

ALTERITY IN THE ARGENTINEAN LITERATURE ON MIGRATION *GENTE CONMIGO* (1962), BY SYRIA POLETTI

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The literature on the entangled history between Latin America and Europe, and especially the literature on transatlantic migrations, acquires relevance at a historical moment when migrations are the object of harsh social debates on both sides of the ocean. Novels that place migration and its memories at the center of their plots often also reveal ongoing social amnesia. They expose experiences of otherness and vulnerability; in other words, under the self-affirmative sign that characterizes national memories, they are often negative memories and, thus, better to be ignored and handed over to oblivion.

Among the numerous works that explore the memory of transatlantic migration, this article refers to an almost forgotten narrative: the novel *Gente conmigo* (People with me),¹ published in 1962 by Italian-Argentine writer Syria Poletti. With its autobiographical framework, the text bears witness to transatlantic migrations as a two-way movement. This common history between continents is told as round trips from the perspective of family and personal biographies. As Birgit zur Nieden points out in her study on discourses on Argentinean migrations, European migrations to Argentina – seen from a meta-individual point of view – are characterized by the reciprocity of

¹ The reprint of *Gente conmigo* was possible thanks to the joint action by distinguished Argentine author Maria Teresa Andruetto, along with Juana Luján and Carolina Rossi.

trajectories. Movements in the opposite direction, that is, towards Europe, are made not only by second or third generations, but also by first ones, in what can almost be described as social round trips.² In the case of *Gente conmigo*, a first generation story describes how the protagonist and narrator gets into trouble because of her profession as a translator and her solidarity with other foreigners. As the circumstances that lead to her imprisonment unfold, the first-person narrator portrays her immigration from Italian Friuli to South America. Inhospitable conditions at home after the Second World War are depicted in contrast to the effervescent and thriving Buenos Aires of the time.

Before commenting on the novel, some points of reference provided by studies on otherness and its relationship with the concept of intersectionality are recapitulated here, followed by an outlining of the historical framework of migration to Argentina. The novel will then be referred to, according to its most relevant motives concerning transatlantic migration.

ALTERITY – OTHERING – INTERSECTIONALITY

Without dwelling on the lengthy religious, philosophical and sociological tradition of otherness, it is useful to summarize some reflections on the 'other' and on the 'stranger', which will provide us orientation for the analysis of this text, written by a female author with a migrant background.

Generally speaking, the 'other' is any subject other than the self. The lowercase 'other' of Lacanian psychology refers to the child that looks into the mirror and realizes her/himself as an individual being, separated from the rest. However, Lacan also theorizes about an 'Other', written with a capital 'O'; 'le Grand-Autre', a symbolic other that is not a real interlocutor, but can be incarnated in the mother or father and allows the subject to identify himself in her/his gaze.³ In their post-colonial studies, Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin create a parallel between the Lacanian Other and imperial power. The empire and its center are regarded as that Other, since the identity of the colonized subject is formulated in relation to and dependence on its metropole. Furthermore, the empire is the ideological framework that the subject leans on to

² Birgit zur Nieden. *Konjunkturen der Migration. Spanisch-Argentinische Diskurse und Politiken um das Recht auf Migration* (Berlin: edition tranvía, 2013), 9-17.

³ Jacques Lacan. *Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse* (Le Séminaire - livre 2, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, [1955] 1978).

understand the world. "In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonized is continually located in the gaze of the imperial Other, the 'grand-autre'"⁴. As a counterpoint, and remembering Franz Fanon, the gaze of the imperial Other induces the colonized to alienated and distorted perceptions of their own subjectivity.⁵

Although defense reactions in the face of the 'strange' seem to be part of our configuration as social beings, and stereotyping is but an orientation strategy in front of the unfamiliar, being conscience of these automatism allows us to overcome them and to expand our horizon of interaction. In the framework of societies stratified by the imperial order, the 'alien' is defined in a process that the post-colonial philosopher Gayatri Spivak calls Alterization, or 'Othering', a dialectical process in which the 'great Other' – that is, the colonizer – establishes himself and creates, at the same time, his colonized 'others' as inferior subjects.⁶

According to Rosi Braidotti, and in agreement with an intellectual movement that questions humanist universalism because of its contradictory trajectory, the Eurocentric paradigm presupposes a dialectic between the self and the other, in which the binarism between identity and otherness constitutes a cultural logic and a driving force.⁷ In this context, 'difference' always points to a devalued relationship, since the 'Other' is a negative image of one's own subjectivity, which is always provided with conscience, rationality and moral autonomy. Under the influence of this paradigm, situations of hegemony of powers and fatal discrimination are continually reproduced, since the self is mostly an European white man. Discrimination then occurs in multiple and complex ways, linked to different aspects of human life, such as belonging to or being identified with a social class; assumptions about the body or physical appearance; sexual desire or orientation; cultural and/or national background; age, gender, skin pigmentation/complexion, religion, etc. Those who are discriminated against are always marginalized. If we take into account the concept of intersectionality, the discrimination of the 'other' is an action that occurs through immersion in a discourse that allows one to separate her/him from one's community, which is perceived as being homogeneous.

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures – (New accents)* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 171.

⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Piel negra, máscaras blancas*. [French original: *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952]. Trad. por Iria Álvarez Moreno, Paloma Moleón Alonso y Ana Useros Martín (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2009).

⁶ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 171.

⁷ Rosi Braidotti. *Posthumanismus. Leben jenseits des Menschen*. [English original: *The Posthuman*]. Aus dem Englischen von Thomas Laugstien (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, [2013] 2014), 21.

Therefore, the challenge consists of being aware of the Othering processes, understanding this discourse as a performance, and interrupting it. The perceptive Georg Simmel, in his 1908 text *Exkurs über den Fremden*, had considered the immigrant's status as a 'stranger' as not being an intrinsic quality of a person, but a relational ascription, that is, a characteristic that is granted – consciously or unconsciously – within a relationship and that imposes a critical assessment. Georg Simmel described the foreigner as a 'social form'; that is, to be a foreigner means to be connected with others in a particular way. Simmel distinguishes between the 'foreigner' and the 'wandering traveler', the nomad, because the foreigner "comes today and stays tomorrow", while the nomad is passing through. Due to her/his situation s/he has a special perspective:

Because s/he is not fixed by her/his origin, the singular components or the one-sided tendencies of the group, s/he confronts all of them with the special attitude of the "objective", which does not mean a mere distance and indifference, but a special structure of distance and proximity, indifference and commitment.⁸

For Simmel, the special objectivity of the foreigner is a privilege that, at the same time, places her/him in a situation of vulnerability, because, in case of social unrest, s/he immediately becomes a suspicious person.⁹

In Latin America, the debate about concepts that accurately describe the coexistence of people of different cultures has a long tradition – for historical reasons. Currently, the ideational framing is marked by the concepts of hybridity, transculturality and *ch'ixi*. As for transculturation, this is a concept that acquired new international visibility when it was adopted by the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch in 1997 and which postulates that cultures are always open to exchange. Welsch took the concept from the work of the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who forged it in 1940 to describe the reciprocity of cultural contacts between Europe and Latin America. Against the backdrop of the plantation economy on the island and the related forced migration from Africa, Ortiz studied the creative potential of migration movements and their positive evaluation. Transculturality is also at the heart of the much-discussed concept of

⁸ Georg Simmel. "Exkurs über den Fremden", In *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. Kapitel IX: Der Raum und die räumlichen Ordnungen der Gesellschaft (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1908) Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this article are by the author.

⁹ cp. *ibid.*

hybridity, conceived by Néstor García Canclini (1990). He described it as a two-way process of borrowing and lending between cultures, in which tensions certainly resulted from interwoven power relations. García Canclini not only observed the dynamics of cultural transformation that resulted from the influence of transatlantic migrations, but also the adaptations in popular culture consequent on rural-urban migration processes, so typical of industrialization in Latin America.¹⁰ With '*ch'ixi*', Bolivian theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui draws attention to the long history of resistance by indigenous people. Using a word from the Aymara language, she describes the interplay of different cultural influences as an overlap, whereby the various elements do not dissolve into each other or merge into something new. Instead, the mixed cultural practices would "contradict or complement each other", representing a tension. In a visual metaphor, Rivera Cusicanqui describes *ch'ixi* as the grey that, seen up close, is made up of black and white dots.¹¹

For Peruvian philosopher Aníbal Quijano, a fundamental axis of the colonial pattern of power is constituted by the idea of ethnic difference: "the social classification of the world's population on the idea of race [is] a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination".¹² In his eyes, since a Eurocentric perspective was established as a characteristic and condition of modern nation-states, a process of homogenization has taken place in Latin American societies of the Southern Cone through massive elimination of indigenous groups, blacks and mestizos. In other words, these new countries were built "not through the fundamental democratization of social and political relations, but through the exclusion of part of the population".¹³ Aníbal Quijano emphasizes the stratification of Latin American societies along the axis of ethnic difference. However, when we approach the experience of the European immigrants persuaded to populate Argentina at the time of the national foundation, we will verify that they were themselves subject to processes of discrimination, which reminds us once again of the concept of intersectionality and the consequent study of the discourse that underpins discrimination in each specific case.

¹⁰ García Canclini, 1997.

¹¹ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa. Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores*. <https://chixinakax.wordpress.com/>, 14.02.2020.

¹² Aníbal Quijano. "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina". In *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas* edited by Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires, 2020), 201–246.

¹³ *ibid.* 232.

IMMIGRATION AND EXILE TO ARGENTINA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

With the establishment of a repressive military government in the 1970s and the occurrence of successive economic crises in the 1980s, the direction of transatlantic migrations was, for the most part, reversed, now flowing from Latin America to Europe. However, towards the end of the 19th century and also in the post-World War II context of the 20th century, Argentina was a preferred destination for European immigrants. Since the middle of the 19th century, Argentina's elites had been incentivizing immigration, a characteristic measure of expanding metropolises. In short, they regarded the country's aboriginal people as barbarians and the descendants of Spaniards as unfit to incorporate the nascent state into the dynamics of the world market. In its beginnings as an independent republic, barely one million inhabitants populated a territory of more than 4 million km², as estimated by the statesman Juan Bautista Alberdi, who wrote the Argentine Constitution and was a great promoter of European immigration.¹⁴ Likewise, by the end of the 19th century European governments were in a stage of imperial expansion in which they regarded positively the idea of 'colonizing' territories in South America through the rooting of parts of their emigrated population.¹⁵ Thus, some segments of the Argentine population still consider themselves as expats and continue to identify with European centres. On the one hand, this is understandable due to their family ties; on the other hand, this has resulted in an attitude of contempt towards the native population that endures to this day, at the cost of building a unique Latin American ethos.

An invitation for Europe to populate its territory remains a part of Argentina's Constitution, in Article 25,¹⁶ and is also inscribed on the nation's self-perception. Since its foundation as a nation-state, Argentina has been a country of immigrants. The impact of migration was immense: while the first census, taken in 1869, recorded 1,737,076 inhabitants, the following one, in 1914, already counted 7,885,237 people, doubling this figure once again in the following thirty years, to 15,893,827, in 1947 (INDEC, s.f.). By

¹⁴ Cp. Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina*. Prólogo de Matías Farías (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca del Congreso de la Nación, 2017) <http://bcn.gob.ar/uploads/BasesAlberdi.pdf>, 17.02.2020, 119.

¹⁵ cp. zur Nieden, *Konjunkturen der Migration. Spanisch-Argentinische Diskurse und Politiken um das Recht auf Migration*, 102-109.

¹⁶ „The Federal Government shall encourage European immigration; and may not restrict, limit or impose any tax on the entry into Argentine territory of foreigners whose purpose is to work the land, improve industries, and introduce and teach the sciences and the arts.”

the end of the 19th century Buenos Aires had become a Babel on the shores of the Rio de la Plata; in its streets one could hear, inter alia, Cocoliche, Spanish, Galician, Catalan, Yiddish, French, Turkish, Russian, Polish and Hungarian conversations. Most of the young men who arrived in Argentina were of rural origin and were given no access to the 'promised land' in the interior of the country. Few managed to engage in agriculture or related activities, as the land was mostly in the hands of large landowners.¹⁷ The vast majority settled in urban areas and were involved in commercial and service activities, having to fight a long struggle to gain political representation.

The intrinsic causes of emigration from Italy were multiple. Like Spain, in the second half of the 19th century Italy experienced a great demographic pressure due to the lack of land for cultivation, since neither country succeeded in establishing an industrial revolution. The wars of dismemberment, which occurred after the Napoleonic invasion, and the reunification wars of the Risorgimento, followed by the two World Wars, provoked incessant social unrest and great economic impoverishment, which resulted in the exodus. According to estimates, between 1870 and 1970, 2,9 million Italians arrived in Argentina. Today, approximately 50% of Argentina's population, some 27 million, are considered to be, for the most part, of Italian origin.

SYRIA POLETTI'S *GENTE CONMIGO*: OTHERNESS AS A COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Syria Poletti was born in Pieve di Cadore in 1919 and died in Buenos Aires in 1991. At the age of twenty, she graduated as a teacher in Venice and arrived in Argentina at the age of 26, in 1945, to become the director of the Dante Alighieri Association of the Santa Fé Province. Shortly afterwards, she studied Spanish and Italian at the National University of Córdoba, graduated as a legal translator and settled in Buenos Aires. Public recognition as a writer came through the work herein discussed, *Gente conmigo* (1962), a great success for which she received the Losada International Award and the prize of the City of Buenos Aires. In all, 10 editions have been published, and it has been translated into German, Czech, English and Italian, and was even made into a film. Five more novels followed, and she also worked as a journalist.¹⁸ However, Syria Poletti

¹⁷ Cp. Roberto Benencia, *Perfil migratorio de Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Organización Internacional para las Migraciones, 2012), 17.

¹⁸ Cecilia Bettolli, "Prólogo". In: Poletti, Syria ([1962] 2017). *Gente conmigo*, pp. 7-24 (Villa María: Eduvim, 2017), 19.

obtained her greatest recognition as a promoter and author of children's literature, an occupation that granted her the Konex National Culture Award in 1984.

When asked in an interview about the obstacles she encountered in her career, Poletti replied that she faced three: being a foreigner, being a woman and being poor, the latter being the toughest because "being poor confines one to a purely individual sphere, with no possibility of influential friends, of interesting relationships".¹⁹ Her invitation for readers to empathize with situations of extreme poverty and with the vulnerability of migration forms an essential part of *Gente conmigo*. Its prose is intense and its temporal structure brings the past into the present. The narrator, Nora Candiani, writes from prison the story of a girl whose malformed back made it impossible for her to join her family overseas, forcing her to stay with her sister in their native village, in the Dolomites, under their grandmother's care. The first paragraph vividly recounts the causes of emigration during the second decade of the last century, and also the distress of those left behind: "Perhaps it all began in my village, eaten away by centuries, devastated by invasions, the day my parents left for America. Then Argentina appeared to me as a monster devouring fathers, mothers and brothers".²⁰ The girl works in the village of Friuli with her grandmother as an amanuensis. She is educated and arrives in Argentina by a cunning stratagem, thanks to the support of her sister, who manages to emigrate earlier. In Buenos Aires, she becomes a sworn translator of Italian, a position from which she will witness and take part in an immigrant society full of contradictions and injustices, hopes and disappointments. By a change of fortune, she will become the victim of a professional and emotional fraud and end up in prison.

There are numerous historical references that allow us to situate the novel during Perón's first presidency (1946-1952), in the context of the exodus from Europe that occurred after the Second World War. Supplying the narrator with the tasks of an amanuensis, first, and then of a translator, constitutes an intelligent narrative strategy for showing a meeting point between two different worlds. The protagonist is aware of a common deed between immigrants:

Over there, writing letters to America, I was living in the tension of America.
Here, when translating documents of emigrants, I was once again plunged into the

¹⁹ Revista Mercado. "Los idiomas de Syria Poletti". [Interview, January 4, 1979], <http://www.magicasruinas.com.ar/revistero/argentina/sirya-poletti.htm>, 14.02.2020.

²⁰ Poletti, Syria ([1962] 2017), *Gente conmigo* (Villa María: Eduvim, 2017), 29.

swell of Europe. [...] I felt the reality and the hope of everyone. I had suffered from both illnesses: the waiting and the perplexity of the arrival.²¹ (161)

Hence, the protagonist becomes acquainted with the emotional conflicts and strife that migration unleashes from the perspective of both those who emigrate and those that are left behind. Her place of enunciation can already be read in the title of the book. It also appears clearly at the end, when the protagonist remembers her grandmother instructing her in her first profession by saying: "Read what you write as if you were talking, because what you wrote is no longer yours. It belongs to the people. Your job is to interpret people, to see inside them and tell the truth".²² Nora Candiani, the poor Italian girl who became a respected professional in Argentina, continues to side with the poorest and most unprotected people, like the amanuensis she was at her grandmother's side.

The characters presented in the book are beings that pass through a land that attracts them, receives them, and rejects them at the same time;²³ they are caught in a double bind between their homeland and their new country. Those who arrive try to stand on the rough ocean of a glittering city; yet, they carry subworlds of sadness on their backs. Therefore, they are constantly facing the dilemma of reinventing oneself and starting a new life or meeting the needs of those that are waiting at the place of origin. In her work as a translator, the protagonist is confronted with the cruelty of laws that only allow "suitable immigrants" to enter. Her imprisonment is due to having signed forged documents that facilitated the entry of undesired people into Argentina. With soulless efficiency, immigration laws select and dismiss those with physical defects or illnesses, destroying families and creating homelessness and greater deprivation in the countries of origin. Nora finds it impossible to close her eyes before the troubles of those who were left behind and require urgent help: Rafael, the hunchback child; Magdalena's crippled daughter; the old ladies wanting to join their emigrated family; a husband in poor health after the war...

The main character's relationship with both lands undergoes transformations throughout the novel. From the perspective of a narrating self, a search for belonging is described. Nora begins with the metaphor of Argentina as an overseas monster that swallows up parents and siblings; she then moves on to the illusion that one

²¹ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 161.

²² Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 313.

²³ Bettolli, "Prólogo", 11.

environment mimicks the other one; finally, she realizes, with great disappointment, that we are not bound to any land, but always to people. This is why the final reunion with parents and siblings causes her great disillusionment; after 15 years of separation, the family becomes a group of strangers, as if that was the tribute demanded by the monster of her childhood²⁴:

And I felt towards them only the melancholy pity inspired by trees punished by the storm or transplanted to an unsuitable habitat. Those pathetic trees that despite the lashing, before falling, throw a last burst of green [...] I needed to sink roots in the pavement streets, rammed with the wandering of men and women as uprooted as I was, but aware of living.²⁵

The protagonist's very own process of "rooting" is opposed to the attitude of numerous immigrants that never manage to overcome a utilitarian regard for their country of residence: "It was our parents who inculcated in us that this is a country of passage. [...] They considered Europe to be their true country. And they didn't think that, with their detachment from the transit country, they were cutting us off from the nerve centres".²⁶ This contrast reaches its zenith with her love affair with Renato, a man from her region of origin. Due to his wealthy situation he did not suffer any losses during the war and, thus, is still filled with nostalgia for Italy. However, he will not hesitate to swindle in order to advance socially in his new country. With him, the protagonist discovers her "americanism", which occurs as an opening of horizons beyond preconceived stereotypes: "Yes, that's right. America penetrated me. It invaded my insides. However, it was because my vessels were open to receive it in all its bareness. Instead, you came with your senses hermetically sealed".²⁷ Nevertheless, becoming Argentine will not mean committing to the new country. The protagonist continually questions the way society acts, the so-called Argentine 'no te metas' way: "Now I am contaminated by abulia; attacked to the core by that 'don't get involved' that places Argentines in a limbo with respect to social reality. [...] It would seem that the country, the laws and the civic norms are a utopia".²⁸ The difference in attitude towards Italian immigrants also springs

²⁴ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 67-9.

²⁵ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 69.

²⁶ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 230.

²⁷ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 171.

²⁸ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 228.

from the figure of Renato and, in this opposition, coloniality within the contemporary discourse of immigrant communities is clearly reflected:

- They're trying to get their son back. They didn't like the idea of going to see the president's wife either. It seemed to them that they were going to beg for alms instead of justice.
- Bah! Those people have no dignity. They're Southerners. They spoil the prestige of Italian immigration. And that deficiency is due...
- It's not only in Southern Italy that there are poor and deformed people!²⁹

At the end of the novel, the protagonist will discover that it is not the territories, but the poorest people, to whom she is rooted.³⁰ Nora Candiani embodies the position of the foreigner as described by Georg Simmel in *Exkurs über den Fremden*. In critical situations, the stranger's "objectivity" becomes a trap and the foreigner turns into both a suspect and a victim.

In the novel, the vulnerability of immigrants is also made explicit through situations that turn their fate against themselves. For example, the story of the beautiful but destitute young Sicilian woman, Valentina, who, eager for freedom and forced to marry out of interest, is persecuted by her own family, and, with no way out, finally commits suicide. Various stories that depict women being exploited by men are related. But there is also the case of the uneducated Mateo, father of five children, who is accused of being an anarchist and tortured into admitting a crime he could never have committed.

Therefore, the text depicts migration as a process that requires its protagonists to be extremely adaptable; however, these same changes they constantly make can end up destroying them. For those who are open to the experience, there is an irreversible cultural and personal transformation. The intensity of *Gente conmigo*'s prose correlates to a commitment to vulnerable humanity, to the hundreds of thousands who crossed the ocean in an act of desperation, courage and hope, but also to those who were left behind, exposed to the misfortune of poverty and loneliness, until the day came when Europe rose from its ashes.

²⁹ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 205.

³⁰ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 313.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the questions that inevitably arises when working with female authors is to what extent their narrative has characteristics attributable to gender positioning. Without entering into the long debate on whether or not women's writing as a category exists, it can be said that, in patriarchal societies, the materiality of the body imposes experiences that become palpable through the narrator's place of enunciation. Thus, it should be noted that a distinctive element of *Gente conmigo* is a language clearly anchored in the corporality of the immigrant narrator. As a starting point for an analysis made from a gender perspective, please see Regazzoni (2011) on *Gente conmigo*.

Syria Poletti places her protagonist at the crossroads of characters in transit, and evokes through her life the voices of others. This way, she is able to reflect on a process that goes from uprooting to rooting, creating space in the novel for the expression of a collective migrant subject. When analyzing the passages on otherness, the question emerges regarding who in fact discriminates and who is being discriminated. Perhaps the most disturbing certainty that grows inside the reader as the pages are turned is that discrimination is a two-way process: it can be found on both ends of the road.

On the one hand, marginalization and social violence in the homeland are the starting point for all migration experiences described in the book. The immigrants find themselves in situations of great precariousness; in the case of the protagonist, it results from an intersection formed by the axes of social class, body and gender. The possibility of immigrating to Argentina was, for many, a privilege; yet, adaptation to the new land was, for the most part, a huge struggle for survival. Although Argentina was not an empire, for the immigrants it received, it functioned as such. In this sense, one may even ponder to what extent the reflections of post-colonial studies regarding the "Great Other" have a wider validity in terms of "others" as migrants. Difficult circumstances and artificial barriers hover over these "other migrants" as serious obstacles, and the discriminatory discourses of the new country are poured out and preserved in laws that determine their social position. In *Gente conmigo*, the imprisonment of the protagonist seems to illustrate Georg Simmel's thoughts on the great risk of persecution faced by migrants during difficult times.

In the current socio-political climate, in which migration is spoken of as a pressing danger, the memory of migration as part of national history is still a forgotten experience for countries built on immigration. In contrast to epic accounts celebrating national

founding or imperial expansion, immigration, as "history from below" is often negative and resistant to memory. However, the literature on migration enables us to assume a different perspective on past migrations because it acts as an intermediary between individual and collective memory and shows us how historic circumstances make their mark on people's lives. This is essential knowledge for today's democratic societies, which are interconnected worldwide by extremely dynamic economic processes. Never before have we been more able to listen attentively to migrants stories and, through such knowledge, contribute to building the fairer societies we all wish to live in.

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