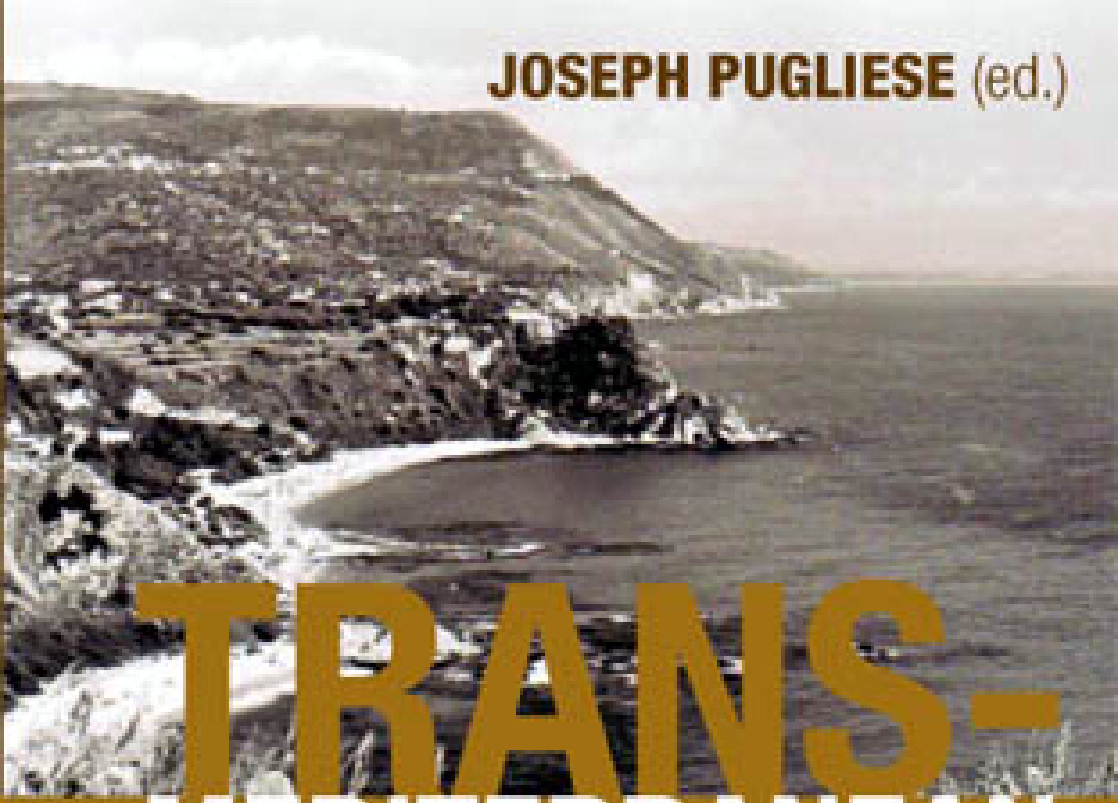
JOSEPH PUGLIESE (ed.)



TRANS-MEDITERRANEAN

DIASPORAS, HISTORIES, GEOPOLITICAL SPACES

P.I.E. PETER LANG

INTRODUCTION

Transmediterranean Cultures in Transnational Contexts

Joseph PUGLIESE

Associate Professor at Macquarie University, Sydney

Diasporic Traversals

The Mediterranean Sea is both a physical space and a place of memory and affect inscribed with complex sedimentations of history, culture and politics. It has been a grand theatre that has witnessed the rise and fall of cultures, societies and empires. Yet, precisely because of its constitutive and agenda-setting historical role, it has too often been theorised as a body that is self-identical to itself – that is, the Mediterranean, in the discursive formations of received knowledge, has remained an entity conceptualised as a fixed geographical locus mapped and regulated by a series of longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates. The premise that underpins the essays collected in this book departs from this type of conceptualisation of the Mediterranean in order to ask the difficult question: how is the Mediterranean not identical to itself? This question, in other words, rejects conceptualisations of the Mediterranean perhaps best encapsulated by the imperial tag: *mare nostrum*. The Mediterranean, as *mare nostrum*/our sea, is already marked out as a transparently known entity inscribed by fields of force, possession and containment. Against this imperial and received conceptualisation of the Mediterranean, the essays in this book propose a transmediterranean traversed by lines of contestation, displacement and heterogeneous reconfigurations. There is no "essence" of Mediterranean culture or cultures as such, only dynamic, transformative and heterogeneous figurations that connect back to this geopolitical locus, even as they dis/locate and reinvent its histories, legacies and cultural affiliations.

Critically thinking and writing about the Mediterranean as an entity "outside itself" could perhaps only effectively be staged by subjects who are "outside themselves". In fact, all the scholars represented in this book are, in varying degrees, diasporic subjects who can trace lines of

connection back to the Mediterranean, even as they continue to live and work well beyond its physical presence and cartographic parameters. As such, the essays in this book, precisely as they theorise and represent Mediterranean cultures in all of their multiplicities, are concerned principally with phenomena of dispersion, diaspora and the transitive movement encapsulated by the figure of the *trans*[1] – specifically, the *transmediterranean*. If the figure embodied by the trope of the *trans* signifies anything, it is the transversal movement that cuts across authorised borders, moving not vertically or horizontally but diagonally across space. The essays in this book, in varying modes, locate themselves on the fraught and unstable fault line of the border – as site to be traversed, problematised and contested. If the rhetorical force of *trans* resides in its ability to establish, through transversal crossings, systems of relation between otherwise disparate subjects, then its productive power must be seen as structurally generative of new and often seemingly untenable reconfigurations. Situated within this philosophical-tropological context, the figure of *trans* can be seen to be charged with the power to call into question the doxa of origins – of categories and identities that are at once epistemological and ontological, corporeal and geopolitical (see Stryker 2006). The figure of *trans*, through its constitutively tropological movement of transpositioning, reconfigures seemingly originary categories such as "homeland", "nation" and "identity" and, in the process, overturns the law of separation between such seemingly autonomous categories thereby disclosing their constitutive enmeshment and interdependence.

The figure of *trans*, in crossing seemingly autonomous and naturalised categories such as "nation" and "identity", brings into focus the iterable, always already constructed status of these categories. Inhabiting these categories from the inside and transfiguring them from dis/locations well beyond the physical parameters of the Mediterranean, the trope of the *trans* productively calls into question the "metaphysics of the proper" (Derrida 1976: 244) and the attendant border-control agents preoccupied with policing the propriety of the pure and the legitimate, the legal and the authorised in the face of border incursions. Furthermore, the power of the figure of *trans* resides in its ability to interrogate originary categories and to condition the field of inquiry simultaneously as it refuses – through the tropic force and animating logic of transpositional movement – to belong to the very borders and limits of the field that it traverses and unsettles. Animating this critical theorisation of

[1] This meditation on the figure of *trans* was first delivered at the Transsomatechnics Conference, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada, 2 May 2008. I am grateful to Susan Stryker for offering me this opportunity to think through the power of *trans*; her work in this area has been inspirational.

transmediterranean cultures is, of course, the landmark work of Paul Gilroy on transatlantic cultures and their politico-cultural ability to "transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (1993: 19).

Rather than view the figure of *trans* – in all its multiplicity of bodies, forms and subjects – as a mere supplement, however dangerous, to established categories, essences and normative formations, what the essays in this collection evidence is a field of cultural dispersions and disseminations that ruptures established binaries such as native/immigrant, legal/illegal, authentic/reproduction and so on. So, for example, what would appear to be the quintessence of "native" Italian cuisine (dried pasta, canned tomatoes, and olive oil) is in fact the result of the formative influence of Italian immigrant communities in shaping economic and cultural practices back "home". In her critical study of the cultural politics of Italian food, Carol Helstosky (2004: 8) has mapped the dimensions of this native/immigrant transposition:

> These waves of [Italian] migration had both direct and indirect impact on the food available within Italy. Relatedly, immigrant remittances and the decrease in competition for jobs within Italy meant the living standard improved over the course of the early 20th century. And, as Italians began to leave the peninsula for greater economic opportunities in the Americas and elsewhere, they sought to recreate familiar dishes. This led to a growing body of consumers for Italian products (dried pasta, canned tomatoes, olive oil), which in turn greatly aided the development of certain food industries within Italy. Only after substantial numbers of Italians abroad began consuming these foods did domestic production furnish products for Italians at home. Ironically, it was because of the 'imagined communities' outside Italy that the food industry inside Italy produced the goods that became the foundations of Italian cuisine.

Transposed to this field of dispersions, I want to reflect on two things: on the dimensions of the transformative power of *trans* and, simultaneously, on those prescriptive categories and policed borders that defy this reconfiguring power of transpositioning, remaining largely untouched even after the tropic movement of crossing has transpired; and, finally, on the possibility of alliances between and across transmediterranean communities as a way of mobilising collectively to transform precisely what remains violently in place even after the always risky and vulnerable act of crossing.

As I observed above, the power of the figure of *trans* resides in its interrogative and transformative ability. I want, at this juncture, to begin to trace what remains recalcitrant to these transformative movements of transposition and reconfiguration. And I am thinking here of the manner, for example, in which undocumented immigrants, refugees and

asylum seekers so often fall victim to the violence of militarised and policed national borders as they attempt their border crossings – leaving intact, despite their sacrificial deaths in the very movement of transnational crossing, the very lethal borders they attempt to evade, subvert or cross.

In a video installation titled "Made in Ghana (Man in a Box; On a Journey)", the contemporary Ghanaian artist Mawuli Afatsiawo depicts a man in a shipping container-like box.[2] Literally boxed in on all sides, the man is shown encased in his container, crawling on hands and knees, trying desperately to find an exit. This picture of imprisonment and entrapment in a shipping container is juxtaposed against a backdrop of bustling shops and markets in which the viewer witnesses the free and unrestricted flow of goods and commodities. In his video, Afatsiawo graphically materialises the stark disjunctions that inscribe globalisation: the free flow of commodities is predicated on the restrictive movement of the subjects of the Global South. In their attempt to circumvent this geopolitical double standard, refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants, clandestinely insert themselves within shipping containers, vans, trucks and other modes of transport instrumental in enabling the global flow of goods and services. These modes of transport become at once clandestine forms of mobility and suffocating containers of trauma and death for thousands of subjects from the Global South attempting to make their way to the countries of the Global North (see Pugliese 2009).

The nuanced and complex mappings of transmediterranean histories, cultures and geopolitical spaces that are staged by the essays in this volume affirm the transformative power of transversal crossings, even as they soberly mark the violent structures that remain in place despite this movement.

Transmediterranean Instantiations

In the opening essay of this volume, "Alien Conscription, Australian Sovereignty and the Vietnam War", Maria Giannacopoulos proceeds to map the complex lines of dislocation and affiliation between Greece and Australia. Situated within a theoretical frame concerned with issues of citizenship in times of war, Giannacopoulos unfolds a previously untold story that brings into focus the manner in which economies of exploitation are opportunistically mobilised by the nation-state in times of war. Beginning with the enforced deportation from Greece of millions of

[2] Afatsiawo's video installation was screened at the 2006 Contemporary Commonwealth exhibition, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne, February-May 2006.

subjects post-Second World War, she cites her father's eloquent observation: "We had to leave so the rest could live". As Giannacopoulos explains, her father and his family fled one imperially driven war only to be enmeshed within yet another war of empire and ideology: the Vietnam War. In the context of this war, Giannacopoulos' father is swept up in a bizarre and arbitrary national enlistment scheme that, through the exercise of white Australian sovereignty, disregarded the non-citizen, alien status of non-British immigrants in order to make them available to be conscripted into the war. That Giannacopoulos' father was spared this violent fate is only due to the fact that his number was literally not forthcoming in the draws of lottery-like ballots that, through biopolitical regimes of governmentality, transmuted lives into numbers. As she concludes, this biopolitical program of transmuting aliens into militarised citizens is continuing today under the auspices of the US war in Iraq and the targeting of the "Hispanic Market", with the promise that enlisted subjects can convert their alien status to that of citizen.

The privileges of citizenship are what are enunciated in the opening lines of Lara Palombo's "The Drawing of the Sovereign Line". Beginning from what is apparently a personal and circumscribed location, she narrates the story of her southern Italian grandmother's failure to access nursing home facilities in the northern Italian city of Como, despite having spent years of her productive working life in the region, because of the exclusionary and racialised laws of "Territorial Welfare". This instantiation of a seemingly individual and personal exclusion, however, is soon situated by Palombo within both national and transnational relations of power that are shown to be gendered, racialised and underpinned by neoliberal values. Following in the wake of Giannacopoulos' analysis of the operations of white sovereignty on Greek immigrant subjects, Palombo further qualifies this term by delineating the hetropatriarchal dimensions of transnational forms of white sovereignty as they operate upon Southerners (including southern Italian citizens and non-citizens from the Global South such as refugees, immigrants and the undocumented) within different geopolitical contexts. In her mapping of the complex operations of white sovereignty, Palombo brings into focus past and continuing colonial histories that cross and criss-cross both the Italian and Australian nation-states, marking, in the process, lines of connection and refraction between the two.

In her "Giving the Voiceless a Voice: Saving Third World Women Through a Western Lens", Seren Dalkiran stages a thorough critique of the paternalism of Eurocentric feminists who continue to frame Third World women as in need of "saving" – from themselves and their cultures. Unpacking the catalogue of stereotypes that continue to script non-European women from the Global South in contemporary Europe,

Dalkiran mounts her critique of the way in which Eurocentric fetish-objects such as the Muslim veil are mobilised by western feminists and others in order to homogenise all Muslim women as oppressed victims. Focusing on the unstated Eurocentric norms that underpin such stereotypes, she proposes other "lenses" through which to begin to view and understand such practices as veiling. As Dalkiran argues, outside the paternal and homogenising western lens, such practices emerge, for many Muslim women, as both liberatory and essential in establishing "social collective environments" of "shared standards, religious beliefs and moral values". Dalkiran productively develops her thesis by disclosing the complex political and cultural forces that the controversial former Dutch member of parliament, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, magnatised through her very public declaration on the "abuse of Muslim women and the crisis of multiculturalism in general".

Dalkiran's project of giving the "voiceless a voice" is reconfigured along entirely other, but related, lines by Ihab Shalbak in "Edward Said and the Palestinian Experience". In this eloquent meditation on the role of the public intellectual, Edward Said, in his giving voice to the Palestinian struggle, Shalbak traces the larger configurations of empire, colonisation, and the urgent issue of Palestinian self-determination within the context of this singular figure and his passionate commitment to a cultural politics of writing and literature. Beginning with a recount of a tragic story by the Palestinian writer, Ghassan Kanafi, Shalbak demonstrates how, for Said, the relation between politics and the cultural (*qua* literary) was indissociable, that one could not be understood without the other. Nothing exemplifies this premise with more force and conviction than this observation by Shalbak, once it is situated in the ethnogenocidal realities of contemporary Palestine and the cultural-literary compulsion to materialise Palestinian survival and existence in the face of violence and prospective decimation: "In the Palestinian case other worlds may not merely exist but they ought to exist out of necessity if not by choice". This was one of the fragile truths that Said strove to impart in the course of his politico-cultural life. Shalbak concludes his chapter by foregrounding the importance of Said's transitive approach in his politico-cultural work, arguing that this approach enables the materialisation of the historical nature of points of origin, simultaneously as it allows for the identification of the contemporary continuities that flow from such originary points.

It is precisely this transitive approach to the study of history and contemporary culture that Noah Raffoul Bassil stages in his "The Construction of the Colonial State in Sudan: Tribe, Region and Race and Colonial Power in Darfur". With incisive skill, Bassil proceeds to materialise the stratified history of colonialism and empire in the context of the

Sudan. He at once brings into focus the pre-colonial complexities of identity formation in Darfur and the manner in which imperial powers such as Britain, once they colonised the Sudan, proceeded to exploit, through the colonial rule of divide and conquer, pre-existing tribal and regional identities. In his tracking of the imposition of the so-called "thin white line" in the everyday colonial administration of the Sudan by the British, Bassil discloses the manner in which Eurocentric racial hierarchies functioned to classify, tribalise and, critically, to isolate groups that had previously co-existed together. The results of the administrative dimensions of this human geography, as Bassil demonstrates, was the colonial rupturing of previously existing transafrican and transmediterranean intercultural and economic flows and the consequent rigid boundary-patrolling of demarcated groups situated within distinctly unequal relations of power: "The benefits bestowed on tribes, including recognition of semi-autonomy and an allocation of land, or a tribal *dar*, left those groups that failed to be recognized as tribes in their own rights, as outsiders in a system dependent on tribal identity". In his rigorous historicising of the colonial and racialised history of Darfur, Bassil overturns the western stereotype of the innately genocidal African (as represented in western media by such conflicts as Rwanda and Darfur) by evidencing the colonial and imperial processes that have been instrumental in engendering conflict and war in the region.

In my essay, "Transnational Carceral Archipelagos: Lampedusa and Christmas Island", I proceed, like Bassil, to materialise histories of colonialism and biopower in the context of two islands, Lampedusa, off the coast of Sicily, and Christmas Island, off the coast of Western Australia. By examining the manner in which both these islands have been mobilised by Fortress Europe and Fortress Australia as frontline spaces that must thwart, through imprisonment and deportation, the landfall of asylum seekers and the undocumented on their shores, I attempt to mark their fault line status in the geopolitics of North/South relations. In the process, I also draw attention to transmediterranean historical and cultural flows that mark relations between Italy and Australia. Even as both Lampedusa and Christmas Island are sites marked by the harrowing presence of immigration detention prisons, they are also places that are destinations for luxury holidays. By drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of *crisis heterotopias*, as spaces that can simultaneously accommodate violent and contradictory differences (for example, vacation resorts and prisons, tourists and imprisoned refugees), I theorise the biopolitical relations that inscribe and organise such sites. Situating both these islands along the fault line of the border, I conclude by bringing into focus the border zones of the refugee dead that circumscribe both these islands.

The historical status of transmediterranean intellectual, racial and political flows between Italy and Australia is what Gaia Giuliani brings into focus in her "Whose Whiteness? Cultural Dis-Locations Between Italy and Australia". By drawing attention to the influential racial theories of the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), Giuliani argues that such racial theories played a pivotal role in shaping Australian intellectual and political race thinking from the end of the 19th century to the close of the 1930s. She contextualises these influential racial theories within a medico-scientific field, addressing their material ramifications through a critical examination of the work of an Australian doctor, Raphael Cilento (1893-1985). Cilento, Giuliani argues, was an important figure in shaping both debates and policies centred on the colonial administration of the tropics in Australia and their attendant concerns about racial purity and hygiene. Giuliani proceeds to unravel a complex and intertwined Italian and Australian transmediterranean history underpinned by environmental, racial, medical, anthropological, eugenic and political theories that were instrumental in constructing transnational racialised ethnoscapes in both Europe and Australia.

The intertwined histories of transmediterranean cultural flows and exchanges are emblematically embodied by the Greek Australian writer and political activist, Alekos Doukas, in Petro Alexiou's "Alekos Doukas (1900-1962): A Dis-Located Life in the Shifting Terrain of the Eastern Mediterranean". In this essay, Alexiou stages a critical archaeology that refuses reductionist categories and homogenising labels. On the contrary, the transitive power of the figure of the *trans* (transmediterranean, transnational, translocal and so on) is here shown to breach such facile forms of containment: Greece, Turkey, the Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire and Australia are all shown to be inextricably connected through the singular subject of Doukas. Alexiou unravels differential layers of historical, political and cultural sedimentation that shaped and were, in turn, reoriented and transformed by Doukas in the course of his diasporic life. As with so many of the other essays in this collection, fundamental questions on race, nation and colonialism are raised by Alexiou in the course of his study of Doukas. The importance of Alexiou's work lies in the manner in which an individual life-history becomes the vehicle through which to address complex transnational forces that usually fall outside of the concerns of traditional biographical studies. This enables him to flesh out a biographical life of Doukas that does not resile from naming contradictions, as well as celebrating multiplicities.

The identification and naming of a series of political contradictions is what Ilaria Vanni sets in motion in her "Imagining Italians Abroad:

The 2008 Italian Political Election Campaign in Australia". Through her delineation of a series of sardonic vignettes that figure the literal playing out of the recent Italian election campaign amongst Australia's Italian diaspora, Vanni effectively identifies "The ability of diasporic imagination to produce figurations that are both in conjunction and disjunction with the mythographies of the country of origin". Situating her study within the localised context of the nuanced and ephemeral practices of diasporic everyday life, Vanni demonstrates how the very ordinariness of such everyday diasporic practices "mobilise[s] a set of representations and self-representations that has little to do with the grandeur of Italian mainland political imagination". In effect, what Vanni so cannily discloses through this study are micro-political agentic practices that, through their deployment by transmediterranean diasporic subjects, are grounded in the realm of the senses, affect and the everyday and that contest, disperse and reconfigure nationalist political ideologies.

The transitive force of transmediterranean crossings in the context of nationalist fictions and mythographies is what is also critically examined in Goldie Osuri's "Transmediterranean Dispersals: Mazzini, Hindu Nationalism and Sonia Gandhi". Osuri's focus on a series of transmediterranean dispersals, that are embodied by such historically different figures as the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) and the contemporary political figure Sonia Gandhi, enables her to set in train the productive unsettling of reductionist categories and self-identical formations. Consequently, the system of relations that holds between nation, religion and racialised embodiment is both unsettled and transfigured through Osuri's innovative disclosure of the links between Mazzinian theories of nation and religion and Sonia Maino Gandhi's incorporation and productive reorientation of such theories. In the face of homogenising and exclusionist Hindu nationalist ideologies, Sonia Gandhi emerges, in Osuri's words, as a trans-figure that contests "fictions of purity and homology – of blood, body, territory and nation". In her transitive study of Sonia Gandhi in the context of the politics of the Indian nation-state, Osuri underscores how these same nationalist fictions of purity are too often mobilised by various nationalist bodies not only to exclude otherised identities within particular geopolitical formations, but also in order to foment and legitimise violence against target subjects. In advocating transnational moves that question and contest such nationalist fictions, and in the context of a country, India, "whose metropolitan cities boast of road-side eateries which advertise curries, pizzas, and pastas on the same board, Indianness", Osuri concludes, "cannot be anchored to a homogeneous idea of culture or nation. This is the lesson that a mapping of transmediterranean dispersals has to offer us".

The "lesson" offered by Osuri perfectly encapsulates the key concerns of this book. If the study of transmediterranean cultures has anything to offer, it is precisely a lesson on how to contest homogenising and exclusionist categories that continue to reproduce both symbolic and physical forms of violence. The transmediterranean flows that are mapped in this book testify to embodied histories of relations, connections, exchanges and interdependencies that refuse self-identical categories, precisely as they open up the heterogeneous routes and heteronomous relays of transitive movements and their too often occluded histories. The essays in this collection are situated on a politico-historical fault line that is inscribed by globalising calls for economic liberalisation and the demolition of trade borders and, simultaneously, by the passing of ever more draconian nationalist policies and exclusionary racist laws delimiting and criminalising the movement of people from the Global South to the Global North. Situated in this charged context, the essays in this collection articulate both the violent legacies of previous racist and colonialist histories, whilst also uncovering previously effaced transmediterranean flows and exchanges that breach and productively reconfigure bodies and nations that claim to be self-identical to themselves.