

Travel, Culture, and Society: A Book Review Article of New Work by Andraş and Tötösy de Zepetnek, Wang, and Sun

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**Katerina SOUMANI**

**Travel, Culture, and Society:**

**A Book Review Article of New Work by Andraş and Tötösy de Zepetnek, Wang, and Sun**

During the past two decades, travel writing has received much scholarly attention not only by literary scholars, but also by scholars from a wide array of academic disciplines, thus gaining an interdisciplinary status. This fact should come as no surprise if we take into consideration the following two factors: first, the current geopolitical context, in which such notions as "mobility," "displacement," "identity," "border," etc., linked to the concept of travel itself become central and give rise to questions which can be addressed more efficiently when different perspectives and methodological outlooks come together to engage in inquiry. The second factor is more directly related to the genre of travel writing in itself, which, as Joan-Pau Rubiés puts it, is more adequately described as a "genre of genres": "a variety of kinds of literature defined by a variety of purposes and conventions share travel as their essential condition of production. The concept of literary genre refers to a set of assumptions and often invisible rules that shape the way a linguistic representation is formally organised to meet the demands of a social context of communication" (6).

Given that the boundaries between travel texts and travel fiction are often blurry, in many cases it seems safer to talk about a hybrid genre whose study from diverse disciplinary stances would probably be more appropriate and complete. Indeed, as Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs's volume *Perspectives on Travel Writing* suggests, travel writing has become an object of study for scholars from fields as varied — and at once interrelated — as geography, history, sociology, linguistics, and cultural studies, among others. In view of the prolific literature on travel writing, the publication of yet more works on the subject might be considered dispensable, if not redundant. Nevertheless, when it comes to an issue as interesting and multifarious as travel writing, there always seems to be room for further inquiry, especially when the contributions made delve into previously unexplored areas or provide fresh perspectives on matters which have already been treated. It is in this sense that the edited volumes under review add to the existing body of research on travel writing and travel or/and (comparative) cultural studies in general and are thus worth introducing to prospective readers.

The first volume I review is *New Directions in Travel Writing and Travel Studies*, edited by Carmen Andraş. In line with the current state of research on travel writing the volume is a collection of articles by an international group of scholars with diverse academic backgrounds, in which the theme of travel is the common denominator. The variety of theoretical approaches, along with the reference to different geographical and temporal contexts of travel, grants it with an unquestionable interdisciplinary and pluralistic character. In their analyses, the contributors draw on (comparative) cultural studies, imagology, travel studies per se, postcolonial studies, cultural anthropology, semiology, history, literature, geography, political science, and other interrelated and, more often than not, overlapping fields of research. The volume is divided into four parts, each consisting of five to nine articles. The volume's parts are created on the basis of the articles' content, that is, the specific aspects of the issue that are looked into, while the chronological period is not a determining criterion. Thus, part one, under the general title "The Study of Travel and Travel Writing," deals with central topics and recurring themes in travel studies, some of which occupy a prominent place in the existing bibliography, both in terms of quantity and quality, such as the Grand Tour. In this sense, the opening article of the section, "Traveling and the Grand Tour" by Mihaela Irimia, revisits the phenomenon and looks further into its influence on tourist tendencies and the general travelers' mentality in Europe. P.J. Johnston's "The Making of Counter-Cultural Pilgrimage," on the other hand, presents an interesting and innovative approach to the notion of pilgrimage and its relation to the Beat generation challenging the established views on religion and pilgrimage and tracing the erroneously — and to a great extent deliberately — dismissed link between spirituality and the "counter-cultural" travels in Beat literature.

In Philip Krummrich's "Conversations and Reported Dialogue in Travel Writing" the role and function of reported conversations in travel literature is examined in relation to the ever-intriguing question as to where the borderline between fact and fiction lies in travel narrative. Krummrich's analysis of selected representative works by authors such as Byron, Theroux, or Bryson reveals that despite what is sometimes assumed, non-fiction prose is not necessarily a factual report of events and that the use of realistic dialogues can, at times, be but an effective literary device for the enrichment of the text — independently of the author's implicit or explicit statement of veracity and, consequently, the reader's expectations. The controversy over fact and fiction in travel writing, pertaining to more general discussions on genre, is certainly not new (see, e.g., Martels) and the article in question constitutes a worthwhile contribution to the debate as it offers illustrative examples. In a similar way, "Sightseeing Strategies in Modern Travel Writing" by Arne Melberg sets out from a similar point, namely the fuzzy edge between fact and fiction, to develop an argument about the ambivalence in travel writing and the effect of the writer's perspective on charting the foreign landscape — together with the people who reside in it. The factor of subjectivity seems to be omnipresent, even in works not categorized as fiction, but merely as "travel books" or "travel guides" whose aim is to orient and inform the reader and potential traveler. Brad Olsen, for instance, in his *Sacred Places in Europe*, admits the subjective and personal criteria which are applied to the selection of the sites he includes in his travel guide.

The remaining two articles of part one of the volume, although dealing with two different issues, fit well into the general frame of discussion. In her article "Time and Journey as Cultural Metaphors," Asunción López-Varela Azcárate revisits the presence of travel as a metaphoric motif in literature, an idea that has been previously proposed by many scholars. However, López-Varela Azcárate takes up a slightly different stance by approaching the matter through the concept of time, which is also one of the most common resources for metaphoric representations. After establishing a metaphoric link between time, space, and spatial movement, her argumentation unwinds by way of specific examples in British literature from successive historical periods and the conclusion is eventually reached that the observed transformations of time and journey as metaphors may well point to a new conception of the Self, through questioning old values, and reflect "a move towards pragmatism, pluralism, ambiguity, and skeptical irony" (58). In "Staying without Paying or Heading towards Free Tourism?" Lucian Luca discusses the recent phenomenon of alternative, "decommodified" tourism, examining two internet based networks which host such content and drawing on his own personal experience as a member in one of them. An interesting proposal indeed, insightful in its approach to such notions as "neo-tribe,"

"quasi-capitalism," "social capital," and "interculturality"; in addition, the article is a timely contribution to the ongoing interdisciplinary research on tourism in general.

The title of part two, "Travel and Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania," is self-explanatory. As is the case with previous works on travel, this section collects papers on specific destinations, often labelled as "exotic" and which have been the focus of attention predominantly, although not exclusively, in the fields of postcolonial studies, anthropology, and cultural anthropology. The recurrent issues here are, rather unsurprisingly, the notions of the Self as opposed to the Other, the representation and interpretation of cross-cultural encounters, as well as the geographical, political, and socio-economic observations on these exotic, largely unknown contexts, as they unravel through the recounts of travelers, mostly during the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Similarly, part three, "Travel and Europe," is dedicated to the analysis of representations of Europe — more specifically, of countries in the eastern and southern regions of the continent, for the most part — but includes also a travel writing poem by Beatriz Badikian-Gartler, in the form of a literary interlude, which, despite its apparent disparity, makes a straightforward and efficient point about the very essence of travel writing. With respect to the latter, it is worth noting that this first-hand, more personal intervention to the otherwise scholarly discussion, under the title "A Postmodern Nomad," does not disrupt the logical flow of the ideas nor thematic cohesion; rather, it is original and direct in treating the concepts of "migration," "home," and "racial memory" and likely to surprise readers pleasantly, offering them a moment of reflection. As far as the rest of the articles are concerned, they present a fairly cohesive sequence with recurring themes generally being the stereotypes and preconceptions about the destinations in question. In the case of East Europe in particular, as treated in Andraş' "British Travel Writing about Romania" and Özlem Çaykent's "John Galt's Travels," a stark opposition is outlined between the West and the East of the European continent, as it arises in the British travelers' narrations. And, although the travelers' attitudes are clearly subject to their personal experiences, tastes, and expectations — as for example David Wills points out in his work on British travelers in Greece during the twentieth century — the historical, economic, and political context of a specific period also plays a crucial part in the construction of such attitudes. This idea seems to tie in well with the conclusions reached by the authors of the contributions.

Part four, under the title "Travel and Fiction," consists of five essays on important literary works, and the authors embark on an in-depth discussion of specific travel-related notions and themes featured in them, from a critical perspective. In her "The Journey of Diaspora in Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet*," Elena Butoescu reflects on the concept of cultural identity and the various facets of acculturation as it takes place during (im)migration. Using the testimony of postcolonial writer Salman Rushdie as her starting point, she analyzes Timothy Mo's 1982 novel in terms of the characters' reaction to the experiences of exile, translation, adaptation, and acculturation. Although these phenomena are looked into through the lens of a fictional world made up by the author and the analysis basically falls within the realm of literary criticism, it yields useful insights on crucial issues in travel writing from a more global perspective including the issue of subjectivity and the fading border between reality and imagination in travel narration. This is the main axis around which the next article revolves, too. Marius Crişan's "Descriptions of Landscape in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," however, deals with a different topic: as the title reveals, Crişan explores the mythical dimension of Transylvania as the land of vampires, comparing Stoker's imaginary accounts of the region with landscape descriptions featured in four travelogues.

The remaining three articles of the last section treat different but equally interesting topics in reference to works of travel fiction. Thus, intertextuality is the main concern of Atalay Gündüz's "Intertextuality in Jeremy Seal's *A Fez of the Heart*," in which a parallel examination of various British travelogues about Turkey is carried out. Taking Seal's 1995 novel as his point of reference, Gündüz discusses the obvious influence exerted to it by other, preceding but chronologically close accounts, particularly with respect to the cultural and political representation of the country. Moving away from intertextuality and its undeniably dominant role in all literary production, the next two articles deal with the issue of genre, although in different ways and from different perspectives. Eva R. Hudecova's "Poland in Dorota Masłowska's Work" guides us through the novelist's turbulent universe, analyzing her narrative in terms of factual information, emotional involvement — on the part of both the author and the reader — and empathy, while making the point that Masłowska's work, although not easily

definable as memoir, could in fact be considered a testimonial novel. Finally, Alexandru Dragoş Ivana's paper, "Don Quixote, Travel, and Pre-novelistic Discourses," is yet another contribution to the discussion on Cervantes's work, placed by common consent among the founding works of Western literature. In his analysis, Dragoş Ivana sets out to explain why *Don Quixote* may well be considered a point of departure for travel in time and space by examining its socio-cultural context, as well as its relation to previous literary genres.

On the whole, *New Directions in Travel Writing and Travel Studies* presents interesting and innovative scholarship, a self-contained publication that can easily serve as a reference guide for both uninitiated readers and scholars working in the field of travel studies. That being said, it should probably be noted that, in the edition in question, a substantial amount of errata can be found throughout the text, especially in the first section (17-99). Although this fact by no means depreciates the content of the works presented in the volume, it does have a negative effect on the final product, and it is therefore recommendable that the misprints be rectified in subsequent printings. Of note is that the volume is supplemented by a "Bibliography for Work in Travel Studies" compiled by Carlo Salzani and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and available online in the *Library of CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/travelstudiesbibliography>>.

The second volume I review here — *Perspectives on Identity, Migration and Displacement* — is edited by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, I-Chun Wang, and Hsiao-Yu Sun. The articles included in the volume are divided in two thematic sections and an additional section with a thematic bibliography. Contributors to the volume treat various aspects of migration, displacement, and identity comparatively as they appear in literary, historical, photographic, and filmic modes of representation. Similar to *New Directions in Travel Writing and Travel Studies*, readers are presented with a manifold synthesis of viewpoints and theoretical approaches by multinational authors. However, in this case, the range of issues discussed is rather restricted, as the general topic is more strictly defined. Part one of the volume consists of seven papers of thematic cohesion under the title "Identity and Migration." The first two articles, "Distance, Culture, and Migration in Ancient China" by Chin-Chuan Cheng and "Sui and Tang Princess Brides and Life after Marriage at the Borderlines" by Jennifer W. Jay both deal with the notions of border and distance, as well as cultural issues in China, although in different historical periods. Chin-Chuan Cheng, on the one hand, takes us to the Central Plains in ancient China and explores the ways in which the implicit self-regulation of migratory distance affected the history, society, and cultural development of China. In Jennifer W. Jay's article, on the other hand, the factor of gender comes into play as she discusses the marriage outcomes of princess brides forcefully sent to the frontiers during the sixth to the tenth centuries. Jay comes to the conclusion that, despite the common tendency among scholars to victimize women under such circumstances, the examples mentioned in the study point to a different direction: the women in question actually empowered themselves and managed to lead a better life in exile.

Next, Sabine Milz explores in "The Hybridities of Philip and Özdamar" the issue of literary hybridity in relation to the discourse of identity, migration, and displacement by means of comparing the strategies of decolonization of the ethnocentric discourses in the works of two women writers: Caribbean Canadian Marlene Nourbese Philip and Turkish German Emine Sevgi Özdamar. An insightful contribution that brings together comparative literature and cultural studies, Milz makes the case for the importance of such works for an open, multi-racial, and multi-cultural discussion on the spurious issues of racism, nationalism, (hetero-)sexism and gendering. The topic of Susan Castillo's "The Ambivalent Americanness of J. Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur" is different, although the object of examination remains a literary text, and, once more, the concept of identity in a somehow hybrid space is present: the analysis focuses on Crèvecoeur's concept of the melting pot and his personal experience as an expatriate living in the United States. Thus, Castillo raises interesting questions regarding the definition of identity — particularly European identity as opposed to the US-American one — multiculturalism, as well as current controversies over the literary canon in the U.S. Also dealing with identity crisis, but from a different viewpoint and in a different context, is Pao-I Hwang's "Ethnicity and Nationhood in Achebe's *Arrow of God*," where the dominant themes of the discussion are the concept of nation, particularly in postcolonial Africa, and the urgency of ethnic co-existence in the continent, as well as their impact, at a more personal level, on the main character in Achebe's novel.



In Anders W. Johansson's and Maria Udén's "The Migration of Gender and the Labor Market" the concept of migration takes up an unexpected meaning as it is transferred into the context of market and is looked at from a sociological perspective. Johansson and Udén draw on theories of the Nobel prize winning economist Michael Spence on signalling costs to analyze three cases, which show how women enterprisers and women-dominated sectors face higher signalling costs compared to men-dominated sectors. The article, despite its relevance for gender studies and the interesting approach to another, less conventional type of "migration," is likely to be challenging for a reader uninitiated to theories of economics and marketing. The last article of this section, "Migration, Diaspora and Ethnic Minority Writing" by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, returns to the more familiar context of comparative cultural studies — Tötösy de Zepetnek's signature work — and puts forward a framework for the study of (im)migration and life writing. He uses specific examples of life writing by women in Canada and the U.S. with a Central European Jewish background and focuses on the notions of "in-between peripherality" and displacement — whether historical, cultural, geographical, or personal.

Displacement is the cohesive link that introduces us to part two of the volume consisting of six articles with more literary references and, in one particular case, what could be viewed as a multimodal approach. The opening article of this section, "Cosmopolitanism in Zhu's *Ancient Capital*" by Yu-chuan Shao, is a reflection on the crucial notions of identity, the Other, xenophobia, and nationalism, proposing a reinterpretation of contemporary Taiwan writer Tienxin Zhu work, based on Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic view on cosmopolitanism. In a similar vein, the articles "British Muslims and Limits of Multiculturalism in Kureishi's *The Black Album*" by Shao-Ming Jung and "(Im)migration and Cultural Diasporization In Garcia's *Monkey Hunting*" by Jade Tsui-yu Lee constitute timely contributions to the discussion on current and sensitive issues such as fundamentalism, radical Islamism and Muslim alienation, and ethnic identity, diaspora, and the reconceptualization of "home," respectively. They both do so through the analysis of literary works related to the issues in question and this is also the case with Paula Jordão's "From Diaspora to Nomadic Identity in the Work of Lispector and Felinto," where two apparently unrelated novels are subjected to a parallel analysis. The analysis eventually shows that what those two novels have in common is the questioning and reformulation of their respective protagonists' female identity, which stands in diametrical opposition to the stereotyped female identity constructed on patriarchal standards.

The last two articles of the section might be seen as a multimodal approach to issues of nationalist discourse and multiculturalism in different geographical contexts and historical periods. In "Documentary Photography of the Internment of Japanese Americans" Hsiu-chuan Lee examines the photographic work of Ansel Adams and Carl Mydans on Japanese internment camps in the U.S. during World War II and proposes a reinterpretation of the pictorial history of the internment with a view to restoring its integral position in U.S. historiography. By doing so, Lee brings into discussion the issues of US-American nationalism, historical continuity, and discourse of control, as well as the notions of displacement, dislocation, and deprivation. And Giacomo Bottá's "Interculturalism and New Russians in Berlin" is an insightful look into multiculturalism, focusing on the community of Russian artists in contemporary Berlin, exploring various aspects of its emergence and activity, and addressing the question of how the German capital is related to the success of Russian culture worldwide. The volume includes a "Selected Bibliography of Work on Identity, Migration, and Displacement" compiled by Li-wei Cheng, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, and I-Chun Wang and the bibliography is also available online in the *Library of CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*: <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/migrationbibliography>>.

In conclusion, the two volumes reviewed represent scholarship for anyone interested in a wide range of momentous, and, at the same time, commonly occurring social phenomena which fall within the domain of various and largely overlapping disciplines: (comparative) cultural studies, comparative literature, travel studies, anthropology, sociology, history, semiology, among others. Concepts such as travel, mobility, displacement, identity, ethnicity, transculturation, (im)migration, gender, etc. are revisited, juxtaposed, and interconnected and serve as the common basis for a constructive debate in a cross-temporal and cross-cultural context. That being said, some minor differences should be pointed out. First, as far as the thematic content is concerned, *New directions in Travel Writing and Travel Studies* is more about travel writing per se and most of the articles draw heavily on comparative literature and critical literary studies — without, however, losing their interdisciplinary

character — while they treat varied issues. This thematic variety makes it a comprehensive and self-contained reference work with innovative scholarship. On the other hand, in *Perspectives on Identity, Migration and Displacement* the subject matter is defined and restricted, although the approaches and cases in point remain heterogeneous.

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