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BEYOND THE BORDER AND THE WORD: WONDERING SUBJECTS IN THREE ANGLOPHONE TEXTS

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Abstract

In cultural terms, wondering subjects like vagrants, homeless and migrants are often relegated to liminal social positions and neglected complete identities. However when novelists give them a voice, they can reconstruct and reinvent language and bring to the fore the tense reaction and challenge of the periphery to the monolithic sense of order and power that lies in mainstream lifestyles and canons. My paper focuses on three very diverse Anglophone fictional renditions of this complex scenario, in its postmodern, dystopian and diasporic articulations, respectively represented by *Next* (Christine Brooke-Rose 1998), *Divided Kingdom* (Rupert Thomson 2005) and *Harare North* (Brian Chikwava 2009) and sets out to analyse how these novels subvert the stereotypical vision of vagabonds and squatters and turn them into unusual tropes of alterity and diversity. Their fragmented, exuberant language uses constitute the backbone of these texts, which attempt to mirror or re-imagine the contemporary tangling and breaking of different viewpoints, stories and identities via innovative forms of eye-dialect, slang, and antilanguage. From a thematic perspective, therefore, these outcasts provokingly go beyond borders and vigorously express other voices by re-appropriating and re-shaping communicative codes and social practices.

Key words: wandering subjects, Christine Brooke-Rose, Rupert Thomson, Brian Chikwava, language and power, language and variation, antilanguage, language and identity, borders, space, crossing.

1. Introduction: wandering across textual and cultural spaces

In our multifaceted contemporary age, the controversial and somehow ‘disturbing’ presence of vagrants and wandering subjects seems to emerge and gain attention in various types of discourses and contexts, cutting across the restricted fields of social studies, anthropology, philosophy, and politics in an attempt to reclaim voice and space. In literature, these subjects are often depicted as alternative, provoking or marginal characters that react to the establishment’s processes of homogenisation and levelling

from their very peripheral positions, in their perennial, restless motion. The purpose of this essay is to investigate how the cultural role(s) and identity manifestations of the homeless, vagrants and migrants are represented in Anglophone literary discourse, in particular through the specific postmodern, dystopian and diasporic articulations, respectively represented by *Next* (Christine Brooke-Rose 1998), *Divided Kingdom* (Rupert Thomson 2005) and *Harare North* (Brian Chikwava 2009). Although these texts belong to very different literary genres, they all pivot around a range of wandering subjects, and employ particular stylistic and linguistic strategies to substantiate a sense of reaction and opposition towards the threat of hegemonic control and brutal suppression. Furthermore, my intention to focus on these texts does not merely lie in a comparativist approach, but rather in the assumption that today wandering subjects are central figures in literary discourse, especially in these sub-genres, as they reflect and dramatise a plurality of various themes and styles.

From both a cultural and a historical point of view, vagrants and their various representations and subcategories – such as migrants, gypsies, refugees and others – have been typically viewed with circumspection, indifference, and sometimes even with hostility and loathing, and consequently they have been condemned to marginal, precarious social positions. Because of their unwillingness and impossibility to settle down, they are constructed and imagined as bearers of otherness and difference, whose identity is often denied, subjugated or uprooted. Yet, from their outer collocation they have access to a different kind of perception and they can approach, understand and deconstruct cultural phenomena and social practices from other perspectives. In the narrative context the role they play is salient, as they are able to cross borders, undermine stereotypes, and reshape language so as to denounce the excesses of power and obtain visibility for marginalised categories. This vision is confirmed in particular when we take into consideration the narrative modes that characterise postmodern, dystopian and postcolonial literatures, namely those cultural terrains that mirror, delve into or re-imagine present-day anxieties, fragmentations, hopes and uncertainties.

2. Wandering subjects in three text worlds

I will now briefly present the three novels I intend to use as case studies for the analysis of the trope of migrants and vagabonds in contemporary fiction. These texts belong to the wider context of Anglophone literatures, although they tend to branch off from mainstream fiction thanks to their innovative characteristics such as the fragmentariness of the narration, the manipulation of the linguistic resources, the creation of novel metaphors and tropes.

Published in 1998, Christine Brooke-Rose's *Next* is a very particular kind of murder novel, whose non-linear plot, in reality, disintegrates into a diegetic flow charting the voices of the London homeless. Rejected by society, these squatting characters fluctuate in a self-perpetrating, nebulous condition, and their 'rotten' language is astutely recreated via urban dialects that, to a certain extent, may even echo or challenge the linguistic variety known as Estuary English, namely the 'fashionable' language spoken in Greater London and the South East. The complexity of the novel is a real challenge for the reader, since it is possible to list up to 26 characters, each of them carrying a name starting with a different letter of the alphabet. Furthermore, the author heavily relies on the phonetic transcription of the homeless' jargon, and thus verbally reshapes the textual surface in an unusual, attention-grabbing way. The ground-breaking significance of *Next*, however, does not merely emerge in the linguistic invention, but rather in the endeavour to unbind social outcasts and vagrants from the constraints of silencing, allowing them to achieve visibility through the re-appropriation of effective communicative resources.

With *Divided Kingdom*, authored by Rupert Thomson and published in 2005, we move to a dark representation of the future, in which a totalitarian government breaks an imaginary country into four distinct colour-coded areas (Pneuma, Aquaville, Cledge and Ustion) and regroups the population according to a strict personality-type classification with the purpose to eradicate the evils of society. Although the name of this country is not explicitly cited (even the idea that it is an island is not textually expressed, but rather hinted at or suggested by various allusions), the novelist's satirical style displays obvious and clear references to the socio-political scenario of modern Britain. The plot draws extensively from fantasy and science fiction, from *Gulliver's Travels* to Orwell's *1984*, and follows the peregrinations of the protagonist, born with the name of Matthew Micklewright but socially 'relocated' as Thomas Parry, i.e. equipped with a new life, in the Red Quarter. The theme of wandering is particularly prominent when the protagonist comes in contact with the category of the so-called White People, those subjects with no rights and no identity who, after the panoptical reorganisation of society, have not been assigned a specific role and place, and thus are allowed to lead a nomadic life, continuously migrating and living in dire conditions of misery and silence. In order to

rescue his real memories and feelings, Parry decides to join the White People in their diasporic passages across geographical, but also cultural, borders, in a process that renegotiates the meaning of belonging and being.

The sense of postcolonial displacement that often affects migrants struggling to integrate themselves in a new environment is the governing paradigm of *Harare North*, written by Brian Chikwava in 2009, whose nameless Zimbabwean narrator has to cope with the difficulties of creating new social and cultural relations. The main character, a former soldier child, is a young man in multicultural London, an octopus-like, sometimes inaccessible hub, which many African migrants rename as Harare North. The miserable experiences of the protagonist exemplify the sadness and pain of migrants, even undergoing mental distress, and are narrated in a sort of 'rotten' English, which nonetheless has a strong expressive power, especially in showing the inequalities and schizophrenia of the contemporary world in refusing and abandoning migrants from 'other' contexts. By appropriating and transforming English, namely the language of the powerful and wealthy West, the narrator strives to provide an alternative vision, a different perspective from a *sans papiers* who does not understand and cannot accept the repression of human dignity.

3.1 The language of wandering subjects

How do wandering subjects represent and reconstruct the world and its elements? Is it possible to consider the sense of wandering as a condition that impacts on the linguistic construction of reality? And which characteristics does the language of migrants and vagabonds display? These loaded questions inform and enrich the narrative fabric of the three novels I presented in the previous section, which I am now going to tackle by adopting a stylistic-pragmatic approach. It is indeed within and through language that identities are given the possibility of expression, and thus the various modalities that the writers attribute to their narrators function as structuring devices for empowering or sometimes even freeing the voice of the wandering subjects, the outcasts that are normally confined to social and cultural peripheries, condemned to a dull limbo.

The intimate tie between language and identity indeed is of paramount importance for approaching wandering characters in literary discourse: in their movements across frontiers, borders, paths, they question themselves, and others, and they map territories and contexts as well. Their acts of exploration and travelling, however, are not mute but they are based on the centrality of language, a key medium for establishing relations between the self and the other, and between members and non-members of the same community or group. Ashcroft underlines this interconnection in almost metaphysical and symbolic terms: "Languages may be held to represent various cultural traits, but *our*

language is different, our language is transcendent, it is the language of God Himself. Language is an instrument of communication, but in our hearts, we know God speaks only our language to us, because *our* language is *us*" (2009: 95; Authors' emphasis). Language therefore is a fundamental identity-building element and this characterises elusive wanderers in fictional worlds too.

3.1.2 Going elsewhere: *Next*

Next is a novel whose temporal and spatial coordinates are simultaneously precise and diaphanous: we know that the author sets the scene in contemporary London as locative deixis provides clear references including topographical elements (roads, stations, parks, boroughs), but the dominant presence of the homeless with their eventless and colourless lives is emphasised and foregrounded, as they keep moving around in a peripatetic fashion. The poor that live on the streets and sleep rough represent a cultural category of new wandering subjects, often neglected by society, against the backdrop of a post-capitalist and postmodern scenario, segregated into a "different country called Streetland" (Brooke-Rose 1998: 192). Their liminal, off-the-stage existence is commonly ignored, as they turn simply into a number while queuing up at jobcentres and charities, hence the title of the novel: "An every tahm i' says NEXT, an wha' bi' of world's camin ap, yer ge's Bu' first wey'll tike a brike" (Brooke-Rose 1998: 11; Author's emphasis). The voice of the homeless too is obliterated through a broken, rough and suggestive language that nonetheless bespeaks stories, events, memories.

In order to reverse the idea of exclusion and marginalisation of these wandering subjects, Christine Brooke-Rose works out a particular type of language to express their feelings and hopes, which does not simply benefit from register-mixing and other linguistic strategies, but also reminds of the features of the Hallidayian 'antilanguage' (1978), namely those linguistic varieties usually stemming from subcultures that "reflect counter-reality, in opposition to established norms" (Black 2006: 95). In this light, the homeless characters portrayed in the novel explicitly acknowledge their proximity to other social minority groups (e.g. migrants), as emerges in the following example in which a homeless man describes his experience in Manchester before moving to London: "No freedom of movement for vagrants isn't it odd. Like immigrants. In the global economy money is free to move but not people. Unless you are rich of course" (Brooke-Rose 1998: 122).

Linguistic variation, in particular with reference to the diatopic level, including for example elements or echoes of Cockney and Estuary English, thus stands as an important feature of the novelist's representation of wandering subjects, and according to Black (2006: 89) "the use of dialect words works in at least two ways: it serves to

characterise or identify the narrator or character sociolinguistically, but readers may react in unpredictable ways, partly on account of the dialect chosen, and what effects it might have". For the readers, indeed, approaching the text may not be easy, since they have to decode and infer meanings from non-standard linguistic renditions, as in this dialogue between a man and a young runaway:

> High on Ecstasy?
> Cauwse no'. Rappin ter meself. Yer beggin?
> No. Just resting. Waiting for the night to fall.
> Iss fall'n.
> Not really, not to sleep yet, just winter dark and iodine lights. But I found this nice doorway and want to keep it.
> Waon the lah's and traffic keeyp yer awike?
> Used to it. Traffic dies out and I can wrap this scarf round the eyes. Real problem is to find a carton. What are you called?
> Blike.
> That's a poet.
> Ah am a paowet.
> Is it a surname?
> Naow, iss me firs' name. An' you? (Brooke-Rose 1998: 49)

If language can be viewed as a form of symbolic power, its unbalanced distribution and provision is still at the heart of much social discrimination, considering all its potentialities and implications for growth and development. In metaphorical terms, language competence is a kind of 'capital', and as Bourdieu (1991: 56-7) holds "the groups which possess that competence are able to impose it as the only legitimate one in the formal markets (the fashionable, educational, political and administrative markets) and in most of the linguistic interactions in which they are involved". As a consequence, outcasts and vagabonds, who do not master the standard language (i.e. they are not in a position to manage symbolic capital), are denied any form of social participation and involvement because language for them is a barrier, a border that transforms their space into a ghetto and turns them into dehumanised beings, because, in spite of concepts of freedom and democracy, the question of inequality and the lack of rights is still very serious: "MEN BORN EQUAL. *Natus sum*, giving rise to *natio*, but the Declaration forgot that a slave is not a national, that a refugee, like a dropout, ceases to be a citizen" (Brooke-Rose 1998: 2, Author's emphasis).

However, the novelist does not accept such binary unfair vision and elaborates a counter-discourse by giving voice to those itinerant subjects originating from the margins of cultural centres. Indeed, it is important to notice how the writer's "exploitation of the language becomes a way of promoting individuality, in that it enables her characters to

finally assert their identity" (Canepari-Labib 2007: 47-8) and thus to discard the burden of silence and eventually emerge from an anonymous mass. Throughout the novel, moreover, the anarchic linguistic creativity of the homeless appears to problematise the idea of speech community, i.e. the prescriptive imposition of stylistic norms and competences, and thus it implicitly challenges the standardisation of society, in its wider sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects too. Indeed, we should remember that, as Fairclough sustains, "there is an element of schizophrenia about standard English, in the sense that it aspires to be (and is certainly portrayed as) a *national* language belonging to all classes and sections of society, and yet it remains in many respects a *class dialect*" (2001: 48; Author's emphasis). Conversely, the homeless' inventive language is a distinguishing key identity marker that also operates, on the one hand, as a tool to break the constriction of invisibility, and, on the other, to enhance diversity and otherness. Indeed, by using the invigorating power of their idiosyncratic code, the homeless try to reclaim a place in society and denounce the inequalities and abuses of the contemporary de-humanised world.

In Morawski's vision, "the social reality is approved of in all its dimensions as heterogeneous, segmented, accidental" (1996: 90), and a result the postmodern puzzlement that somehow affects the various narrative layers and implicitly points to "the end of meganarratives, of all the fictions we live under, from the divine right of kings to presidents by universal suffrage with half the nation not voting" (Brooke-Rose 1998: 202) is evoked by the fragmentation of language, in a process of decentring and shifting, in other words a kind of explicit textual and polyphonic wanderlust, as the story and its narrators are deconstructed in alphabetical simulacra, objects and subjects. From a stylistic point of view, in fact, it is worth noticing how various strategies are at work with the purpose to convey uncertainty, movement, incompleteness and these include a mixture of direct speech and indirect speech acts, but also attention-getting graphical layout, intertextuality, terms of slang and other techniques. All these elements thus contribute to the characterisation of wandering subjects as active participants in the contemporary sociocultural systems and discourses.

3.1.3 'White People' on the move: metaphors of colour beyond the borders of dystopia

The idea of motion and shifting represents an underlying issue in Rupert Thomson's text, which is present not only in Thomas Parry's peregrinations across the various territories that make up the Divided Kingdom and in the possibility of the central governments to remove people from one location into another through a procedure called 'transfer', but it also markedly characterises the mysterious nomadic groups called 'White

People' that constantly migrate and are shunned or persecuted by mainstream society. Colour-based metaphors and tropes (the four parts of the Kingdom are assigned a specific colour) are the linguistic and stylistic devices through which the novelist orchestrates this complex satirical fable about the possible socio-political derailment of the near future of modern nations (Britain in particular).

It is interesting to note, indeed, that the most recurrent semantic fields that Thomson uses in building up this mad universe relate to the opposing, and yet pervasive, poles of sedentarity and motion, in the detailed description of places (towns, streets, stations, railway lines, borders, barracks, tunnels) and actions (moving, travelling by train or air, running, walking, driving). In particular, an element that embodies the discourse of migration is the border, which here cuts through space and rearranges the cartographic representation of the land: "What had been until then a united kingdom was broken down into four separate and autonomous republics. New borders were created. New infrastructures too. New loyalties" (Thomson 2005: 11). It is a highly intertextual device, which draws from sci-fi and dystopian literature but which also emphatically evokes the partitioning power of borders and boundaries in real-life contexts of the past or of the present (e.g. Berlin, Nicosia, Ireland).

The multiple meanings of space and border, however, can also be tackled in their symbolic sense, as De Michelis (2008) maintains: of course they are comprised within the realm of cultural geography, but they can also be extended to other spheres and dimensions, for example concerning the perception of space as the arena of the self, in which it is necessary to elaborate and negotiate the performances of existence as actions and motions within space. The fear or hesitation of crossing the border, for instance, is linked to the idea of spatial organisation, namely how space is reinvented and rearranged so as to accommodate people in or protect them from strangers, according to new emerging powers and ideological visions. In this light, for Thomas Parry the values of border-crossing, and subsequently of the decision of joining the White People, lie in an inner process of identity reconstruction against the totalitarian eradication of individuality and difference, which functions via the mechanisms of metaphor. Moving, wandering, travelling, crossing borders are 'special' acts that inform cultural and linguistic behaviour indeed. The sense of motion for example is encoded in the frequent conceptual metaphor 'life is a journey', that we employ to draw analogies between two elements in order to map cognitively concepts and meanings (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010: 138-148). In a wider prospective, "metaphorical gesture, like metaphorical speech, opens a window onto the inner world of thought and feeling, a metaphysical world rooted firmly in physical experience" (Geary 2011: 111) and in the novel the discourse of space and borders is dominant and leads to engender many thematic ramifications.

Colours play an important role in the textual architecture of the novel, and are themselves connected with the sense of wandering, since the possibility of moving freely is given exclusively to the White People whilst in general the other population groups (each of them characterised by a particular colour) have to be sedentary by law. First of all, colours mark and implicitly define the four parts of the Divided Kingdom following the specific connotations stemming from the theory of humours, and as a matter of fact "everyone in the country had been secretly examined, assessed and classified, all in strict accordance with the humours" (Thomson 2005: 11). Consequently, the Red Quarter is home to the sanguines, the Yellow Quarter is for the cholerics, whereas in the Green and Blue Quarters respectively live the melancholics and the phlegmatics. As Geary (2011: 103) affirms, colours "have metaphorical significant as well as physical influence" and such an argument is validated not by simple suggestions but by scientific evidence for the attribution of particular characteristics to different colours, for example with red associated with violence or passion, or blue evoking a sense of quietness and relaxation.

The social (and textual) construction of the White People represents in the dystopic dimension of the novel the condition whereby individuals are deprived of their identity, position and memories, and often made the targets of fierce persecutions, attacks, scorn or simply indifference. Their chromatic characterisation embodies a form of reversed racist connotation, in which it is the colour white and not black that signposts their sense of otherness and difference (De Michelis 2008: 243) through an instantiation of unconventional opposition:

> They were society's untouchables, […]. The past had been taken from them, as it had been taken from everyone alive at the time of the Rearrangement, but these were people who had been either unwilling or unable to find a place in the future. They didn't fit into any quarter, he said, or any humour. They had ended up marooned between the old kingdom and the new one. Lost in a pocket of history. […] Known formally as achromatics, they were required to wear white because white had no status as a colour. Since they were perceived as having no character, they were deemed incapable of causing psychological damage, and as result they were allowed to cross borders at will, to wander freely from one country to another. They were commonly believed to be both sterile and psychic – sterile because the idea of non-beings giving birth to non-beings was too bizarre to think about, and psychic because their apparent instability to speak had led to a reliance on other, more obscure forms of communication. (Thomson 2005: 125)

The idea behind the invention of the White People addresses and points to those marginalised categories that have traditionally suffered from various forms of discrimination and racism through space and time. In Thomson's writing these subjects have not been able to conform to the dictates of the new hierarchical society, and as a consequence they are construed as the alien or the abnormal (they do not use a verbal language, but produce only guttural sounds in a beast-like fashion) that the Divided Kingdom must exile or silence.

The description of the White People also alludes to some uncanny features such as their alleged mental powers (in some episodes there are references to telepathy), but paradoxically their individuality is foregrounded in particular by their freedom in moving about and going beyond borders, therefore considering the notion of wandering as a paramount tool of expression and affirmation against the neutralising homogenisation of the new governments. The narrator even seems to suggest that their apparent dumbness and pale existence may, in reality, camouflage an alternative form of awareness and perception since "their so-called emptiness was actually a distillation, a form of knowledge" (Thomson 2005: 291), and consequently he decides to join them in order to retrieve memories and feelings obliterated by the new totalitarian state. The experience of adopting the roaming lifestyle and primitive customs of the White People represents a kind of rite of passage, which allows crossing a border to question one's own identitarian position and inclinations: "If I really wanted to step outside the system, if I wanted to be rid of it entirely, I would have to forget myself – everything I was, or ever had been" (Thomson 2005: 291). From this perspective, travelling across boundaries and countries becomes an exploration of the inner self, a sort of rebirth leading to a fuller comprehension of life as a necessary step for social and political improvement, upheaval or reaction.

3.1.4 Postcolonial wanderings

My discussion of wandering subjects must necessarily take into consideration the area of postcolonial and diasporic literature, as it often deals with the scattering of cultures and people in the global scenario, and indeed some of the themes that underpin both *Next* and *Divided Kingdom* are also present or at least evoked in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*, which focuses on the appalling experience of African migrants in contemporary London (the title refers to the way migrants from several parts of Africa rename the British capital, in opposition to Harare South, which is another appellative for Johannesburg), and also tackles the creative transformation of language, the sense of 'placelessness' and the reinvention of contemporary 'ethnic' identity.

In this novel, the young narrator from Zimbabwe finds a shelter at a friend's house in Brixton, a London district known for its large multiethnic communities, but soon he has to face the dire conditions of migrant life, whose overwhelming impact redesigns the notion of movement in cultural, social, and geographical terms. Caught between the cogs of overwhelming globalisation and haunted by the spectre of xenophobia (De Michelis 2013), his outcast existence is further marked by his lack of a passport, and even a name, the element which primarily connotes identity, so that he appears to be a ghostly,

invisible 'non-person', nearly frozen by some ineluctable fate, as people tend to ignore or avoid him:

> I feeling like *umgodoyi* – the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villager relieve it of its misery by hit its head with rock. *Umgodoyi* have no home like the winds. That's why *umgodoyi*'s soul is tear from his body in rough way. That's what everyone want to do to me, me I know. (Chikwava 2009: 226)

The anonymous narrator is in reality a very complex character, as he alternates the roles of an unreliable storyteller, of an epitome of social exclusion and of an undecipherable exile lost in his psychological confusion (Splendore 2011), thus combining different stylistic forms and unusual voices that interleave the meaning of wandering and its cultural connotations.

In this text too, language is cunningly manipulated and reconstructed so as to subvert and abrogate social and cultural constrictions through the voice(s) of the 'periphery'. To this purpose, the author adopts a double intertwined strategy: on the one hand, he hybridises the language of the narrator (with astute recourse to code switching and code mixing, or echoes of Ndebele or Shona proverbs and metaphors), and, on the other, he highlights the poor competence of the man with his 'broken' English. The latter aspect, which is quite common in several postcolonial and diasporic texts, is particularly relevant here: from a structural point of view, its copious resources comprise omission of articles and other determiners, reduplication ("Dave, with his unending roll-up in his mouth, talk talk while I eat", Chikwava 2009: 165), or neologism ("Walking on, I am worryful", Chikwava 2009: 2), but the most significant element regards the pragmatic ability to generate social production of difference, i.e. the migrant's rough speech against the dominant sociocultural standardization of British society, which in turn is linked to specific cultural references (Paulin 2012). Of course this type of language superficially seems to suggest poor education, but at the same time it concentrates various layers of meaning of the migration experience, such as the inability or reluctance to communicate with the surrounding multitude, the social stigma impressed upon low-level language competence and the clash between two different cultural worlds.

The text records an overlap between reality and vision and, indeed, the protagonist is afraid of walking out at night, in search of abandoned food and other things, because the alleys and backstreets "'can be completely mental. Full of strange characters'" (Chikwava 2009: 167). The distress of the man – a serious condition that may have devastating affects on migrants as shown by recent ethnopsychiatric research – emerges from the collapse of cultural references due to the deprivation of a name, an identity, but also of the capacity to interpret and approach life in the new environment. As Hill *et alii* affirm, the outcome of such truncated situations often is a cultural shock because "once out of that familiar cultural environment we have to rethink many aspects of our

behaviour including our use of language and non-verbal communication" (2007: 100). Frequently this climaxes into a form of alienation that produces a doubling of personality, as the protagonist, at a certain point, even believes to be another person, Shingi, a friend of the narrator's, thus constructing a fictional persona, perhaps for projecting and exorcising his tormented moods and obsessions, in a kind of ventriloquist voice.

Yet, in spite of the obfuscating menace that the diasporic displacement subtly generates, the protagonist, in his isolation and peripatetic desperation, tries to reshape language to express inner feelings since he is "tired of the wrong answers" (Chikwava 2009: 224), having to face constant discrimination and silencing. The novel's atmosphere, especially in the concluding chapters, is rather gloomy and seems to suggest a dramatic ending, but we should be aware of the fact that narration can function as a way to claim a new identity profile for the subject who shifts across social and spatial borders and constructs a cultural discourse on diversity and hybridity to avoid complete annihilation. The narrator represents a postcolonial wayfarer who witnesses the instability of the contemporary world and its tensions and conflicts, both in the West (with the dark representation of precarious and inhospitable London) and in Africa, still devastated by ethnic conflicts and fierce dictators. But he also reacts by recreating expressive modalities and visions in his patchy, eccentric style, which is a reflection of the endeavour of those iterant subjects who convey their anxieties, dreams and expectations in dynamic flows. This is intensified by the mechanism used in the very last paragraph of the whole book, when the story adopts a second-person narration, one trying to engage directly with the readers, with the migrant's desperate effort to ask for their empathy and pity: "you stand there in them mental backstreets and one big battle rage even if you have more ginger for it" (Chikwava 2009: 230).

4. Conclusions: new directions in (cultural) wanderings?

In this article I have dealt with the theme of wandering as a human condition for the expression of identity in fictional contexts, in particular by focusing upon contemporary Anglophone literature in its postmodern, dystopian and postcolonial renditions. Given the notable complexity of these works and the space available here, however, my analysis is limited and should be considered a starting point for further research, in particular adopting an interdisciplinary approach by using different interpretative tools, ranging from cultural studies to linguistics and sociology. The issue of wandering in its various forms and modalities does constitute a key component of many cultural discourses, and because literature mirrors the plural features and the aftermaths that this type of behaviour produces across time and space, it is fundamental to take into consideration language as the chief instrument for creating meaning and

comprehending the cogs of contemporary life and its multiple interconnected scenarios. As we have seen, the languages of the wanderers are multilayered and dynamic: they are capable of subverting clichés and beliefs, but they also target the re-appropriation and re-modulation of space and voice. Within a wider perspective on the artistic productions of contemporaneity, Chambers (1990: 8) holds that "it is the languages of pleasure, of tragedy, of pain, of hope, of freedom, of detail and difference, of death and beginning… of the real, and not naked reality, that address us and which we, in turn, address" and these forces and feelings are embodied by wandering subjects as well in their quest for wholeness and novelty.

From their paradoxical 'double' position, simultaneously being at the outskirts of society and yet moving as central actors, the vagabonds, migrants, homeless, and other wandering subjects that constitute the backbone of the texts here considered propose an alternative, insightful world-vision: their polysemic codes and forms of communication make up a variegated range of cultural discourses on a plurality of loaded questions. Thus, these figures partake of broad processes of meaning-making, and in their fictional worlds they advocate the power of mimetic representation in mirroring a variety of contexts, practices, values. As Fairclough points out, "in seeing language as discourse and as social practice, one is committing oneself not just to analysing processes of production and interpretation, but to analysing the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions" (2001: 21). In other words, although these works use literary language, they deal with thorny, real topics and situations, for instance the question of identity construction and positioning, but also the redesigning of contemporary societies and their different borders, partitions, migration policies, whose impact is palpable and unavoidable.

Ultimately wanderers reject the dullness of conformity and orchestrate unconventional forms of aggregation that we could conceive as "imagined communities" since according to Anderson (1986: 6) "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined". The communities of these outsiders become microcosms operating within broader systems: they trigger and facilitate the circularity of discourses between centres and peripheries, in cultural, social and historical terms, for example with the redefinition of relations and powers linking and opposing the decaying West and the emerging East, a context skilfully pictured in Kate Pullinger's *When the Monster Dies* (1989). For wanderers the very idea of moving, travelling and going beyond borders is a permanent, 'open' condition of change, transformation and growth across time and space, in which different cultural strengths and influences come in contact, intermingle and create new tensions and values. In this light, they turn into 'living metaphors', and in closing it is worth remembering that the

word metaphor derives from the Greek *metaphorein*, which means 'to move over, to carry over', thus implying the power of movement as a metamorphosis and rebirth.

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