama.<sup>11</sup> The novel narrates the various stages in the life of the young protagonist Abel, as he struggles to survive outside the centre of his world, the Jemez Pueblo (Walatowa) in New Mexico. Notwithstanding the long series of alienating and destructive experiences he undergoes, his original centre is never totally lost. It remains in his memory, even though he has to make it re-emerge. The novel ends on a note of potentiality rather than one of certainty. The protagonist has gained awareness: the “home” he has recovered is crucial to his survival. It is clear that the return to a world whose origins and destiny he shares, leads the way to a future and redeems the tragic fate of a final annihilation.<sup>12</sup>

In *The Death of Jim Loney* by James Welch, “home” is such a determining factor for the protagonist that, even in the face of various attempts to persuade him otherwise, he never abandons it.<sup>13</sup> Orchestrating his own demise, he decides to die at home, in the highest point attainable, that is, in a space where it is still possible for something to happen, whereas nowhere else would this be possible. He chooses the way of a contemporary warrior, thus transfiguring his own end into a ritual act. The theme of returning home is central to all the major works of the Native Renaissance where it symbolises the sense of connection/belonging to tradition, which, however much beleaguered, remains the only possible means of leaving behind the hostile and alienating reality looming over both reservation borders and metropolitan ghettos.

In Leslie M. Silko’s *Ceremony*, the deep-rooted ties between the native world and the “land/home” concept are portrayed in the image of a spider’s web where the pattern of the web traces the perfect equilibrium of reciprocal tensions.<sup>14</sup> Ceremonialism is an essential factor, as it both creates and reinforces the sense of native identity. It thus has a therapeutic function in articulating and affirming their sense of Indian-ness which, for centuries, has been under attack to the point of near-extinction. Only in the context of home is it possible to find the strength

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11 Momaday, N. Scott: *House Made of Dawn*. Harper & Row: New York 1966.

12 Meli, Francesco: ‘Images of the Sacred in Native North American Literature’. In: Sullivan, Lawrence E. (ed.): *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*. Continuum: New York 2000, pp. 208–38.

13 Welch, James: *The Death of Jim Loney*. Penguin Books: New York 1987.

14 Silko, Leslie M.: *Ceremony*. Viking Press: New York 1977.

to go on. McMaster leaves no doubts as to this: ‘The land represents the spiritual, historic and physical connection which gives Native peoples their identity’.<sup>15</sup> Momaday also confirms this: ‘[T]he Native lives *with* the continent and not simply *on* the continent’.<sup>16</sup> Whereas Deloria is even more radical, posing an irrefutable distinction: The Native still has spiritual possession of the American land, while the Euro-American *only* has juridical possession, derived from violence and deceit.

A less evident form of deceit, and perhaps for that very reason more insidious and injurious, is the legislation in the environmental sphere. It is clearly not enough simply to guarantee an abstract principle of “religious freedom” to the Natives. In order to enact this right, which already exists within the legislation, it is of the utmost importance to be able to do so in those specific spaces/places historically considered sacred. Apart from ever-increasing development pressures, the norms and regulations of state and federal agencies tend to restrict access to sacred lands, making it particularly difficult, often very nearly impossible, for traditionalists to carry out their ceremonies and rituals. It is a tragic irony that the promulgation of laws aimed at protecting the environment (The Wilderness Act of 1964, The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, The National Environmental Protection Act of 1970) has resulted in excluding, or making it more difficult, for Natives to practice their religion. This derives from the attempt to pander to a generic environmental trend, popular, above all, amongst urban elites, or self-defined “greens”, who would like to experiment with the wilderness for limited periods. It has paved the way to a growing business based on an economy linked to tourism structures and services, which inevitably leads to the elimination or degeneration of those minimal conditions whereby a space may be determined *wild*.

If the wilderness has been under attack for centuries as a terrifyingly dangerous place that needed to be eradicated, its destruction now continues out of an “excess of love” that may prove fatal. It is evident that America finds it difficult to own up to a simple truth: the most trustworthy guardians of the American soil are, in fact, the native peoples. It is, furthermore, time to acknowledge the fact that native spirituality from Thoreau onwards – Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, Gary Snyder and many others – has influenced and fascinated the noble fathers of American ecology, as we know it today.<sup>17</sup> We should note, finally, that questions concerning the preservation of native spaces need to be extended to the animal

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15 McMaster, Gerald: *Edward Poitras*, Canadian Museum of Civilization: Hull, Quebec 1995, pp. 86–7.

16 Momaday, N. Scott: ‘A First American Views His Land’ in: *National Geographic*, 150 (1), 1976, p. 18. Italics in the original.

17 See Nash 1967.



species which inhabit these spaces, and which currently face extinction. Amongst many others, a glaring case is that of salmon, which involves the native population of the northwest territories, on the northern Pacific coast.

The treaties stipulated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century stated that, in exchange for vast territories, namely the major part of the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana, the native peoples were guaranteed modest reservations but, above all, the rights to fish 'in their usual and accustomed fishing grounds' outside these reservations. The populations concerned depended on salmon fishing as the cornerstone of their subsistence and culture. These Natives have tried, in every way, to maintain their traditional modes of fishing in the face of the enormous changes taking place in the whole area. Masses of Euro-Americans have continued to occupy ever-larger territories, and as the numbers of colonists increased, so the quantity of salmon decreased.

Industries were set up for the preservation, canning and shipping of the salmon to the big cities. Logs needed for the timber industry were floated down the rivers. Dams were built and waterways deviated, thus radically changing the regular flow of the rivers. Agriculture demanded more and more water for irrigation. Pesticides and fertilisers were found in the waters. Mines also pumped water out of the rivers and then re-pumped it back in, full of toxic waste. Lastly, the urbanisation of the coast and the development of cities like Seattle and Tacoma, built on river estuaries, has meant further water loss. The enormous impact this has had on the interaction of the salmon's life cycle with the ecological conditions of its natural habitat is, clearly, inevitable. Each tampering with the environment has greatly affected the salmon's existence and its capacity to reproduce.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Natives fought legal battles in defence of their fishing rights. They strove to disentangle their way through federal and individual state legislation. The latter, in particular, insidiously discriminated against them, as it backed the interests of both intensive commercial fishing concerns and amateur weekend fishers. These often resorted to intimidation and outright violence in the attempt to demonstrate that they would never recognise Native fishing rights. Only in the last 10 or 20 years has a policy of 'localized site specific habitat restoration' been implemented. Once the dreadful conditions of the salmon's habitat were recognised, there was a move to restore a sort of parcelled-out habitat within the larger ecosystem. However, claims on the Endangered Species Act of 1973, plus local and institutional jurisdiction have largely limited the implementation of this parcelled-out reconstruction. Greater opportunities for reconstructing these habitats are more forthcoming in the public lands, in

the treaties stipulated with the Natives and, above all, in the centuries-old fishing practices of the latter.<sup>18</sup>

The conclusions to be drawn from the situation of an endangered species such as the salmon are much the same as those to be drawn from the condition of the so-called *wilderness*. The Endangered Species Act reflects the hypocrisy of the same culture that has backed and promoted the ruin of the salmon's habitat. Here also, no acknowledgement has been made of a simple truth: the true custodians of the salmon have always been, and still are, the native peoples. In fact, their vision rests on the concept that Lévy-Bruhl has defined as the logic of human and non-human participation.<sup>19</sup> The intrinsic holism of the native world, which derives from its ancient substratum of shamanism, could possibly be something that Western culture really needs.

Something of extreme importance, tending in this direction, occurred the day before the last International Water Day on 22 March 2017. The Supreme Court of Uttarakhand, a northern state of India, decreed that the Ganges River and its principal affluent, the Yamuna, were, from that date, to be considered as legal and living entities with a juridical status.<sup>20</sup> In other words, if a person causes damage to either river, this person is liable to prosecution and legal punishment, as if he or she had wounded or killed a human being. The judges cited the precedent of the New Zealand River Whanganui, sacred to the Maori who, after fighting in the courts since 1840, won their case and saw the full rights of their river recognised on 15 March of this year.

These unprecedented sentences have not received due attention from the media worldwide. Even though a vague echo of the above decrees may be traced in the recent appeals of various associations, unheeded to date, that juridical status should be applied to other living forms beyond that of human beings – namely

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18 Brown, Jovana J./Footen, Brian: *Pacific Northwest Salmon Habitat: The Culvert Case and the Power of Treaties*. Evergreen State College: Olympia, WA 2010, retrieved 15.06.2017 from <http://nativecases.evergreen.edu>.

19 Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien: *Primitive Mentality*. AMS Press: New York 1922.

20 'A First in India: Uttarakhand HC Declares Ganga, Yamuna Rivers As Living Legal Entities', retrieved 15.06.2017 from <http://www.livelaw.in/first-india-uttarakhand-hc-declares-ganga-yamuna-rivers-living-legal-entities/>; <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/uttarakhand-ganga-yamuna-holy-rivers-namami-gange/story/1/16312.html>; <https://townhall.com/news/politics-elections/2017/03/21/indian-court-gives-ganges-yamuna-same-rights-as-a-human-n2301928>; <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/uttarakhand-hc-declares-ganga-yamuna-living-entities-4579743/>; and <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4334454/India-grants-Ganges-Yamuna-legal-person-status.html?amp>.

dolphins, primates, rivers, forests, etc. A common path in this direction could save both native peoples and all other forms of life on the planet. This is, perhaps, the utopia towards which we should strive, keeping Max Weber's words in mind: you cannot attain what is possible unless you reach for the impossible.

A perspective and message of hope, which is more than ever necessary considering the immense catastrophe that the American utopia has brought upon the native peoples, African slaves and the entire ecosystem of the whole continent. This American utopia has been intolerant with other visions that do not conform to its own; it has not accepted geographies and histories that may be different from its narratives. America as the promised land has been the dominant utopia. It interprets other visions as potential dangers which may transform Eden into apocalypse. A utopia, therefore, which, in keeping with all forms of intolerance, has turned into dystopia. It must also be remembered that Thomas More's *Utopia*, in circulation five hundred years ago in an attempt to change the world, deals with a non-place, a utopia. It may be possible that the American experience turned into a dystopia because of its strong apocalyptic emphasis and the fact that it was limited to a single, specific space, which, in itself, is not viable for any form of utopia. The native vision was not utopian in itself. It was simply another vision that had to be welcomed and accepted. When environment protective laws were passed, it seemed that some sensibility had emerged regarding native geography and culture, but politics soon turned to support and spread around another powerful utopia, that of technological development and exploitation, business and economic profit. A complicity whose consequences are being revealed to a much greater extent than George Orwell's previsions about the overwhelming control over consensus by the dominant power.

Concluding, we should note the fact that Western culture today appears to shy clear of the concept of utopia. It feels the need but, all too often, holds back in a stance of politically correct resignation. Film directors and writers show great *finesse* in analysing and narrating the situation but seem unable to devise a way out of the deadlock. Politics has lost its way around the tension of ideals. At best, it limits itself to governing what already exists and to merely fulfilling the dictates of technocrats. The need, the nagging anxiety of the impossible has been erased. No one is even able any longer to come up with a new image of the world. No new Thomas More exists, who would be willing, symbolically, to risk his neck. The problem seems to have taken care of itself and the guillotine has fallen on all forms of utopia.

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## Utopian View: Thomas McKenney's Portfolio of American Indians

They came to McKenney's office from the vastness beyond the frontier and he escorted them to a succession of Great Fathers who listened, promised, and did nothing.

James D. Horan

**Abstract:** Thomas McKenney was born in 1785 in Maryland. He was a Quaker and his religion influenced his interactions with Native Americans. He started his career as a merchant and, after the abolishment of the U.S. Indian Trade program in 1822, had a position in the War Department as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, which became the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1824. McKenney was an advocate of the "civilisation" programme for Native Americans, and tried to defend their memory – when the project of deportation west of the Mississippi River started – with a series of portraits that he commissioned to authors like Charles Bird King, James Otto Lewis and John Cook. President Andrew Jackson, the major sponsor of the Indian Removal Act, dismissed McKenney from his position in 1830, disagreeing with his opinion that 'the Indian was, in his intellectual and moral structure, our equal'. McKenney's utopian view of a pacific world of colonists and Indians was put definitively aside. Certainly his utopia was colonial, but his view was able to preserve the memory of the vanishing Indians east of the Mississippi River. Before his discharge, McKenney announced plans for the portfolio of hand-colored lithographs 'with biographical sketches and anecdotes of the principal chiefs', while his collection of portraits, created at the expense of the War Department, was moved to the Smithsonian Institution, established in 1846, 'for the increase and diffusion of knowledge'. McKenney died in 1859, and his paintings burned in the Smithsonian Institution fire of 1865. *The History of the Indian Tribes of North America*, by Thomas McKenney and James Hall, which came out in three volumes between 1836 and 1844, is now considered a landmark of American ethnography, and one of the major American publications of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In these volumes McKenney was able to gather not only the original costumes but the souls of the Indians

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1 The author wishes to thank Claudia Gualtieri for her invitation to present the exhibition 'Dai Grandi Laghi alla Florida. La Galleria di Thomas McKenney e le origini del Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1816–1836' (From the Great Lakes to Florida: Thomas McKenney's Gallery and the Origins of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1816–1836) in the context of the conference 'Practicing Utopia in the Intercultural Present', University of Milan, 25–26 October 2016.

full of sadness for their lost world, and at the same time proud to be still alive to tell the readers their stories. McKenney's utopian view is faithful to these stories.

## The Great Dream

When I started thinking about an exhibition on Thomas McKenney's portfolio, I realised that the importance of his mission was to bring back the memory of the Indians for the future, not only in a historical way, but also in anthropological and cultural ways. It was clear to me that when he had realised the impossibility to preserve the real existence of the Indian tribes east of the Mississippi river – his original great dream – he resolved to preserve the memory of these men and women asking three different artists – Charles Bird King, James Otto Lewis and John Cook – to paint a portrait of the characters he considered important in the cultural history of the United States. This became similar to an obsession for McKenney, even when Congress started to investigate into the expenses for these paintings. Who would they be paid by? The American people? And why should the American people pay for them? A senator from Kentucky, Charles Anderson Wickliffe, questioned in 1828 why the government should pay 20 dollars for 'the likeness of an Indian woman'.<sup>2</sup> McKenney answered using the columns of the Washington *National Intelligencer*, writing on 22 May: 'It is true her likeness was taken. It hangs in the office of Indian Affairs with the rest, and preserving the female costume of the North West and is a fine portrait'.<sup>3</sup>

The story of the Chippewa girl named Tshusick was one of the many stories of the Indians who visited McKenney's office in the winter of 1827. She was a pretty woman, with black hair and dark eyes. She arrived one night in Georgetown, asking the tinsmith, Mr. Haller, if she could warm herself by his forge, explaining in broken English mixed with French how she had walked through the wilderness from Detroit. The tinsmith's apprentice was ordered to guide her to Weston, the McKenney estate on the Georgetown Heights. With tears in her eyes, Tshusick told McKenney how after the death of her husband she walked to Washington asking the Great Father who lived in the White House for protection 'until she was properly instructed and baptized'.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Horan, James D.: *The McKenney-Hall Portrait Gallery of American Indians*. Crown Publisher: New York 1972, p. 91.

3 Washington *National Intelligencer*, 22 May 1828, p. 1.

4 McKenney described the arrival of the Chippewa girl in an article for the Washington *National Intelligencer*, 21 May 1828, p. 1.



In the end, Tshusick proved to be a good dress designer. In a few hours she was able to make a colourful dress, and with McKenney, she went to Charles Bird King's studio where, for 20 dollars, a portrait was commissioned. While the Chippewa girl was posing for the painter, McKenney was able to tell her story to the First Lady, Louisa Johnson Adams, the melancholic English wife of John Quincy Adams. Louisa was astonished by her guest. They spent hours together speaking in French, and one day the President also gave Tshusick a silver medal. People in Washington invited Tshusick to their homes: she had tea with the wives of foreign dignitaries and attended dinners and receptions for congressmen and senators. It was a great success for an Indian girl, who also decided to become a Christian. The ceremony of baptism took place in Christ Church, in Georgetown, with McKenney escorting Tshusick to the font.<sup>5</sup> In short, with great ability and consciousness, she could control the scene in Washington showing the dignities of women in the Indian world, and their important role in the making of clothes. As clearly depicted in her portrait painted by Charles Bird King, her homemade dresses were very elaborate with an original black cap, a scarlet jacket surmounted by the silver medal, blue skirt, and red pantaloons.

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5 McKenney, Thomas: *Memoirs, Official, and Personal; With Sketches of Travels Among Northern and Southern Indians*. Vol. 1. Paine and Burgess: New York 1846, p. 355.

Fig. 1: *Tshusick, An Ojibway Woman, Washington 1872*<sup>6</sup>



TSHUSICK.  
AN OJIBWAY WOMAN.

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6 McKenney, Thomas: *History of the Indian tribes of North America: with biographical sketches and anecdotes of the principal chiefs. Embellished with one hundred portraits from the Indian Gallery in the War Department at Washington.* Vol. 1. D. Rice & Co: Philadelphia 1872, p. 119, retrieved 06.06.2017 from <https://archive.org/stream/historyofindiant01mckerich>.

Tshusick's personality emerged in this painting. She was part of the great cultural exchange on the American frontier, defining the importance played by Indian women in this world. 'Stereotypes have dominated the history of the fur trade, which is frequently mythologized as a masculine landscape where hardy Europeans transported trade goods, disease and alcohol to Indian villages.'<sup>7</sup> But the role of the Indians, and particularly Indian women, in this commerce was really important: they profited from the trade and were active participants, especially in the fur trade. Fur traders and Indians created a common ground of exchange and shared an intimate relationship. *Métissage* was frequent, and many white traders gained access to peltry through the furs produced by the kin networks of the Indian women whom they married. These Indian women exerted more influence than men on the types of cloth that became a staple of the fur trade in processing peltry. They cut, sewed, and embellished the cloth they received in trade, transforming it into embroidered clothing, becoming important members of their community and securing the status of a household.

The ornaments were also arranged by the women, who 'know how to dress themselves in style'<sup>8</sup>, observed John Heckelwelder, the Moravian missionary in the Ohio Country in the early years of the United States. His knowledge of Native American cultures and languages helped the American Army in negotiating several treaties with Indian nations in western Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan during the 1790s and the first decade of the 1800s. He was literally enthusiastic about the gathering of various colours in Indian dress, describing how 'the wealthy adorn themselves besides with gartering of various colors, beads, and silver brooches' (p. 203). Another Moravian missionary, David Zeisberger, also described the role of women in the community: they 'always know more than the chief'<sup>9</sup>

These reflections clearly summarise the ability of the Indian women, even if McKenney discovered Tshusick was a professional swindler. This discovery created some problems in his utopian views. When he wrote to Michigan governor Lewis Cass about how she had gained Washington's favour, the answer was unexpected. Tshusick was a superb confidence woman, and her French husband was

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7 Sleeper-Smith, S./Barr, J./O'Brien, J. M./Shoemaker, N./and Stevens, S. M. (eds.): *Why You Can't Teach United States History without American Indians*. University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill 2015, p. 40.

8 Heckelwelder, John: *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States*. Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia 1876, p. 203.

9 Zeisberger, David: *Diary of David Zeisberger: A Moravian Missionary among the Indians of Ohio*. Vol. 2. R. Clarke & Co.: Cincinnati 1885, p. 40.

alive, working as a scullion in George Boyd's house in Mackinac Island on Lake Huron<sup>10</sup>. For Cass, 'in her wandering through the whole length of Canada, from Montreal to St. Louis and from Quebec to the Falls of St. Anthony and many times in the interior,' she was able to dupe many persons, and Washington had been her supreme and most successful effort. When the letter arrived, the Indian girl was on her way to the Chippewa people, on a trip arranged by the White House to the end of the stagecoach line and by horse to Detroit, full of boxes and packages of gifts and dresses.<sup>11</sup>

Tshusick's story well revealed the fragility of the world imagined by McKenney. His great dream to help Indians in Washington as well as in their native lands was under attack by his opponents. In particular Thomas T. Moore, representative of Kentucky in the House from 1823 to 1829, denounced the 'extraordinary expenditure' in McKenney's Indian department in an article in the *Louisville Public Advertiser* on 29 July 1828. Hotel expenses, boots and shoes for the Indians, and especially '[t]hree years of taking portraits of Indians' for 3,190 dollars, were put under the lens of a frontier demagogue and an earnest supporter of Andrew Jackson. 'I cannot think it was very economical,' wrote Moore, 'to send a gang of Indians to the most expensive hotel in the city [...] to pamper savages who a few years ago were burying tomahawks in the heads of our wives and children'<sup>12</sup>.

## A sturdy Quaker

But who was Thomas McKenney? He was born in March 1785, in Hopewell, Maryland, two years after the end of the War of Independence. His parents were 'sturdy and consistent Quakers', but his mother died when he was 10. His father remarried and had other children. Thomas was devoted to his new family, but the death of his mother was a difficult experience that was never erased from his memory.

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10 George Boyd came to Mackinac in June 1819 as an Indian agent. Born in Maryland in 1779, he married Harriet Johnson, the sister of Louisa, the wife of President John Quincy Adams. Through Boyd, the American government encouraged the Chippewa to stay on the American side of the Canadian border by providing medical care for sick Indians. Widder, Keith R.: *Battle for the Soul: Métis Children Encounter Evangelical Protestants at Mackinaw Mission, 1823–1837*. Michigan State University Press: Ann Arbor 1999, p. 58. These details show that Tshusick was well acquainted with President Adam's wife, too, and reveal that McKenney was not alone in imagining utopian solutions as regards the frontier and the relationship with Indian people.

11 McKenney 1846: Vol. 1, p. 363.

12 The 'Address of Thomas T. Moore to his Constituents' of 27 June 1828 was published in the *Louisville Public Advertiser* on 29 June.

He started studying medicine but soon moved to learn his father's job: a merchant. Along with the profession, he shared his father's religion, becoming a sturdy Quaker, which influenced his approach to interactions with Native Americans. At 22, he married Aditha Gleaves, and two years later also his father died at the age of 47. After the death of his father, Thomas McKenney left to his stepmother what remained of the plantation – almost everything was lost after creditors had been satisfied – and he moved to Washington and decided to settle in Georgetown. Around 1808, he opened two large shops, one in Georgetown, the other in Washington. He soon became a familiar figure both in Washington and Georgetown – at that time, as today, a charming place to live with its beautiful old brick mansions surrounded by gardens filled with flowering trees.<sup>13</sup>

In 1808, the Bureau of Indian Trade had been transferred from Philadelphia to Georgetown. The responsibility for administration of federal policy toward Indians initially was in the War Department, under the immediate Office of the Secretary of War, established by an act in 1789. In 1806 a separate Office of Indian Trade was established, and the fact that the office moved to 2810, M Street in Georgetown, close to McKenney's shop, influenced his life completely. Like many Quakers, he was a distinguished and friendly, but reserved man who was predicted to become one of the capital's leading businessmen. The election that ended the presidency of Thomas Jefferson and brought Madison in his place was also dominated by new important voices in American politics, John Calhoun of South Carolina, and Henry Clay of Kentucky, who became the Speaker of the House of Representatives. They were all friends of McKenney and helped him to change from a businessman into a politician. One of the issues discussed by the three friends was the question of what to do with the Indians tribes on the frontier, and when Tecumseh, the leader of the Shawnee Indians, formed his confederation to resist the arrival of new settlers in the Indian Territory, the war broke out. The final battle of Tippecanoe ended Tecumseh's dream of stopping the white army, and when American soldiers found British weapons, both Calhoun and Clay became war hawks, asking Congress for the conquest of Canada.<sup>14</sup>

Even if a Quaker, and therefore a fervent pacifist by creed, McKenney strongly supported the war of 1812 to the point that he left his clerk in charge of his shop and enlisted as a *liaison* officer between the Secretary of War, John Armstrong, and the army of General Van Ness. After the resignation of Van Ness following

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13 Horan 1972: pp. 25–6.

14 Taylor, Alan: *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies*. Knopf: New York 2010, p. 128.

a dispute with Armstrong, he remained an aide without a general. With a great patriotic spirit of sacrifice, when the English landed close to Washington, McKenney sold his two shops, bought his own uniform, and enlisted as a private in the Georgetown Volunteer Riflemen under General Walter Smith. He used McKenney as a *liaison* officer between his army and Armstrong again, and as a spy in the enemy lines, reporting the intention of the British to move out of Washington. In this role, he worked with president Madison and the new Secretary of War James Monroe, after Armstrong was fired due to his inaction against the British troops that brought about the burning of Washington.<sup>15</sup>

At the end of the war, President Madison, impressed by the ability and patriotism of McKenney, appointed him Superintendent of the Indian Trade in 1816. His office was in the old office of the Bank of Columbia, in which he was also on the board of directors, with John Cox, importer and banker, and later mayor of Georgetown: a small and well-connected world of friends viewing the American frontier as a 'peaceful kingdom' instead of a 'divided ground'. It was a time when corruption was commonplace in Indian trading, but McKenney was well intentioned to protect his honour and reputation. With his arrival in office, American politics towards the Indian changed quickly. Probably the original intentions of the Americans were to destroy the Indians allied with the British, asserting their sovereignty at the expense of native nations after the war of 1812; therefore, they tried to impose a monopoly on commerce, especially the fur trade. In this commerce, Americans needed the help of the Indians, and they were welcomed to the American border of the Canada frontier. In addition, for the American farmers, their major effort was directed to undermine their warrior culture, asking the Natives 'to embrace the Christian faith and morality and to practice the European mode of agriculture, rather than their traditional mix of hunting, fishing, gathering, and horticulture'.<sup>16</sup>

Following this idea, McKenney stressed the humanitarian aspect in the factory system that ruled the commerce with the Indians, by trying to supply them with the goods they needed, and not whiskey. He also started a new bookkeeping method with great control on the agents, stressing the importance to furnish blankets and implements of husbandry, essential to the prosperity of the Indians. While the American Fur Company of John Astor was seeking to obtain a monopoly on the fur trade, gaining control of the tribes with the increase of the whiskey trade, and transforming Astor into one of the richest men in America, McKenney started

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15 Taylor 2010: p. 416.

16 Taylor 2010: p. 437.

his lifelong struggle to pay loans, debts, and creditors.<sup>17</sup> He described people like Astor as 'the worst species of white men (that) are dealing with the Indians,' and he tried to stop Astor's political influence against his office by asking for the help of his old friend Philip Milledoler, president of Rutgers College and chairman of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.<sup>18</sup>

In these years, McKenney started to support his friend John Calhoun for the presidency. Recognising the efforts put into his career, after the abolishment of the U.S. Indian Trade program in 1822, Calhoun – who did not become president but was nominated Secretary of War – created a position for him within the War Department, entitled Superintendent of Indian Affairs, that became part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1824. McKenney was appointed to this position and held it until 1830. In this office, he realised that the Indian schools were really important in changing the attitude of the Indians from armed hunters and warriors to Christian farmers, and in this direction the Quaker humanitarian-reformer McKenney defended the federal management of Indian trading posts. He believed that the Indian had the 'capacity [...] for the highest attainments in civilization'<sup>19</sup>, and repeatedly attacked white injustice, bad faith, and cruelty toward the Indian and the government's 'radically, fatally wrong'<sup>20</sup> Indian policies. These reflections expressed in McKenney's memoirs arose from a trip to the Chippewa lands in 1826.

## Travel to Lake Superior

One year before the arrival of Tshusick in Washington in the winter of 1827, Thomas McKenney travelled northwest with Michigan governor Lewis Cass to meet the Chippewa Indians at Fond du Lake, west of the city of Duluth in contemporary Minnesota. The first part of the trip was on well-beaten roads and canals where they could carry their heavy luggage on stagecoaches, steamboats, and canal boats. Things changed when they left Detroit on the morning of 23 June to reach Fond du Lac: they had to bring with them the correct light equipment and

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17 When Astor started his politics of selling alcohol to the Indians, he knew that he was ignoring the American law, but he felt it was important to protect his business. See Emmerich, Alexander: *John Jacob Astor and the First Great American Fortune*. McFarland & Co.: Jefferson, NC 2013, p. 116.

18 'McKenney to Rev. Philip Milledoler, August 3, 1821', Milledoler Papers, New York Historical Society, quoted in Horan 1972, p. 36.

19 McKenney 1846: p. 34.

20 McKenney 1846: p. 238.

have an attitude that would allow them to face the unpredictable challenges of travelling across the upper lakes.<sup>21</sup> Aboard the schooner *Ghent* with McKenney and Cass was the geologist George F. Porter, the Indian trader and interpreter, Richard Connor, and the artist James Otto Lewis. On Drummond's Island, the last remaining British outpost, they witnessed the result of the whiskey trade on the Natives. They enjoyed 'the luxury of being drunk and naked'<sup>22</sup>, wrote McKenney in his *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes* and, the following morning, he counted the barrels of whiskey drunk by the Indians, and found out they were 17. They traded the blankets they had received the day before for 'the raw colored alcohol': 'All this evil comes from whiskey', penned McKenney.<sup>23</sup> As for Thomas Jefferson, also for McKenney the principal impediment to the progress of civilisation among the Indians was the abuse of alcohol.<sup>24</sup>

Lake Superior appeared 'wrapped in admiration of the grandeur and beauty of the Almighty's works'. 'My eye', continued McKenney, 'retains the impression of the loveliness of the lake scenery, and the grandeur and glory that are so often displayed there' (1826, p. 454): 4,000 miles and five months with the intention of comprehending the wilderness spirit, but especially of understanding the Indian world, as well as the future of his young nation. McKenney's patriotic mood was strong when on 19 August he was reached by the news of the deaths of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. 'That these hoary and venerated sages and patriots should die, was no more than what everybody expected' – he wrote in his diary – 'but that they should have died within a few hours of each other and on the ever memorable fourth of July [...] and that this should have been the fiftieth [...] are coincidence that cannot fail to make a deep impression'. For McKenney, there was a precision in this coincidence, signing the future of the United States and their citizens, 'for every man living, or who may hereafter live, will take an interest in them'.<sup>25</sup>

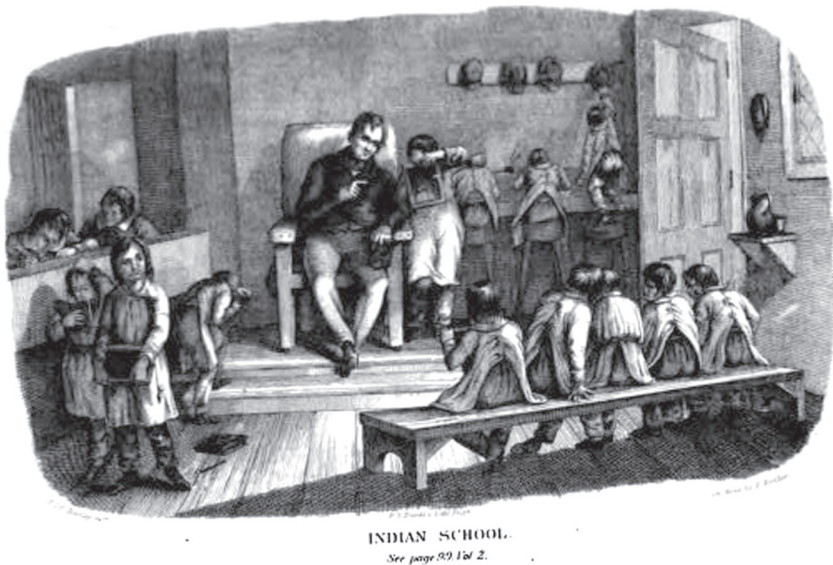
At Mackinac Island, McKenney visited an Indian school for métis children opened by William and Amanda Ferry in 1823. Setting in motion an intense

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- 21 Mackintosh, Will B.: 'Ticketed Through: The Commodification of Travel in the Nineteenth Century'. *Journal of the Early Republic* 32 (1), 2012, p. 77.
- 22 McKenney, Thomas: *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes, of the Character and Customs of the Chippewa Indians*. Fielding Lucas Publisher: Baltimore 1826, p. 165.
- 23 McKenney 1826, p. 169.
- 24 Wallace, P. A. W.: *Thirty Thousand Miles with John Heckewelder: The Travels of John Heckewelder in Frontier America*. University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh 1985, p. 295.
- 25 McKenney 1826: p. 368.



spiritual battle to win the souls and change the lives of the children, their parents, and all others living at Mackinac, the Ferrys guided a group of enthusiastic missionaries; empowered by an uncompromising religious motivation, they served as agents of Americanisation, namely, they helped to spread republican values and culture in the new territories. 'In the girls' school, were seventy-three, from four to seventeen years of age. Three were full blood, the remainder were half breeds, and quarter breeds, and fifteen white children belonging to the island,' wrote McKenney. 'These are examined in spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography'.<sup>26</sup> An example of the one-room school, which was a commonplace for these rural areas, was sketched by James Otto Lewis.

Fig. 2: *Indian school, Mackinac Island 1826*<sup>27</sup>



Jeffersonian theories of agrarian democracy resurfaced in McKenney's narrative when he imposed the identical pastoral labels on pioneers, farmers, and Indians alike. In order to achieve this kind of contentment he had to both sacrifice the

26 McKenney 1826: p. 387.

27 McKenney 1846: Vol. 1, p. 32, retrieved 06.06.2017 from <https://archive.org/details/memoirsofficial00mckeegoog>.

reality of the untamed American landscape and ignore the inevitability of historical processes that brought the disappearance of the Indian in these countries. His great dream to bring peace, fraternity, and prosperity among the people living on the frontier – afterwards considered a utopian view – was really clear in the following pages of *Tour of the Lake*.

His colonial utopia is unrealisable, it is the dream of a peaceful country, when violence spreads everywhere in the frontier. Certainly it represents the settlers' utopia, framed by superficial optimism. This vision is clear when McKenney addresses an invitation to American politicians:

Let portions of their own lands be allotted to them, and their tribe are willing to give their assent, in suitable farms; and implement for working them furnished; and too such as may learn the mechanic arts, the tools necessary for their prosecution, and then we shall see how effective education will be which is now acquiring by so many hundreds of hitherto friendless and ignorant savages. And what, I will ask, could add more to the glory of our country? Tell me not of those who devote days and nights to add to the prosperity of the already prosperous; but point out the statesman who devotes his hours to the relief of the wretched; to the advancement of the cause of human happiness, to the welfare and protection of the friendless.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of McKenney's travel book, a dictionary of the Chippewa language is included, with the intention to explain their world. Among the words: God, split into Great Spirit and Merciful Spirit, worship, ceremony, sacred thing, soul, country of souls or land of ghosts.<sup>29</sup> The role of religion in Indian life was really important for McKenney's reflections. These words are the first in his dictionary, followed by parental relations – child, father and mother, grandfather and grandmother, husband and wife, son, brother and sister, uncle and aunt, cousin<sup>30</sup> –, and finally the words of war: scalp, wound, blood, flesh, nation, tribe, clan.<sup>31</sup> Again, in this dictionary we can note the same translation for country and territory (*Ak'ee*).

## The gallery of Indian portraits

On the trip to Lake Superior, McKenney elaborated his thoughts towards the future of Native Americans. He not only became an advocate of the civilisation programme, but when the programme showed its limits, he tried to defend their memory by collecting objects, arranging for the painting of portraits and

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28 McKenney 1826: pp. 388–9.

29 McKenney 1826: p. 487.

30 McKenney 1826: p. 488.

31 McKenney 1826: p. 490.

gathering the memories of the Indians painted from life, especially when the project of deportation west of the Mississippi River was growing in the minds of American politicians.

As clearly explained in his *Memoirs, Official and Personal*, he was 'first interested in the welfare of the Indians'<sup>32</sup>, but he also realised the difficulty in implementing this policy in the territory east of the Mississippi where, as he wrote in the second part of his memoir entitled 'Preservation of the Indians', they almost totally disappeared. Indian destruction was continued by wars, by small-pox, and by drunkenness. Also, the work of the missionaries – for McKenney 'indispensable' – did not produce and 'will not produce any other result [...] than they have in the past.'<sup>33</sup> In fact, the social changes proposed by missionaries altered the economic role of gender, especially among the Northern Indians, where traditionally women cultivated the crops with little help from the men, who were occupied with hunting and war. The core of the civilisation programme was that the men would take the work of agriculture away from women, whereby agriculture had to become the most important and productive economic activity of the settlers. From the Indian viewpoint, this provoked derision, since they perceived that the warrior-man had lost his social role and turned into a woman.

Education was the way to change this attitude, and when McKenney took his office of Superintendent of Indian Trade in 1816, he founded Indian schools with his budget. 'The first regular school established among the Cherokees was in the year 1817', he wrote in his memoirs, to convert 'the waste into a garden.'<sup>34</sup> Thanks to McKenney, the Indian Civilisation Act was passed by Congress in 1819, giving the annual sum of 10,000 dollars for the programme of the Indian schools that 'flourished'. When he left his administrative responsibilities in 1830, 'there were over eighteen hundred Indian children in these schools, deriving instruction, and making as rapid advances [...] as are made in any part of the United States by the children of the whites.'<sup>35</sup>

His role in the office of superintendent brought him into frequent contact with the representatives of Indian tribes, many of whom traveled to the Capital to voice grievances or negotiate treaties. The practice of bringing Indian delegations to the Capitol did not start with McKenney, but it was part of the founding of the republic. They visited Philadelphia when the city of Washington was in the dream of the founders, and the Indian chiefs always expressed the dream 'to live in peace

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32 McKenney 1846: Vol. 1, p. 32.

33 McKenney 1846: Vol. 2, p. 107.

34 McKenney 1846: Vol. 1, p. 40.

35 McKenney 1846: Vol. 1, p. 36.

and friendship with one another as brothers of the same family should do<sup>36</sup>. The Indians were not as commonplace as they would become in the next years, and crowds followed them as they walked in the streets, like ancient Romans, dressed in buffalo robes painted with birds and horses. McKenney described one of these fine assemblies that greeted President Monroe: there were John Calhoun in his traditional black suit, Chief Justice Marshall with his shoulder-length hair, and Henry Clay who loved the fine oratory of the Indians. The long evening at the White House ended with servants passing plates of cakes and glasses of wine. The Indians quickly finished the wine and the cakes. Then peace pipes were solemnly passed, and everyone smoked in the name of peace, even Justice Marshall. An anonymous reporter wrote in a newspaper: '[T]hese people are destined to soon vanish from the face of the earth [...]. They still possess fine traits of character and we can never forget they were the native lords of the very soil which they are gradually selling to the invaders.'<sup>37</sup>

Interested in learning more about his visitors, McKenney began to collect books concerning the Indians and their artifacts: bows and arrows, moccasins, even skins and furs. At the heart of McKenney's growing collection of artifacts was a gallery of Indian portraits, which he commissioned from a local artist, Charles Bird King and his pupils James Otto Lewis and John Cook. King had gained a reputation for his portraits of Calhoun and Clay. He studied under Edward Savage in New York and spent seven years in London with Benjamin West. He returned to the United States at the outbreak of the war of 1812, painted in obscurity in Philadelphia for 4 years and then went to Washington in 1816. As his reputation as a portrait artist grew, King built a studio and gallery in Washington. King's first portraits were of members of the Indian delegation, who arrived in Washington in the fall of 1821. Of the 25 paintings King accomplished that November, 17 were given to members of the delegation and eight were deposited in McKenney's gallery where they hung in his office.<sup>38</sup>

The increase of books, artifacts, and portraits in his collection enlarged McKenney's interest in the Indians themselves. He began to see them as human beings,

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36 These words are quoted from the Jefferson's address 'To the Wolf and People of the Mandan Nation'. Washington, 30 December 1806, retrieved 06.06.2017 from [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/jeffind5.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jeffind5.asp). For Jefferson's politics toward the Indians see Wallace A. F. C.: *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. 1999.

37 *Washington National Intelligencer*, 29 January 1822.

38 On Charles Bird King see Viola, Herman J.: *McKenney: Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830*. Swallow Press: Chicago 1974.

and discovered the pride of their heritage. He began to dream of a day when the Indians would have opportunities equal to those of a white man, when there would be Indian schools and peaceful villages where they could live in peace with the whites. It was a utopian view of the American frontier, clearly a colonial utopia, and may appear also naive and banal to imagine, an impossible colonial dream: that 'the Indians be looked upon as human beings, having bodies and souls like ours, possessed of sensibilities and capacities as large as ours'.<sup>39</sup>

Three men contested his idealism: John Jacob Astor, the manager of the American Fur Company, Ramsay Crooks, the field manager of the company, and Senator Thomas Hart Benton from Missouri, Astor's man in the Senate. McKenney's enemies launched their first attack questioning his accounts. But it was Benton's superb oratory against McKenney that created the major problems in Congress. His proposition to abolish the Indian trade on 25 April 1822 was seen by McKenney as a personal assault.<sup>40</sup> President Monroe was disappointed by this attack, but the final result was the end of the government trade with the Indians. McKenney continued his career as Superintendent of Indian Affairs and chief of the Bureau of Indian Affairs when the office started in 1824. The following president, John Quincy Adams, confirmed his role, but when Andrew Jackson was elected in 1828, things changed abruptly. The mayor, sponsor of the Indian Removal Act – passed by Congress on 28 May 1830 – dismissed McKenney from his position in the same year, disagreeing with his opinion that 'the Indian was, in his intellectual and moral structure, our equal'.<sup>41</sup> A few lines in the newspapers announced that 'Col. Thomas McKenney has been removed from his position at the head of the Indian Bureau, in the War Department'<sup>42</sup>, with no more explanations. His utopian views of a pacific relation between settlers and Indians were definitively put aside. President Jackson also ordered the War Department to remove Indian boys and girls from school, and to return them to their people.

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39 'Extract of a Letter from Thomas McKenney to Samuel Worcester, Correspondent Secretary of the American Board of Commissioner for Foreign Missions'. Georgetown, DC, 30 October 1817, *The Portico* 5, 1818, p. 441.

40 Benton's motion for the regulation of the trade with the Indians was published as 'The Fur Trade in the West'. *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856*. Vol. 7. D. Appleton & Company: New York 1858, pp. 201–4. McKenney's answer appeared in a letter dated 26 April 1830 to the *Washington National Intelligencer*, and published integrally as Appendix A in McKenney 1846, Vol. 1, pp. 286–92.

41 McKenney 1846, Vol 1, p. 22.

42 See for example *Salem Gazette*, 10 September 1830, p. 2.

Before his discharge, McKenney announced plans for the publication of his portfolio of images. Charles Bird King's portraits formed the basis of what became a majestic series of hand-colored lithographs, accompanied by Indian biographies written by James Hall. The first number of the publication, a set of six lithographs, reached the subscribers in early 1837. The 20<sup>th</sup> and final number arrived in 1844. Together with this imprinting, they also published a three-volume edition between 1838 and 1844 with the long title of *History of the Indian Tribes of North America, with Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes of the Principal Chiefs. Embellished with One Hundred and Twenty Portraits, from the Indian Gallery in the Department of War, at Washington*. King's original portrait gallery, created at the expense of the War Department, was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution in 1858, and it was almost entirely destroyed by a fire in 1865, leaving McKenney and Hall's *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* as its primary legacy and one of the major American publications of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the Indians who lived east of the Mississippi River before the Indian Removal Act.

A few words about the portfolio which he collected: was it based on false ideas about Native Americans? The answer is certainly not, because he asked the painters to represent the Indians exactly as they had appeared in the White House, in the original costumes and avoiding exaggerations or hyperboles. They were painted with simple dresses and creative ornaments: fringed elk skin jackets and leggings, beaded moccasins, feathered headdresses or crowns of buffalo skulls with curved horns. The Indians acted with great dignity, sitting for many hours in front of the painters who tried to catch the psychological force of the subjects. At the same time, McKenney tried to gain their friendship, asking about their lifestyle, 'the oral history of their nations, myths, legends, and tales handed down from father to son'.<sup>43</sup> Not all the portrayed Indians were celebrated chiefs or warriors, since McKenney was keen 'to present a greater variety of the aspects of the Indian character'.<sup>44</sup> Certainly he was interested in their religiosity, but his special attention lay in the Great Medicine Society, the powerful secret organisation that he compared to the Freemasons. Members were said to be expert in 'occult knowledge' and gathered among chiefs and warriors.<sup>45</sup> McKenney always received the same refusal when he asked the Native Americans to send their children to Indian schools: 'The Great Spirit has made us what we are – it is not his will that we should be changed'.<sup>46</sup>

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43 Horan 1972: p. 176.

44 Horan 1972: p. 216.

45 Horan 1972: p. 182.

46 Horan 1972: p. 286.

It is clear that there is not a single story behind the portraits. We have the image of the Indian close to reality, the story of his life gathered by McKenney – certainly anecdotic, influenced by his own stereotypes, and sympathetic with the Indian who demonstrates loyalty to the Americans. Finally, we can read the tragic fate of the portrayed Indians in the descriptions, as for example the Fox chief Taiomah who was dying of tuberculosis when his portrait was painted.<sup>47</sup> All these stories are interrelated in the construction of the portfolio, giving us the full complexity of the masterpiece, a historic work and a very voluminous historic document, difficult to sell to the great public at that time.

McKenney died in poverty in February 1859. After his death, the interest for the Indians did not decrease, and his place was taken by George Catlin, a self-trained artist, who traveled west to record Native American subjects and environments. It was important to Catlin to present his own paintings to the public. His widely popular Indian Gallery opened in New York in 1837, and later traveled to other places, culminating in London in 1839.<sup>48</sup> Although he painted “real” Indians, Catlin practiced his art within the European conventions of his time, using brighter colors in a picturesque way and evoking the sensual appeal of the Indians.<sup>49</sup> Once accepted as exact copies of the subjects, Catlin's pictures are today viewed as images of native people on which Catlin imposed his European sensibility, but we have to go back to McKenney's portfolio if we want to see the Indians and their stories behind the portraits. His utopian view is faithful to these stories.

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47 Horan 1972: p. 182.

48 See Eisler, Benita: *The Red Man's Bones: George Catlin, Artist and Showman*. W. W. Norton: New York, 2013.

49 Ellingson, Ter: *The Myth of the Noble Savage*. University of California Press: Berkeley, 2001, p. 191.



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Raffaella Baccolini

## Feminine Weakness and Restored Masculinity in Post-9/11 Science Fiction Cinema

**Abstract:** The question that lies at the basis of this chapter is whether the events that took place on 11 September and beyond have affected – and if so, how – dystopian science fiction (sf). In order to begin to answer this question I am going to analyse, in particular, two films in which the atmosphere of 9/11 is pervasive: Steven Spielberg’s 2005 adaptation of H. G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds* (1897) and John Hillcoat’s 2009 adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006). I chose these films because they have both been linked to the post-9/11 cultural climate and because I find them representative of “quality” sf cinema. Both films portray a post-apocalyptic world, and center around characters involved in quests for self-survival and for rescuing loved ones. According to Clute and Nicholls, the aftermath of the holocaust may be the most popular theme in sf.<sup>1</sup> However, my point is not to prove that there has been an increase in the number of post-apocalyptic films since 2001, nor that the genre has been radically transformed. Rather, it seems that the post-apocalyptic (sub-)genre is one of the ways through which the 9/11 atmosphere can be successfully conveyed – a climate characterised, as cultural critic Susan Faludi has said, by a return to a 50s-era culture of traditional binaries of masculine strength and feminine weakness.<sup>2</sup> The early response to the anxiety produced by 9/11 was one of a conservative retreat to the mid-1950s culture where *Father Knew Best*, with a marked resurgence in a gendered rhetoric of protective paternalism. This holds true even in the genre of sf, a genre characterised by a great radical, utopian potential.

### Introduction

The question that lies at the basis of this chapter is whether the events that took place on 11 September and beyond have affected – and if so, how – dystopian science fiction (sf). In order to begin to answer this question I am going to analyse, in particular, two films in which the atmosphere of 9/11 is pervasive: Steven Spielberg’s 2005 adaptation of H.G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds* (1897) and John

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- 1 Clute, John/Nicholls, Peter (eds): *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. St. Martin’s Griffin: New York 1995, p. 581.
  - 2 Faludi, Susan: *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*. Holt: New York 2007.

Hillcoat's 2009 adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006).<sup>3</sup> I chose these films because they have both been linked to the post-9/11 cultural climate and because I find them representative of "quality" sf cinema.<sup>4</sup> Both films portray a post-apocalyptic world, and center around characters involved in quests for self-survival and for rescuing loved ones. According to Clute and Nicholls, the aftermath of the holocaust may be the most popular theme in sf.<sup>5</sup> However, my point is not to prove that there has been an increase in the number of post-apocalyptic films since 2001, nor that the genre has been radically transformed. Rather, it seems that the post-apocalyptic (sub-)genre is one of the ways through which the 9/11 atmosphere can be successfully conveyed – a climate characterised, as cultural critic Susan Faludi has said, by a return to a 50s-era culture of traditional binaries of masculine strength and feminine weakness.<sup>6</sup> The early response to the anxiety produced by 9/11 was one of a conservative retreat to the mid-1950s culture, even in the genre of sf, a genre characterised by a great radical, utopian potential.

## 11 September and the revival of strong heroic masculinity

11 September has been widely considered a watershed event – a trauma that has shaken the confidence of many and has forced people to interrogate themselves on the political, cultural, social, economic, and environmental impact of the attacks. The attacks on New York and Washington have generated a series of responses and produced a number of changes, among which are the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also the restrictions on civil liberties in the name of a "war on terror" that has also made possible the justification of torture, the infamous events in Abu Ghraib, the violations of the Geneva Conventions, etc. Fifteen years after the event, we have gained some distance from it, and a number of studies have begun to appear on how culture, "high" and popular, has reacted to the event. One of the first takes on the American cultural response to 9/11 informed by gender is Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream*. Faludi maintains that by 2007, the American

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3 Part of the argument in this article was presented in May 2008 in Madrid, and is part of a larger research project that intends to investigate artistic responses to 9/11.

4 See 'Spielberg Says New Movie Reflects Post-9/11 Unease': *Tonight*, 13 June 2005, retrieved 01.05.2017 from <http://www.tonight.co.za/index.php?fArticleId=2556230>; Warner, Alan: 'The Road to Hell'. *The Guardian*, 4 November 2006, retrieved 01.05.2017 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/nov/04/featuresreviews.guardianreview4>.

5 Clute, John/Nicholls, Peter (eds): *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. St. Martin's Griffin: New York 1995, p. 581.

6 Faludi, Susan: *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*. Holt: New York 2007.

media, entertainment, and advertising had only been able to replicate the event, not inquire into it.<sup>7</sup>

In her book, Faludi talks about what 9/11 revealed about America: underlying Americans' reactions is a cultural mythology that has barely been reckoned with, with the result that Americans have been 'enlisted in a symbolic war at home' that is not simply about an American myth of male invincibility, but one that is, and always has been, deeply gendered.<sup>8</sup> Thus, 'in the aftermath of the attacks, the cultural troika of media, entertainment, and advertising declared the post-9/11 age an era of neofifties nuclear family "togetherness", redomesticated femininity, and reconstituted Cold Warrior manhood. Such a return was an attempt 'to repair and restore a national myth' of invincibility.<sup>9</sup> The script that America reverted to after the attacks was the oldest in U.S. literary imagination: the frontier fear that savages would seize defenseless, vulnerable American women while impotent, feminised men stood by watching.<sup>10</sup>

In a series of chapters on how the media reacted to the attacks, Faludi cites endless articles and TV shows that declared that feminism was over and that America had grown soft and needed to reassert its strength. Unexpectedly, the real culprits of the attacks were not the terrorists; rather, it was women's liberation that had 'feminized' American men and thus, 'left the nation vulnerable to attack.'<sup>11</sup> The

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7 Faludi 2007: p. 2. Faludi's argument holds particularly true as far as media and advertising are concerned; on the academic front, several studies have appeared; see, for example, Melnick, Jeffrey: *9/11 Culture: America Under Construction*. Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester 2009. On cinema, see in particular Geraghty, Lincoln: *American Science Fiction Film and Television*. Berg: New York 2009, pp. 103–23; Godfrey, Sarah/Hamad, Hannah: 'Save the Cheerleader, Save the Males: Resurgent Protective Paternalism in Popular Film and Television after 9/11'. In: Ross, Karen (ed.): *The Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Media*. Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester 2014, pp. 157–73; Hamad, Hannah: 'Extreme Parenting: Recuperating Fatherhood in Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*'. In: Radner, Hilary/Stringer, Rebecca (eds.): *Feminism at the Movies: Understanding Gender in Contemporary Popular Cinema*. Routledge: New York 2011, pp. 241–53; Pollard, Tom: *Hollywood 9/11: Superheroes, Supervillains, and Super Disasters*. Paradigm: Boulder 2011; Dixon, Wheeler Winston (ed.): *Film and Television after 9/11*. Southern Illinois UP: Carbondale 2004; Negra, Diane: 'Structural Integrity, Historical Reversion, and the Post-9/11 Chick Flick'. *Feminist Media Studies* 8, 2008, pp. 51–68; Westwell, Guy: *Parallel Lines: Post-9/11 American Cinema*. Wallflower: New York 2014.

8 Faludi 2007: p. 13.

9 Faludi 2007: pp. 3–4, 13.

10 Faludi 2007: p. 5.

11 Faludi 2007: p. 23.

emotions following the attacks were displaced ‘into the domestic realm, into a sexualized struggle between depleted masculinity and overbearing womanhood.’<sup>12</sup>

Faludi’s examples from the media ‘uncover a series of trend stories trumpeting traditional gender roles’ for men and women alike.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of the veracity of these stories – often disproved by Faludi herself – these articles attain ‘authority not through actual reporting but through the power of repetition’ in a society characterised by the phenomenon of post-truth.<sup>14</sup> The result of such a campaign was ‘the beatification of the ideal post-9/11 American woman – undemanding, uncompetitive, and, most of all, dependent.’<sup>15</sup> In a twisted turn, the attack could be seen almost as a blessing in disguise, one that brought America, and its men and women, back on the right track of traditional feminine and masculine roles. Consequently, the image of masculinity also changed. The ‘more sensitive, loving, nurturing, protective family men of the nineties’<sup>16</sup> gave way to a complex image of masculinity: on the one hand, depleted, feminised men, often emasculated by overbearing females, and, on the other, these same men, who when threatened or when their loved ones are endangered, turn into Rambo-like figures.<sup>17</sup> Such a cycle of questioning and reinstating ideals of masculinities has characterised Hollywood’s portrayal of manhood and of the father figure in particular, as Stella Bruzzi has analysed in *Bringing Up Daddy*: while ‘the 1960s and 1970s saw [...] traditionalism broken down, [...] the 1980s sought to reinstate it; [...] finally in the 1990s and 2000s, there has been a return to more liberal attitudes.’<sup>18</sup>

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12 Faludi 2007: p. 9.

13 Nordenson, Bree: ‘Cowboys and Damsels’. *Columbia Journalism Review* November/December 2007, retrieved 01.05.2017 from [http://www.cjr.org/review/cowboys\\_and\\_damsels\\_1.php?page=all&print=true](http://www.cjr.org/review/cowboys_and_damsels_1.php?page=all&print=true).

14 Faludi, Susan: *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. Vintage: New York 1993, p. 104.

15 Faludi 2007: p. 131.

16 Jeffords, Susan: ‘The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties’. In: Collins, J./Radner, H./Preacher Collins, A. (eds.): *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*. Ed. Routledge: London 1993, p. 197.

17 Since Bly’s *Iron John*, many are the studies that blame feminism and the women’s liberation movement for the disintegration of masculinity and family values, even before 9/11. See Fukuyama, Francis: *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*. Profile: London 1999; Lyndon, Neil: *No More Sex War: The Failures of Feminism*. Sinclair-Stevenson: London 1992; Thomas, David: *Not Guilty: In Defence of the Modern Man*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London 1993, among others.

18 Bruzzi, Stella: *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood*. BFI: London 2005, p. ix.

And yet, the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks saw a return to traditional masculinity in an attempt to correct the fear that, as Jeffrey Melnick states, 'the 9/11 attacks were both the result and the cause of some major problems in contemporary gender arrangements in the United States.'<sup>19</sup> Such a reaction is not new: at specific historical and critical junctions, different disempowered groups have been held responsible for the crisis of masculinity. Faludi's hypothesis recalls Hungarian historian Istvan Bibo's concept of political hysteria: when a community is unable to deal with a problem that challenges its way of being, self-image or existence, 'it may be tempted to adopt a peculiar defensive ploy. It will substitute a fictional problem [...] for the real one that it finds insurmountable. In grappling with the former, the community can convince itself that it has successfully confronted the latter.'<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Faludi's larger point is that America's reaction was hardly 'new': in moments of crisis, Americans displace their insecurity by restoring their 'faith in [their] own invincibility through fables of female peril and the rescue of "just one young girl"'.<sup>21</sup> In the face of insecurity bred by Indian attacks, American culture generated a countermyth of cowboy arrogance and feminine weakness, one that has been revived every time the nation feels vulnerable. This is what happened on 11 September, when Americans experienced once again homeland terror and humiliation. And, once again, Americans steered away from self-knowledge and rather embraced myth. On the field, among the casualties were women who, by being recast as victims, have been denied any agency and seem to have disappeared from the scene, but also men who, while being cast back in the role of heroes, have been denied any serious inquiry about themselves.

This, according to Faludi and others, was the cultural response initiated by the media, entertainment, and advertising. I argue that this 'pronounced resurgence in a gendered sociopolitical rhetoric of protective paternalism' holds true also when taking into consideration the initial response provided by mainstream sf movies.<sup>22</sup> This feature, along with the emasculation brought about by feminism, constitutes an update of the familiar trope of invasion from outer space of the 1950s and 1960s.

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19 Melnick 2009: p. 121.

20 Terray, Emmanuel: 'Headscarf Hysteria.' *New Left Review* 26, 2004, p. 118.

21 Faludi 2007: p. 200.

22 Godfrey, S./Hamad, H. 2014: p. 157.

## Artistic responses to 9/11: sf cinema

11 September has generated a great number of responses that range from commemorative merchandising to cartoons and comics, from essays to fiction, from music to films. One of the features of the initial responses is that they are almost all collective projects, as if to say that 9/11 cannot be contained and can be tackled only by a plurality of voices.<sup>23</sup> The following years, on the other hand, have seen the appearance of substantial, individual artistic responses, from novels like Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, to films like Paul Greengrass's *United 93* and Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center*. The films, in particular, tend to replicate the event and offer no examination or analysis of it.<sup>24</sup>

Of all the studies on post-9/11 cinema, only Tom Pollard (2011) offers a sustained analysis of sf films. His extended study of Hollywood's response to 9/11 also notices that very few films deal with the events of 11 September directly, but several reflect the attacks more obliquely. Along similar lines, Guy Westwell also observes that some movies 'may be read as indirect representations of, or informed by, 9/11 that extend the ways in which those attacks and their aftermath might be described and [...] understood'.<sup>25</sup>

Thematically structured around the emotional responses engendered by the 9/11 events and their aftermath, Pollard's study catalogues Hollywood productions along seven emotions – shock, grief, horror, rage, vengeance, terror, and paranoia. He notices that today, Islamic terrorism is translated both into realist and sf films, with terrorists taking many shapes, from 'greedy corporate executives, ruthless Wall Street traders, serial killers, and rogue intelligence agents'<sup>26</sup> to climactic apocalypse, aliens, zombies, mutants, and vampires. All these various monsters 'attack symbols of Western businesses and governments', without depicting 'their hopes, fears, and aspirations', hence avoiding 'the viewpoint of violent opponents of U.S. policies' – a choice motivated by filmmakers' unwillingness to

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23 Anthologies were published across genres; as for films, the subject of this study, one collective project should be mentioned: *11'09"01*. Released in 2002, the film has been virtually censored in the U.S. and has only been made available as a DVD.

24 An early film that deals with the theme of a threatened community in the post-9/11 atmosphere is Shyamalan's *The Village*. For an analysis of *The Village* in relation to utopia in post-9/11, see Baccolini, Raffaella: 'Dystopian Fears, Utopian Nightmares? Reflections on M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village*'. *mediAzioni* 2, 2006, retrieved 01.05.2017 from [http://www.mediaziononline.it/english/dossier/2006baccolini\\_eng.html](http://www.mediaziononline.it/english/dossier/2006baccolini_eng.html).

25 Westwell 2014: p. 94.

26 Pollard 2011: p. 112.



risk revenue.<sup>27</sup> In particular, Pollard discusses sf films in the chapter on paranoia, where he concludes by stating that by evoking apocalyptic scenarios, ‘filmmakers tread safer ground than they would discussing Middle Eastern oil interests or Bush-era geopolitical ambitions.’<sup>28</sup> According to Pollard, post-9/11 sf ‘expresses fear, anxiety, panic, and outright paranoia about humanity’s fate in a violent, chaotic universe. [...] Apocalypse is the form paranoia assumes in the genre’. In such films, ‘paranoia symbolically stems not from fear of terrorists but from fear of outside forces poised to annihilate humanity and the entire earth’.<sup>29</sup>

Some sf films depict the earth’s destruction by extraterrestrial beings and extraordinary forces, thus turning to a traditional invasion-survival-and-rescue narrative. A number of sf films have explored the ecological disaster/end of the world plot: Robert Emmerich’s *The Day after Tomorrow* and *2012*, Francis Lawrence’s *I Am Legend*, as well as Hillcoat’s *The Road*. Others have kept to the invasion “from outside”, like Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds*, Matt Reeves’s *Cloverfield*, as well as Scott Derrickson’s remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. The two films chosen offer examples of mainstream sf cinema that, in their depictions of apocalyptic scenarios, also propose particularly interesting gender narratives, split along the lines of invincible manhood – and more specifically manly protectiveness and fatherhood – and jeopardised femininity. In doing so, they “update” the trope of the invasion from outer space and provide an elaboration of the trauma of 9/11.

A look at the publicity posters of these films confirms what has just been said. Both *War of the Worlds* and *The Road* showcase images of fathers protecting their children against a dark backdrop and with images of destruction in the first case, and against a bleak and frozen landscape in the second. Both men physically bond with their children: Tom Cruise holds his daughter who clings on to him, while Viggo Mortensen leads his son by the hand. Both images convey a reconstituted ideal of good, protective fatherhood – where despite the adversities, the ideal masculinity is represented by white, heterosexual men.

Set in New Jersey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Spielberg’s adaptation of Wells’s classic ‘could be taken as a statement of America’s deep unease following the September 11 attacks’ (‘Spielberg’). Several elements alert the viewer to such an atmosphere: the voiceover at the beginning of the film informs us that years of scheming and surveillance were needed for the aliens to draw up their evil plans against humans, thus establishing from the very beginning a potential parallelism with terrorism

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27 Pollard 2011: p. 12.

28 Pollard 2011: p. 148.

29 Pollard 2011: p. 131.

and sleeper cells waiting to be activated. Initially the alien aggression is mistaken for a terrorist attack, with the protagonist's daughter repeatedly asking, 'Is it the terrorists?' Confusion reigns at large with people fleeing incomprehensible death and destruction. There are a number of scenes in the movies that are also openly reminiscent of 9/11, as when the protagonist returns home, traumatised and covered in dust, after having seen the first alien attack; or when he and his children walk out of the house amid the rubble of a plane that has crashed on the neighbourhood; or when as the survivors-refugees march in search of a safe place, they walk by posters of missing people posted along the road; or still when queuing blood donors are sent away because doctors already have enough blood. Besides these evoking images, Spielberg shows that it is the families that are primarily threatened by the invasion: his film concentrates on the impact of the attacks on the lives of ordinary people.

The plot modifies Wells's original in several ways besides temporal and spatial setting: one significant change, for example, regards the protagonist, Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise), who is not a happily married, middle-class intellectual without children, but is a divorced, working-class guy, and estranged father of two. The film thus fits with what Hannah Hamad and others have seen as a recurrent Spielberg theme, that of 'inadequate fatherhood' – presenting the movie as a story of 'domestic crisis'.<sup>30</sup> We first meet Ray at work where he is a skilled labourer. After a long shift, however, he is not willing, when his boss asks him, to work any extra hours – not because he is not "part of the team", but because of union laws. This is the exchange that follows:

Boss: 'Do you know what your problem is?'

Ray: 'I can think of a couple of women who'd be happy to tell ya.'

Ray's tongue-in-cheek reply suggests simultaneously the image of a depleted masculinity and of an overbearing womanhood. For women, he is the kind of man who does not deliver – either sexually, but also, in a more metaphorical way, economically and morally. As the movie progresses, we see that the protagonist seems to be a man who fails in almost all areas of life – we are left with the image of a basically good, hard-working man at the mercy of angry, demanding, bitchy women. And the next scenes confirm exactly that. We see him arrive late, at his own home, while his pregnant former-wife Mary Ann (Miranda Otto) and two children – 16-year-old Robbie (Justin Chatwin) and 10-year-old Rachel (Dakota Fanning) – wait for him in the company of the new and rich husband/father, Tim (David Alan Basche).

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30 Hamad 2011: p. 242.

By comparing the two men, competing images of masculinities are offered: on the one hand there is Tim, a representative of the liberal, soft, middle-class man (but, essentially, ineffectual), while, on the other, stands Ray, a devalued, belittled working-class man (but, actually, the true model of masculinity). This fragmentation of masculinities, together with the devaluation and disavowal of fatherhood, also facilitates the disintegration of the social order – one that is also iconically destroyed by the aliens. The troubles of modern masculinity and of the post-9/11 cultural landscape can be narrowed down to the emasculation brought about by feminism. Such a narrative is in line with a ‘tendency of contemporary Hollywood to characterize “the white male as victim” of, among other things, feminism.’<sup>31</sup> Ray is clearly seen as the poorer and unreliable man: his pregnant ex-wife does not even trust him with his child’s suitcase; his refrigerator is empty; there are no separate rooms for his son and daughter; and almost every conversation revolves around his lower economic status. It is Tim, the new husband, who pays for his children’s schools, and as Ray engages in a sort of all-male competition around sport with his rebellious teenage son, he comes out humiliated and beaten. He is not a model for his children who do not respect him and seem more sophisticated than he is. Furthermore, his daughter seems to be already a small-size version of her mother – an overbearing female who knows best and whose constant talking and hysterical cries drive her father crazy. He, however, is neither a source of comfort nor a symbol of protection for his children, who bypass his attempts to take care of them and comfort each other instead: ‘Who’s gonna take care of me if you go?’, asks a frantic Rachel clinging to her brother, while their father is shown helpless, humiliated, and impotent. Ray’s devaluation as father figure is then carried out both through his lack of paternal authority and his economic status.

And yet, despite being portrayed as a loser as far as his family is concerned, he is shown as a respected member of his immediate community, where people stop him to ask his opinion and to seek advice, so that we are alerted that we are likely to be in the presence of a misunderstood character. And in fact, Ray may have been beaten by the economic recession and by domineering women, but he is a resourceful and courageous all-American man who is a hands-on kind of guy. Despite the continuous humiliation and the lack of recognition from his children, he manages to protect them up to a climactic scene, where he is forced to choose between them: after trying to talk his son out of joining the army, he reluctantly lets him go in order to save his daughter from being taken away by a married couple.

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31 Hamad 2011: p. 244.

The movie, at this point, turns out to be a rescue mission of the damsel in distress on the part of the chivalrous father who needs to protect not only his daughter's life, but also her purity, much in the tradition of the captivity narratives of which Faludi writes. Each attack, in fact, seems to suggest a sexual threat to his daughter and to American womanhood by extension. Having averted a sort of abduction of his daughter on the part of the married couple (albeit with good intentions), Ray and his daughter are offered shelter in a basement by Harlan Ogilvy (Tim Robbins), who turns out to be a rather eerie survivalist. The encounter with Ogilvy serves to compare two other types of masculinities: an apparently strong, but ultimately destructive and dangerous one – Robbins's – and one that seems weak but will show itself to be strong – Ray's. This encounter also serves to set up the revenge of the really *true* American man. While in hiding, Ogilvy offers his end-of-the-world theories to an increasingly preoccupied Ray, who fears for the morale of his daughter. Despite Ogilvy's assertion that 'running is what'll kill you,' he also recognises the might of the aliens: 'We're beat to shit. [...] They defeated the greatest power in the world in a couple of days. Walked right over us. [...] This is not a war, [...] it is an extermination.' His words clearly indicate the feeling of humiliation at the collapse of the 'greatest power in the world.'<sup>32</sup>

Later that night a tripod probe invades the basement, and it is thanks to Ray that the three manage to escape detection. Whereas Ogilvy is ready to attack the invaders and accuses Ray of being a coward, Ray takes charge of his and his daughter's survival in several ways – outsmarting the aliens but most of all, ultimately killing Ogilvy whose cries risk giving them away.<sup>33</sup> As shocking as his action can appear, it earns him his daughter's recognition. As he returns from having killed Ogilvy, she sits for the first time on his lap and the next shot shows them sleeping,

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32 At this point Ogilvy is discovered making a disturbing offer to Ray's daughter: 'You miss your mommy? I had a little girl. Nearly your age. You know, if anything happens to your daddy, I'll take care of you.' The offer sounds inappropriate and, to some extent, sexual both to the viewers' ears and to Ray, who warns Ogilvy to leave her alone and never to talk to her.

33 Ray's killing of Ogilvy is in line with other non-sf movies and TV shows (i.e., *Taken*, *Live Free or Die Hard*, and *24*) that, as Sarah Godfrey and Hannah Hamad suggest, show male characters 'compelled to act outside the parameters of acceptability to protect their daughters, in a post-9/11 cultural climate' of exceptionalism that requires and legitimises this type of response (2014, p. 167). Two more scenes are worth mentioning as far as gender is concerned: while Ray and Ogilvy struggle, the aliens are seen examining photographs of women: they pass one picture in particular among them and lift it to their faces, and seem to then be sniffing it, and licking it. The gesture, even if unclear, appears as a sexual defiling of earth women on the part of the aliens.

again for the first time, close to each other.<sup>34</sup> The message seems to be that only after killing a man can the hero reclaim his restored manhood.<sup>35</sup>

After a climactic scene of struggle and triumph on the part of Ray, the end of the film finally shows Ray for what he has always been: a reliable man who delivers.<sup>36</sup> After having saved his daughter, not only does he deliver “the answer” to the soldiers to defeat the aliens, but he also delivers his daughter into the arms of his former wife. His son is also there, and for the first time, they all seem grateful to Ray for all that he has done: Robbie calls him ‘dad’ instead of ‘Ray’ as they embrace; the in-laws look at him with approval; the rich husband’s importance is also visually reduced, as he remains in the background. Ray’s manhood is reinstated, but the ending does not allow for a full restitution: he remains outside the new nuclear family that cannot accommodate him. The film is then prominently evocative of the American mythological narrative of the West: Ray is none other than the compromised, tainted hero (after all he has killed a man), who sacrifices himself for the good of the community and, despite the community’s recognition, has no place in civilisation.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike the previous film, Hillcoat’s adaptation of McCarthy’s novel, *The Road*, points to humanity’s irresponsible choices, either environmental or political. Described as “Mad Max” in slow motion mixed with “28 Days Later” by *salon* critic Andrew O’Hehir, the story takes place in the near future, in the former U.S., after a great, unexplained apocalyptic event wipes out most human and animal life and leaves the earth covered with grey ash.<sup>38</sup> The protagonist’s voiceover, at the beginning of the movie, seems to suggest that the nuclear winter is man-made: “The clocks stopped at one seventeen. There was a long shear bright light, then a series of low concussions. [...] Each day is more gray than the one before [...] as the world slowly dies.’ Civilisation has been destroyed, along with most life; and even if the precise fate of the rest of the earth is not made clear, the implication is that

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34 The sexual innuendo of such a scene is also problematic.

35 See Slotkin’s ‘regeneration through violence.’ Slotkin, Richard: *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860*. Wesleyan UP: Middletown, 1973.

36 When things between Ray and his daughter finally seem to be set on the right path, Rachel’s typically female behaviour (screams, hysterics) precipitates the situation. When the evil tripod captures Rachel, Ray “offers” himself instead and saves not only himself and his daughter but all the other captives as he throws a hand grenade inside the alien.

37 See Slotkin 1973.

38 O’Hehir, Andrew: ‘On “The Road” with John Hillcoat’. *Salon*, 30 November 2009, retrieved 01.05.2017 from [http://www.salon.com/2009/11/30/john\\_hillcoat\\_the\\_road/](http://www.salon.com/2009/11/30/john_hillcoat_the_road/).

the disaster has affected the entire planet. What is left of humanity consists largely of gangs of cannibals, their prey, and refugees who scavenge for anything safe left to eat. The movie centers on two nameless characters, father (Viggo Mortensen) and son (Kodi Smit-McPhee), as they try to reach warmer southern climates and the sea in particular.<sup>39</sup>

There is no direct evocation of 9/11, and yet, the atmosphere is typically post-9/11 because of the uncertainty and anxiety surrounding the unexpected, unforeseeable event. Although the genre and atmosphere are definitely post-apocalyptic, Hillcoat has repeatedly stated in interviews that he did not reference (post-)apocalyptic films, as they 'tend to be all about the big event'. He wanted instead to concentrate on 'getting through what you have to get through'.<sup>40</sup> And yet, despite Hillcoat's insistence that 9/11 is only one of the many events evoked by the film's narrative, the presence of 9/11 is nonetheless pervasive, so much so that Hillcoat himself reveals that 'the smoke billowing in the background [...] was from 9/11. We deliberately used images we have all seen to make it more real and to give more poignancy and a warning sign'.<sup>41</sup> And as other post-9/11 responses, the narrative focuses once again on a tale of end-of-the-world threat and rescue. With a change, though: this time the person to be protected is not a woman, but a young boy. Women, on the other hand, seem to have disappeared almost entirely from the surface of the earth.

The wife/mother character (Charlize Theron) has certainly been erased from the narrative as she lives only in memories and flashbacks: pregnant with the boy at the time of the cataclysm and overwhelmed by the events, she has committed suicide some years before the story begins. Her decision to kill herself is recollected in two disturbing flashbacks, where she is presented as a cold, rational, embittered, and selfish woman, whose answers to her begging husband are a series of 'no', 'I won't', 'I can't', 'I can't help you':

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39 Both novel and screenplay refer to them as 'the man' and 'the boy'.

40 O'Hehir 2009.

41 Minow, Nell: 'Interview: John Hillcoat of "The Road"'. [n.d.], retrieved 01.05.2017 from <http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/moviemom/2009/11/interview-john-hillcoat-of-the.html#>. While Zournazi fails to see the film as either post-apocalyptic or sf because it concerns 'the world how it could be now' (Zournazi, Mary: 'Afterword: Acts of Kindness – Reflections on a Different Kind of Road Movie'. In: Murphet, Julian/Steven Mark, eds.: *Styles of Extinction: Corman McCarthy's The Road*. Continuum, London 2012, p. 146), Hillcoat's remarks underline the dystopian sf's function of providing a warning.

Woman: They're gonna catch up with us and they're gonna kill us. They're gonna rape me and then they're gonna rape your son and they're gonna kill us and eat us.

Man: Whatever it takes...

Woman: Stop.

Man: I told you.

Woman: Stop it.

Man: I'll do anything.

Woman: Like what? I don't even know why I ask you. I should just go ahead and empty every goddamn bullet into my brain and leave you with nothing. That's what I should do.<sup>42</sup>

Once again we are in the presence of an overbearing woman who won't even say goodbye to her son and, far from being the nurturing kind, complains to her man that he does not deliver. The story, to a certain extent, will prove her wrong. However, her disappearance is complete when, after telling his son to 'stop thinking about her', the man takes off his wedding band, flings his wife's picture into the river, and, thinking about the last fight they had on the night she left, he laconically says, 'She was gone, and the coldness of it was her final gift... she died somewhere in the dark... there is no other tale to tell.'

In this all-male, collapsing world, there are, once again, different portrayals of masculinity: the weakened father who rises to the occasion and goes out of his way to protect his son from the constant threat of attack and starvation (as well as from the boy's dangerous desire to help the other wanderers they meet), as well as a number of dangerous, selfish, and brutal masculinities. On a different level, the boy – not yet a man – born into this world, has no experience of what life was like before the disaster, and yet he has retained kindness, compassion, and innocence that have otherwise disappeared from this world. The father, on the other hand, cannot afford to be generous, is always on the lookout, and is extremely suspicious: he has had to adjust to the brutal requirements of survival. Like the father in Spielberg's movie, he is compelled to act outside the parameters of legality and goes as far as killing a man to protect his child. Where, upon meeting other survivors, the father's instinct is to hide, defend, and kill, the boy's is to offer food. Despite the young age of the boy and surrounding horror, the boy has retained a wisdom and a serenity that highly contrast with his world and, for example,

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42 The novel is perhaps even more explicit: 'What in God's name are you talking about? We're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film. [...] You can't protect us. You say you would die for us but what good is that? [...] You can think of me as a faithless slut if you like. I've taken a new lover. He can give me what you cannot. [...] As for me my only hope is for eternal nothingness and I hope it with all my heart' (McCarthy 2006: pp. 56–60).

with the bitchy maturity and at times hysterics of Spielberg's female kid. As the narrative develops, in fact, the religious overtones of the film become stronger: the boy is progressively associated with a Christ figure, the last remnant of beauty and goodness in this world. The kid is said to be 'an angel', 'a god', 'the last god', and 'the word of God'. Rife with religious overtones is, in particular, an exchange between father and son toward the end of the film. As the boy is deeply upset at his father's survivalist defence tactics and repeatedly sobs in front of what he perceives as injustices, the father tells him, 'You're not the one who has to worry about everything'. To which the boy replies, 'Yes I am. I am the one'.

In what looks like a rewriting of the holy family, the mother has been written off – and written out of the story. The boy is the father's 'warrant' – his *raison d'être*, but also the one who reminds him of compassion and hope in this empty world. Father and son are thus 'each the other's world entire'.<sup>43</sup> Even in his imagination, the father cannot bring himself to think of a world also inhabited by women:

Boy: What's on the other side?

Man: Nothing.

Boy: There has to be something.

Man: Maybe there's a father and his little boy and they're sitting on the beach too.

The father is not simply struggling to protect his son, he has also taught him that they are the 'good guys' who are 'carrying the fire'. As the movie unravels, the fire is the boy's compassion, but it is also their hope, and a remnant of civilisation. The film ends – a bit too simplistically, I think – with the death of the father, who has succeeded in protecting his son so far, and with the unexpected meeting (after almost 2 hours of pure misery and horror) of nothing less than a traditional nuclear family: a kind man with a wife and two children, who invite the boy to join them. Both father and son are proved right in their faith in the existence of other good men: We see, for the first time in the film, signs of life, civilisation, kindness, and hope in a hopeless landscape. The last words of the film are left to the motherly woman (Molly Parker), a stark contrast to the selfish mother who has abandoned her child: 'We're so lucky. We were so worried about you. And now we don't have to worry about a thing. How does that sound? Is that okay?'

What *The Road* envisions is, then, a 'men-without-women' kind of world, much like Ernest Hemingway's *Men Without Women* stories.<sup>44</sup> But if all that the film painstakingly asserts is this laconic, masculine world, the ending surprisingly

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43 McCarthy 2006: p. 4.

44 It may not be a coincidence that Hillcoat himself says that the book is about 'grace under pressure' (Minow [n.d.]).



restores the traditional, nuclear family. The woman is in fact described in the script as a 'motherly' woman<sup>45</sup>, much unlike the boy's own mother. There may be no place for a selfish, overbearing female, but their existence is secure if women are undemanding and dependent.

## Conclusion

Two major trends seem to characterise these post-9/11 sf films: the trope of invasion from outer space is adapted to address the threat of terrorism, while post-apocalyptic destruction works as yet another projection of humanity's worst fear, be it man-made or natural. Both films are marked by an anxiety that turns at times to paranoia, a feature Pollard identifies as characteristic of post-9/11 sf. The post-apocalyptic setting, according to Hillcoat, 'makes hope all the more special. The light shines brightest when it is surrounded by dark.'<sup>46</sup> And yet, if we take the words of *The Road's* protagonist as a commentary on the state of post-9/11 world (and sf), they cannot but leave us baffled: 'When you dream about bad things happening it shows you're still fighting. You're still alive. It's when you start to dream about good things you should start to worry.' The popularity of violence and destruction in post-9/11 films surely attests to the flourishing of dystopian, post-apocalyptic sf as well as a desire to resist. It is unfortunate that such a fight metaphorically leaves gender relations on the battleground and casts a baffling shadow on the possibility of utopian dreams (the dream of 'good things').

Even though the world will continue, the endings are tragic – to different degrees – for their protagonists who witness and live through destruction: in *The Road*, hope survives despite the death of the father; *War of the Worlds* closes on a higher note, and yet there is no place for its protagonist in the new society. What seems more important, however, is the involution in terms of gender politics that has occurred in the societies depicted in these works and that characterises these post-9/11 sf films. One of the distinguishing features of the post-9/11 cultural climate has been to reduce and 'translate the violence of the day as a simple assault on the proper functioning of American masculinity and femininity', reinforcing the idea of 'how much we need male "protectors" and how little we need feminists'.<sup>47</sup> Both confirm, in different ways and to different degrees, the gender discourses that have characterised the post-9/11 U.S.: the disappearance and victimisation

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45 Penhall, Joe: 'The Road'. [n.d.], p. 111, retrieved 01.05.2017 from <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~ina22/splaylib/Screenplay-Road,%20The.pdf>.

46 Minow [n.d.].

47 Melnick 2009: p. 123, Faludi 2007: p. 76.

of women and the resurgence of protective paternalism. Both value women that are undemanding and dependent, and Spielberg's film in particular casts them as the victims that need to be rescued by strong, competent men. Consequently, the traditional nuclear family is reinstated as the pillar of the post-9/11 society, where love, friendship, and family are all that counts. In these stories, traditional masculinity is restored and men succeed in protecting those they care for. Finally, the films seem to support the idea that in times of crisis a retreat into 'safer times', represented by traditional values, is what works best. There is little space for a critical spirit in these works. The 'apocalyptic sensibility' displayed by these early responses to 9/11 loses all traces of 'progressive potential'.<sup>48</sup> If today's world and its ideology are on the way to destruction, their disintegration and untenability seem to be easily countered in the very old concept of the traditional, nuclear family and the values it represents.

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48 Westwell 2014: pp. 96, 108.

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Stefano Simonetta

## Afterword.<sup>1</sup> 'In search of (Never-)land'

Many men on their release carry their prison about with them into the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things, creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong, of society that it should force them to do so. [...] When the man's punishment is over, it leaves him to himself; that is to say, it abandons him at the very moment when its highest duty towards him begins. It is really ashamed of its own actions, and shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay, or one on whom they have inflicted an irreparable wrong.

O. Wilde, *De Profundis*

'The attempted definition of "Utopia"', in the first few lines of the entry in the UTET *Dizionario di politica*, 'is complicated by the multiplicity of possible approaches.'<sup>2</sup> The interdepartmental research group on utopias at the University of Milan, of which I have been scientific director since 2014, wishes instead to define this multiplicity of approaches as a privileged way to shed light on a category that has always been a constant in political reflection and culture whenever a model of society that in a certain context can appear totally unworkable has been imagined or designed in a near future.

For this reason, when this project was initially drafted, we decided to follow a radically (utopian) interdisciplinary perspective: a term which, after a long season of glory, has since appeared obsolete, at least within the borders of our country, but it is quite an endearing term to the writer of this chapter and the numerous colleagues involved in this venture. Therefore, here is a team of ethno-cultural anthropologists, political scientists, philosophers, historians, scholars of aesthetics and theory of the image, of languages and culture, sociologists and

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- 1 The author wishes to thank Giuseppina Rizzi for her invaluable help with the translation of this chapter.
  - 2 Maffey, Aldo, 'Utopia', in Bobbio, N./Matteucci, N./Pasquino, G. (eds.), *Dizionario di politica*. UTET: Torino 1990, p. 1214.

geographers engaged in both individual and collective efforts to investigate the role of utopias in their respective fields of study, through a transversal project that crosses the boundaries of scientific-disciplinary sectors and “corrupts” them. From the principle of hope to eco-topia; from a utopian reflection as a challenge to realism to the interweaving of utopia, heterodoxy and millenarianism<sup>3</sup>; from abandoned places to good places, through the perspective of recovery as a form of concrete utopia<sup>4</sup>; from the identification of a utopian pedagogy in the teaching and learning of foreign languages to the utopian model of society found in institutional communication of some public administrations<sup>5</sup>; from Europeanist utopia to ethno-anthropological investigations on indigenous forms of utopia and the cultural productions of African migrants in Italy; from the figuration of nomadism as concrete utopia to reflection on the effectiveness of images of violence as a deterrent to violence itself.<sup>6</sup>

This project involves researchers and teachers of six of our university departments who wanted to establish a core work group which in the future, with the involvement of members in the area of medical sciences and other important fields, could take the form of a larger and more articulate project and be able to attract European research funds.

However the singular cultural experience that I would like to focus on briefly in this afterword concerns a sub-area of our work group, engaged in a line of research which initially had not even been imagined and which is undoubtedly the most original. Many years ago, at a conference in Turin, the Italian historian Luigi Firpo told me that the most effective metaphor to indicate utopia, to which he had devoted a lifetime of study, was the message delivered in a bottle to future generations in order to make something possible, which at that time had seemed to have no prospective country, no residence and citizenship. I thought about those words – and the sense of challenge they contained – when, in the spring of 2014, I suggested temporarily detaching some of the members of our research

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- 3 See Simonetta, Stefano: *Costretti all'utopia. Wycliffe e il movimento lollardo*. In: De Michelis, L./Iannaccaro, G./Vescovi, A. (eds.): *Il fascino inquieto dell'utopia. Percorsi storici e letterari in onore di Marialuisa Bignami*. Ledizioni: Milano 2014, pp. 63–72.
  - 4 See Dal Borgo, Alice G./Maletta, Rosalba (eds.): *Paesaggi e luoghi buoni. La comunità e le utopie tra sostenibilità e decrescita*. Mimesis: Milano 2015; Dal Borgo, A. G./Garda, E./Marini, A. (eds.): *Sguardi tra i residui. I luoghi dell'abbandono tra rovine, utopie ed eterotopie*. Mimesis: Milano 2017.
  - 5 See Brambilla, M./Bait, M./Crestani, V. (eds.): *Utopian Scenarios in Effective Communication to Citizens and Corporations*. Peter Lang: Frankfurt 2015.
  - 6 See Pinotti, Andrea/Guerri, Maurizio (eds.): *Immagini e guerre*. Mimesis: Milano 2016.

team to put their and my own energies into a project – wholly unusual in our country – on the theme of the prison, both to study a new way of thought on the penalty for people incarcerated as responsible for crimes and to translate this research into best practices.

The first result of this work was a conference – held in September 2014 on the island of Ventotene, a symbolic place of imprisonment and confinement<sup>7</sup> – which saw historians of thought and law, sociologists, philosophers, geographers and experts in the field investigate, reflect and discuss models of society that have inspired completely different concepts of prison from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present: from Beccaria and Bentham to Durkheim and Foucault, from the fundamental ideas of the penitentiary system typical of the *Ancien Régime* to the guiding principle of the fathers of the Italian constitution, according to which custodial sentences must be functional to the rehabilitation of the convicted.<sup>8</sup>

The research material of that conference was inserted into one volume (published the following year<sup>9</sup>). Its starting point was the special relationship of *longue durée* between philosophers and prisons and the debt of the history of utopian thinking and, more generally, of philosophy on prison as the “ideal” place from which to imagine new worlds and new states, precisely because of the impossibility of seeing what happens daily in real life behind the prison walls. Philosophy had therefore the chance – so to speak – to return the favour by making prison the object of its research; with the help of other *artes* that in the volume in question wanted a programmed multidisciplinary mix.

The outcome was a sort of travel diary in the ‘prison archipelago’<sup>10</sup>: scattered notes, drawn up in different styles and methods, in which the long journey was narrated that led from the idea of panopticon prison to the tendency to think of prison as a place of public service, which could ‘produce freedom’ instead of hypocrisy and fiction<sup>11</sup>; a place that re-socialises, restores dignity and responsibility

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7 Simonetta, S., ‘Utopia e carcere. Il caso Santo Stefano, da panoptikon a prigionia aperta, Ventotene (Italy), 27–28 September 2014, under the patronage of the municipality of Ventotene and the Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia, which has since changed its name to Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri.

8 Italian Constitution, article 27: ‘[...] The punishment cannot consist of treatment contrary to the sense of humanity and must strive for re-education of the convicted person.’

9 Simonetta, Stefano (ed.): *Utopia e carcere*. Editoriale Scientifica: Napoli 2015.

10 Foucault, Michel: *Sorvegliare e punire. Nascita della prigione*. Einaudi: Torino 1976, p. 328.

11 Insofar as it empowers the incarcerated inmates and liberates them from the need to recite a script. In this respect see in particular Castellano, Lucia/Stasio, Donatella:

(but some thinkers even speculate a justice without detention, a society without prisons<sup>12</sup>). That same journey describes the first part of a path together with a diverse group of scholars sharing the same civil passion with the desire to understand how to give shape and concreteness to a utopia that, far from being relegated to a mere dream, creates an effective project.

Further steps of this project were and will be the study seminar on the importance of preserving the memory of the prison, which was held in Milan in the winter of 2015, and the preparatory work for a new meeting – planned for the spring of 2018 at the prison of Gorgona, interesting model of *mitigated detention*<sup>13</sup> – committed to the gradual emergence of a different way of conceiving punitive responses for the criminals, something which leads increasingly to criminals paying their debt to society outside the prison, through increasing the use of alternative measures, in particular, the so-called community sanctions, which leave the offenders in society, with the intent to reinsert them progressively.<sup>14</sup> A reflection on this alternative form of response is intertwined with that of the need to identify, in this as in other areas, re-socialisation paths that truly respect subjectivity, and are devoid of the many dystopian elements peculiar to experiments of re-education (individual or mass) of the past<sup>15</sup>, from the age of the *Ancient Régime* to the totalitarianism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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*Diritti e castighi. Storie di umanità cancellata in carcere.* Il Saggiatore: Milano 2009, pp. 14–7.

- 12 See Manconi, L./Anastasia, S./Calderone, V./Resta, F. (eds.): *Abolire il carcere.* Feltrinelli: Milano 2015.
- 13 Mazzerbo, Carlo/Catalano, Gregorio: *Ne vale la pena. Gorgona, una storia di detenzione, lavoro e riscatto.* Nutrimenti: Roma 2013.
- 14 Adopting an approach of this kind is also connected to the strong awareness that imprisonment is harmful, especially for people who have made minor offences, for whom prison is in danger of turning into a school of crime. Among those who have served at least part of their sentence in criminal enforcement outside, the recurrence rate is much lower. The most effective punishments, also ensuring the safety of the citizenry, are those that do not alienate the offender from the community to which they belong but instead help him/her understand the importance of compliance with the laws and regulations of civil coexistence. The punishment shall be ensured, even if it is a reduced sentence, whole or in part, outside the walls of a prison; and the adoption of non-custodial measures in growing proportion, particularly for the less serious offenders and for those who have already spent a long time in prison, produces greater social security.
- 15 See Salle, Grégory: *L'utopie carcérale. Petite histoire des "prisons modèles".* Editions Amsterdam: Paris 2016.



Simultaneously, in practical terms, by the end of 2014, a process gradually led us (as University of Milan) to engage in a number of initiatives – in the context of the Convention signed in December 2015 by the Provveditorato Regionale dell'Amministrazione Penitenziaria of Lombardia (Prison Administration Regional Directorate) and by the University of Milan – through which the University became one of the institutions aiding, through education, in the reintegration into civil context of persons deprived temporarily of liberty for having broken the social contract with their community.<sup>16</sup> Those initiatives include: exemption from tuition and fees for students in jail, the assignment of a tutor to each person, at least once a week, enabling individual internships for students within the detention facilities, development and promotion of common cultural activities (exhibitions, theatre shows, documentaries, readings etc.) and, most importantly, a growing number of courses within the two universities (i.e. the two correctorial facilities of Bollate and Opera where students can enroll and study at university), with the participation of students, both from outside and in detention facilities, regardless of their being formally enrolled at the university.

So, one of the islands that has not been created yet, but to which our group is working on, has the shape of places like Santo Stefano di Ventotene or Gorgona: places that, from being considered 'tomb of the living'<sup>17</sup>, have become a theatre of extraordinary experiments of re-education and rehabilitation, translating into concrete actions what is stated in article 27 of the Italian Constitution and allowing some sort of principle of hope – or at least an encouraging precedent – to those who believe the time has come to cease to abandon to their fate, those who have been released into society, after spending much of their time in prison.<sup>18</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century

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16 In line with some pilot projects carried out abroad, especially in the United States: think of the Prison education program of Cornell University, Ithaca (NY), <https://www.sce.cornell.edu/sce/cpep.php>, <http://cpep.cornell.edu/>, or the extraordinary work done by Emily Allen Hornblower, classicist at Rutgers (NJ), through her participation in the New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons Consortium (NJ-STEP), which during the last three years has lead her to teach a world civilisation course to a class of inmates in two Jersey State Prisons. On this topic, see also Zoukis, Christopher: *College for Convicts. The Case for Higher Education in American Prisons*. McFarland & Co.: Jefferson, NC 2014.

17 As Settembrini indicates in his memoirs in the prison of Santo Stefano, where he was imprisoned from 1851 to 1859. See Settembrini. Luigi: *Ricordanze della mia vita e altri scritti*. UTET: Torino 1971.

18 See Perucatti, Antonio: *Quel "criminale" di mio padre. Eugenio Perucatti e la riforma del carcere di Santo Stefano. Una storia di umana redenzione*. Ultima spiaggia: Genova-Ventotene 2014; Mazzerbo/Catalano 2013. As regards a third school, the most important,

English historian Lord Macaulay wrote that it is not always true that ‘an acre in Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia.’<sup>19</sup> Sometimes, while working on the theme of prisons (as on the other themes studied in this volume) one should consider that there is a utopian thinking behind the ideal of changing ways in which prisons should work in order to allow for prisoners to be accepted back into society.

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namely that of the model prison of Bollate, see Castellano/Stasio 2009; Mastrobuoni, Giovanni/Terlizzese, Daniele: *Rehabilitating Rehabilitation: Prison Conditions and Recidivism*. EIEF (Einaudi Institute for Economics and Finance): Rome 2014. Available at [http://www.eief.it/files/2014/11/wp-13-rehabilitating-rehabilitation\\_prison-conditions-and-recidivism.pdf](http://www.eief.it/files/2014/11/wp-13-rehabilitating-rehabilitation_prison-conditions-and-recidivism.pdf).

19 Macaulay, Thomas Babington: *Critical and Historical Essays, contributed to the Edinburgh Review*. Vol. 2. Longman, London 1843, p. 396.

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