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The Style of "an Immigrant's Manifesto": Analysing Suketu Mehta's *This Land is Our Land*

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Abstract

Written in "sorrow and anger": this is Salman Rushdie's comment on Suketu Mehta's *This Land is Our Land. An Immigrant's Manifesto*, published in 2019. In the first chapter, "A Planet on the Move", Mehta adds "rage and hope" to better express the feelings that led him to the writing of an immigrant's manifesto, a nonfictional work written in struggle, with a language "carried to the barricades", as the literary genre usually requires (Jasinski 2001).

Bringing together autobiography, interviews, historical accounts on colonialism and neocolonialism, economic data and surveys, as well as cultural reflections and literary references, the Indian writer and academic based in New York seems to employ the same rhetorical and discursive strategies that belong to the anti-immigrant narrative (e.g. the us-them dichotomy, war metaphors, use of opposites), in order to deconstruct the current populist narrative on immigration and build a counter-discourse.

Drawing from theories on language, power and rhetoric (Leith 2019, Fairclough 1989), on racism and discourse (Van Dijk 1998) and on postcolonial studies (Gandhi 2007) my paper investigates the stylistic features of Mehta's narrative, highlighting the elements that characterize a manifesto, as well as the tools of postcolonial stylistics in a work that spans across lands and languages, whose tone is not merely polemical, nor simply critical. I elaborate on the way Mehta "struggles" to be convincing about issues of migration and racism, writing a contemporary postcolonial manifesto.

Keywords: Manifesto, Immigrants, Language, Style, Rhetoric, Colonialism/postcolonialism

1. Introduction

Written in "sorrow and anger": this is Salman Rushdie's comment on Suketu Mehta's *This Land is Our Land. An Immigrant's Manifesto*, published in 2019. In the first chapter, "A Planet on the Move", Mehta adds "rage and hope" to better express the feelings that led him to write the book.

Sorrow, anger, rage, hope: abstract, connotative and non-connotative nouns belonging to the semantic field of emotions, feelings and states of mind are used to define a work of nonfiction that deals with issues of immigration, colonialism/postcolonialism and racism in a stimulating and provocative way. As Sipahimalani (2020) writes in his review, "Mehta's anger grows as he explains why migrants are moving and they're feared. Much of this has been written about elsewhere, too. The way colonialism destroyed lands, the so-called dirty wars and regime change tactics employed by the West, how and why climate change is making lands inhabitable. Populism, propaganda and racism are eviscerated". Professor of journalism and scriptwriter, Suketu Mehta draws on his formative years as an Indian-born teenager growing up in New York City, providing a withering rebuke to the anti-immigration rhetoric that has arisen in global politics in recent years, especially in the US, during the first Trump's administration.

Mehta is known as the author of the acclaimed *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (2004), which won the Kiriyama Prize and the Hutch Crossword Award, and was a finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize and other important awards. The book is based on two and a half years research, and explores the underbelly of the city, offering a portrait of the historical, cultural and social complexity of the Indian megalopolis. *This Land is our Land* is based on fieldwork too, since the author's main intent is to do research and work to dismantle the narratives of populist ideologues in a fierce defense of global immigration. Mehta travels, interviews people, goes to several meetings and takes part in political protests. Yet, the result is not a mere travelogue, nor an academic essay on migration and colonialism, nor the memoir of his childhood and adolescence as an Indian migrated to New York: it is a different kind of writing that melts all those genres and conveys them in a "postcolonial" manifesto, with the typical features and rhetorical constructions of the manifesto genre. This is revealed from the first pages, when Mehta (2019) declares the reasons why he feels angry:

> I am angry: about the staggering global hypocrisy of the rich nations, having robbed the poor ones of their future, now arguing against a reverse movement of peoples – not to invade and conquer and steal, but to work. Angry at the ecological devastation that has been visited upon the planet by the West and which now demands that the poor nations stop emitting carbon dioxide. Angry at the depiction of people like my family and the other families that have continued in my family's path, because they had no other choice, as freeloaders, drug dealers, and rapists. I'm tired of apologizing for moving. These walls, these borders, between the people of the earth: they are of recent vintage, and they are flimsy. (pp. 8-9)

Anger relates to historical processes such as colonialism and imperialism, and with their legacy in the present neo-colonial condition that includes issues of migration:

> If World War I gave rise to visas and border controls, our own time is rife with walls, detention centres, national registers and citizenship amendment bills. Meanwhile, the desperation of immigrants grows as they try life-threatening ways to reach promised lands. Those who make it have no guarantee of being allowed to stay. Those who can face racism and threats, if not outright harm.
>
> When migrants move, it's not out if idle fancy, or because they hate their homelands, or to plunder the countries they come to, or even (most often) to strike it rich. They move – as my grand-father knew – because the accumulated burdens of history have rendered their homelands less and less habitable. They are here because you were there. (p. 61)

From the quotations above, the general tone of the writing fully emerges, as well as its stylistic features and general structure. Metha alternates life-stories with personal recollections, interviews, rhetorical questions, metaphors, using binary oppositions, negation, repetitions and code-switching to show its peculiar use of language. The author emerges as a definite writer-activist, presenting a combative prose that we can associate with the kind Arundhati Roy has produced in the last decades, using similar stylistic tools to oppose the Indian government's development projects and neocolonial policies (Note 1). Drawing from theories on language, power and society (Hodge and Kress 1993, Fairclough 1995), on racism and discourse (Van Dijk 1998) and on style as a manner of expression with its different levels and its rhetoric (Leith 2019, Jeffries 2010), I investigate Mehta's counter-narrative on migration, highlighting the elements that characterize a postcolonial manifesto in terms of cultural theory and language, such as, for example, the alternation of English with Spanish and Gujarati expressions, forming a kind of World English vocabulary of migration (Capstick 2020). The tools of stylistics and postcolonial theory constitute the methodological structure of our study and are aimed at showing how to dismantle the anti-immigrant rhetoric and build a new discourse on global migration.

2. The Genre and Style of a Postcolonial Manifesto

2.1 Manifesto: A General Overview

According to Teresa L. Ebert (2003), "The manifesto is writing in struggle. It is writing on the edge where textuality is dragged into the streets and language is carried to the barricades. It is writing confronting established practices, to open new spaces for oppositional praxis. This is another way of saying that the manifesto is the genre of change-writing, of transformative textuality and the textuality of transformation" (p. 553).

Erbert explains that in the circles of ruling knowledges, the manifesto and the polemic have always been represented as forms of "crude" thinking or more often as non-thinking: "as dogmatic pronouncements that are, to make the matter worse, written in an even "cruder" language. In the dominant cliches, the manifesto is formulaic, badly written, and an embodiment of hostility" (2003, p. 555). But the genealogy of "coarse thinking", in its materialist sense, can be traced in modern and contemporary thinking back to Marx and Engels up through Brecht (who taught audiences "coarse thinking" as a resistance against

bourgeois sentimentality represented as subtlety) and now continuing in some contemporary leftist writing, although it is increasingly under attack. The most concerted attacks on the manifesto are now from the neoliberal market forces that are attempting to exclude ideas from the lives of citizens and, in their place, introduce fantasies of consumption and sentimentality. In an overview of cultural and literary criticism in the United States, Richard Woodward (1999) writes that one can no longer find a robust exchange of ideas. He explains how critics are invited to appeal to the "subtle", the "understated", and the "ironic" as marks of thoughtfulness, reflectiveness, and complexity. Manifestos often do the opposite, since they always transgress norms and either implicitly or explicitly show that subtlety is not so much the quality of thoughtful writing as it is often the ideology of the normative. What Mehta aims to show in his manifesto is that we still need "robust ideas": he believes that it is necessary to make dogmatic pronouncements to express those ideas, and define the object of discourse, its history, the different opinions on the matter, addressing those who oppose such ideas and those who are in favour, always assuming a very clear position. He demonstrates that there is no room for subtlety in this kind of production, that it is thoughtful, reflective and complex writing, realized through a series of literary and stylistic devices.

Mehta seems to adhere to Ebert's suggestion: "the manifesto, in other words, is the space in which concrete social contestations are articulated as abstract ideas. It puts in question the existing economic and social arrangements and intervenes in the alienated forms of knowledges and practices that have, by the agency of power, become familiar and commonsensical and thus have assumed the shape of natural modes of knowing and acting in the world" (2003, p. 554). Despite the fact that some are political, others aesthetic, and still others scholarly in nature, manifestos have something in common, and we usually recognize this "something" as peculiar to the genre. As Mary Ann Caws notes, "the manifesto is by nature a loud genre that announces itself (…); it was from the beginning, and has remained, a deliberate manipulation of the public view. Setting out the terms of the faith toward which the listening public is to be swayed, it is a document of an ideology, crafted to convince and to convert" (2001, p. ix). Manifestos are fertile sites for investigating the ways in which writers use and adapt them for political and aesthetic purposes. "At its most endearing, a manifesto has a madness about it. It is peculiar and angry, quirky, or downright crazed. Always opposed to something, particular or general, it has not only to be striking but to stand up straight" (Caws, 2001, xix). This is how Caws presents the genre in her edited book of the great manifestos of history; in her introduction "The Poetics of the Manifesto. Nowness and Newness", she exposes the various features of style a manifesto can present: "like a mirror of the personality of the author, single or collective, the manifesto takes on as many styles as there are writers and speakers. But it has to grab us" (2001, p. xxviii).

The newness she refers to recalls an acclaimed essay by Homi Bhabha, "How Newness Enters the World", included in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), where the postcolonial critic argues that new cultural forms emerge not from dominant, stable cultures, but from the "in-between" spaces where cultures collide, like those inhabited by migrants. He uses examples from literature to show how cultural translation, which occurs in these "liminal" or "interstitial" spaces, challenges fixed cultural binaries and creates newness

through hybridization. In his manifesto, Mehta works on the same interstitial spaces to promote cultural and linguistic hybridity and presents the newness of migration today struggling against binaries and borders.

2.2 The Postcolonial Manifesto

According to Leela Gandhi, "ever since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), postcolonialism has had a major impact across disciplines. It's been a prompt for transnational knowledges. It's also placed imperialism at the heart of modern power - as technology of harmfulness that calls forth corresponding objections" (2019, p.177). In the second edition of her seminal book on postcolonial theory, Gandhi establishes postcolonial thinking as a contemporary philosophy of renunciation, with a unique proposal for uninjured life and non-injurious community. Unlike the first edition, she adds an epilogue entitled "If this were a manifesto for postcolonial thinking", where she takes stock of pertinent field developments and formulates them in seven subsections: assemblage, injury, exit, ontology, renunciation, ethics, and advice to kings. Each subsection ends with a proposal, and we just report the definition of the first section "Assemblage" to render the kind of language used by the author: "Postcolonial thinking is made up of heterogeneous elements with no internal hierarchies of genre (such as representation/event, semiotic/material, or even theory/practice)" (Gandhi, 2019, p. 177). Gandhi adopts the kind of formulaic language typical of the manifesto genre to expand the field of postcolonial studies in our global contemporaneity. She makes proposals to give concrete legitimation to the exposition of ideas, in a way that confronts established practices and opens up new spaces for oppositional praxis. She presents a methodology to critically read postcolonial texts, considering their programmatic aspect and the various artistic forms used to fictionalize themes and processes.

In her book *Postcolonial Poetics* (2018) Elleke Boehmer reminds us that postcolonial writings have the capacity to keep reimagining and refreshing how we understand ourselves in relation to the world and to some of the most pressing questions of our time. "The creative principles that underpin these readings make up the poetics, here the postcolonial poetics, of the writing" (Boehmer, 2018, p. 1). A critical approach that looks at questions of poetics, at creative shapes, formal structures and patterns of postcolonial writing might sharpen rather than obscure our attention to certain issues.

> To read critically is therefore to work together with the text and to understand something of these cognitive processes in operation. Postcolonial writing is as concerned as other kinds of literary writing with questions of aesthetics - that is, with questions of form, structure, perception, and reception – and can offer insights of its own into how these elements work and come together (Boehmer, 2018, p. 2).

We share the critic's position in contending that postcolonial criticism entails a close attention to linguistics and stylistics. Boehmer considers some of the theoretical, structural, and technical dimensions of the term poetics, and asks whether there can be certain purposive, symbolic, and communicative features of postcolonial writing that we might call definitively postcolonial. It is a question that invests our reading of Mehta's work and to which we try to provide answers through the analysis of narrative techniques belonging to various aspects of

postcolonial stylistics. This field is defined as the "linguistic study of literature pertaining to postcolonial era" (Kalpana, 2017, p. 13). It deals with strategies of language appropriation, linguistic hybridity and practices aimed at not conforming to the norms of Standard English. As R. Kalpana underlines, "various postcolonial writers have managed to create a distinct, special place for themselves in the world of language, having nativized the experiences through creative and nativized use of language" (2017, p. 13). Thus, postcolonial writing exhibits numerous samples of bilingual creativity, through playfulness and manipulation of Standard English, bringing about a substantial change in the linguistic fabric of the English language.

Following E. Adami's definition of the expanding and fruitful discipline: "postcolonial stylistics refers to the application (and adaptation) of stylistic analytical procedures and methods to texts from the postcolonial world through an approach that also considers the theoretical frames of postcolonial studies" (2024, p. 5). In his recent book he underlines that "readers are invited to discuss and hybridise (a word that is particularly indicative of postcolonial theories, denoting the result of different contacts, or cultural contamination, in figurative terms) the two disciplines [stylistics and postcolonial studies], in order to enhance our comprehension of the world we live in, since this is, at least partially, the result of the past (including the colonial era)" (Adami, 2024, p. 5). The critic chooses five significant keywords and shows how they constitute a sort of common thread across postcolonial texts and discourses. These are language, identity, belonging, history and ecology, and the book comes to look overall as a manifesto of postcolonial stylistics with theoretical analysis of each keyword and its practical applications in literature.

Within the field of postcolonial studies, different versions of the genre manifesto have been produced, especially in the first theorizations, let us only think of *Post-Colonial Studies: Key-Concepts* by Ashcroft, Griffin and Tiffin (1998, 2007, 2013). However, what Mehta adds in his book is the "language carried to the barricades", the writing in struggle, resulting in a true militant, and rhetorical, narrative invective.

3. The Discourse of Migration in the Manifesto: Rhetoric and Linguistic Hybridity

> Migration is like the weather: people will move from areas of high pressure to those of low pressure. Like the weather, this movement is equally hard to fight. Well over half of all undocumented immigrants come into America through the borders but by flying in and overstaying their visas". (Mehta, 2019, p. 115)
>
> Before you asked other people to respect the borders of the West, ask yourself if the West has ever respected anybody else's border. How often has the United States gone over the southern border or into the Caribbean or Southeast Asia? How often does it keep doing so, going over the borders of Iraq or Afghanistan? (…) I am not calling for open borders. I am calling for open hearts. (Mehta, 2019, p. 31)

These sentences are taken from the first pages of the book: they present dogmatic pronouncements, parallelisms, similes, metaphors, repetitions, and rhetorical questions. It is with these stylistic features that Mehta usually opens a chapter and introduces an argument.

The author uses what Sam Leith (2019) describes as the main characteristics and purposes of rhetoric, "ringing truths and vital declarations", since rhetoric is a way in which our shared assumptions and understandings are applied to new situations. "Rhetoric inspires, bamboozles, persuades and cajoles. It is made of groups of three. It is made of repeated phrases. It is made, as often as not, of half-truths and fine-sounding meaninglessness, of false oppositions, of abstract nouns, and shaky inferences" (Leith, 2019, p.6). Using these tools, Mehta proposes his own pro-immigration rhetoric to dismantle the anti-immigration rhetoric, including, in the structure of his manifesto, personal memoirs and stories of ordinary people who have experienced migration, "ordinary heroes", as he calls them. Social and anthropological investigation, data reporting, and linguistic hybridity make up the pervasive style that characterizes all the eighteen chapters. First-person and third person narrative alternate, as well as autobiography and reportage**.** There is a constant use of tricolon as a rhetorical strategy, to emphasize, give extra weight to the specific issue, as well as completeness:

> Often it is dark money, secret money, blood-tinged money (Mehta, 2019, p. 81).
>
> There is a giant program of reparations under way, but it's reverse reparations, by the poor of the world to the rich: to the oil companies, the chemical companies, the mining companies, which have figured out how to corrupt the governments of the developing countries and continue stealing. (Mehta, 2019, p. 80)

To sustain his counter-rhetoric, the author also uses negation, in such a way that Jeffries (2010) describes as attempting to persuade someone ideologically.

The West is being destroyed, **not** (Note 2) by migrants, but by the fear of migrants. (Mehta, 2019, p. 115)

The colonizers **did not** practice the Western liberal democratic values when they ruled our countries; but they are certainly worth adhering to in principle – whether they come from within or without. Yet, the sorry history of colonialism renders anything associated with them suspect, and the baby gets thrown out with the bathwater. In any case, colonialism **isn't over**. It is, like Faulkner's definition of the past, **not even past yet**. Corporate colonialism is the new colonialism. When the colonial regimes withdrew their soldiers and viceroys, they replaced them with their businessmen. (…).

The Socialist International and libertarian economists dreamed of a world without borders for human beings. Instead, what we have is a border-free world for multinationals. They looted us for centuries, they took whatever was worth taking, and they continued taking after we became "independent" – of their governments, but **not** of their corporations.

(Mehta, 2019, p. 80).

Negating is used to refer to a conceptual practice rather than the simple negating of a verb. Mehta applies negation to construct in the reader's mind a version of the situation which is clearly at odds with the one being confirmed (anti-immigration rhetoric).

Another stylistic and narrative tool employed by the author is the use of life-stories and

storytelling. He uses reported speech or direct speech to build a discourse of migration that includes multiple voices, intertwined stories, and the narration of conflictual spaces. He constructs a discourse that, borrowing from Fairclough (1995), refers to an ordered set of discursive practices associated with a particular social domain, and boundaries and relationships between them. To analyse the texts and languages of such a discourse we need to employ the category of power, to make sense of the ordering relations between practices, and the category of ideology to make sense of the differences between practices.

> Wherever there are immigrants, there are stories; because of their dislocation, they have a need for recollection. When I arrived with my family in Jackson Heights, Queens, in 1977, the area was filled with phone centers where people would call their families in other countries. They had booths or cubicles where men and women stood or sat on a chair, and spoke into a phone, and, often, wept. There were always promises: I'm coming back soon; we'll bring you over as soon as I've made enough money to pay the coyote; Americans are good people, and the government will soon give me a green card because I work so hard, and then I can come back to see you" (Mehta 2019, p. 32).

When reporting these stories, the author shows that, according to Fairclough, boundaries between and within orders of discourse are constantly shifting and discursive practices may be in different sorts of relationships. Mehta mixes English with terms and expressions from other languages, producing a language of transculturation that reflects the intimate discursive relationship between language and migration. For example, about central American women who migrate to USA and are often raped on route, he writes:

> When you move countries, your greatest - sometimes only – asset is your body, which also becomes your greatest vulnerability. Sex becomes currency, to be exchanged for protection from the smugglers, the *coyotes*, or the police. The arrangement is called *cuerpomático* – after the Central American credit-card processor Credomatic – because it involves using your body, cuerpo, as currency" (Mehta 2019, p.11).

In the second chapter, writing about the painful stories emerging from the border between USA and Mexico, he explains the way people meet through the fence:

> If a child wanted to touch her mother, for instance, she could stick inside the fence, and her mother could do the same on the opposite side, and the tips of their pinkies could touch: the dance of fingers, the "pinky kiss". "Amargo y dulce" is how the migrants describe the experience. Bittersweet (Mehta, 2019, p.15).

Mehta displays the necessity of a language that emerges from the practices and the cultural specificity of those who experience migration. The writer seems to adhere to what Gilmour and Steinitz (2018) call "bilingual creativity", reproducing the everyday multilingualism that constitutes the lived experience of individuals and communities, and displaying "how the monolingual paradigm is disrupted both by a long-term plurality of languages in a single geopolitical unit, and by more recent and ongoing processes of migration and globalization". (Gilmour and Steinitz, 2018, p. 2)

> My friend Abdelkader Benali, a Dutch Moroccan writer, tells me about the *kissa*. Before

> calling cards made international calls cheap, Moroccan migrants would mail a cassette tape back to the family, in which the migrant would record his kissa, his tale of the new land (Mehta, 2019, p.32).

The author uses code-switching as a sociolinguistic phenomenon that involves rapid switch or change from one language to another, depending on the situations, audience, and subject matter. It is a consequence of language in contact, and, according to Gardner-Chloros, "Code-switching, code alterations symbolize varying degrees of speaker involvement in the message" (Gardner-Chloros, 2009, p. 5). In other words, code-switching allows for determining proximity between the addresser, addressee, and the message. As a speaker switches between codes, s/he is switching between cultural and epistemological constructions of meaning. According to Capstick (2020), the study of the relationship between language and migration encourages a more mobile account of the analysis of language practices, one which tracks across national borders, and appreciates the challenges of power and discrimination in all parts of the world, not just the Global North.

In the third part of the manifesto, chapters have titles that display an articulated discourse on racism: "Why they're feared", "The Populists' False Narrative", "Shitholes versus Nordics", "The Colour of Hate", "The Refugee as Pariah", "Jobs, Crime and Culture: the Threats that aren't". Mehta elaborates on racism in a way that we can associate with Teun van Dijk's reflections on the issue: "The system of racism consists of a social and a cognitive subsystem. The social subsystem is constituted by social practices of discrimination at the local (micro) level, and relationships of power abuse by dominant groups, organizations, and institutions at a global (macro) level of analysis. The symbolic elites, that is, those elites who literally have everything "to say" in society, as well as their institutions and organizations, are an example of groups involved in power abuse or domination" (1998, p. 10).

The second subsystem of racism is cognitive. Whereas the discriminatory practices of members of dominant groups and institutions form the visible and tangible manifestations of racism, such practices also have a mental basis consisting of biased models of ethnic events and interactions, which in turn are rooted in racist prejudices and ideologies. This does not mean that discriminatory practices are always intentional, but only that they presuppose socially shared and negatively oriented mental representations of Us and Them.

Mehta shows several examples of these subsystems; in Abu Dhabi he asks the taxi driver, Robert Kwasi, from Ghana, how his Arab customers are.

"They are fine", he says. They just pay and go. Some Arabs will not take a cab driven by a black driver; others will not take cabs driven by Indians, Pakistanis, or Nepalese, because they believe blacks are cleaner and speak English better. P. 41. In Abu Dhabi I noticed that the brown people, usually working in menial or service jobs, were called migrants, while the white people, employed as executives or professionals, got to call themselves expats, a much more glamorous term than migrant, implying wealth, long afternoons at the club, fat housing allowances. (Mehta, 2019, p. 11)

Teun van Dijk (1998) suggests that political, corporate, media, educational and scholarly

elites control the most crucial dimensions and decisions of the everyday lives of immigrants and minorities. They do so by speaking and writing, for instance: in cabinet meetings and parliamentary debates, in job interviews, news reports, advertising, lessons, textbooks, scholarly articles, movies or talk shows, among many other forms of elite discourse. The structures involved in discriminatory interaction against minority groups have to do with lexicon, that is a selection of words that may be more or less negative about Them, or positive about Us, for example terrorist vs freedom fighter. Mehta refers to a speech given by Trump in 2018, where he mentioned Haiti, wondering why Americans should have people from Haiti when they have "Africa". Instead of having people from all the shithole countries here, they should have more people from places like Norway.

Mehta also quotes Samuel Huntington's rhetoric against the American dream in 2004. He asked his readers to think of the United States not so much as a melting pot but as a tomato soup: "The base of the Tomato soup is the Aboriginal Anglo-Protestant culture". And what about everyone else who came later? "Onions and croutons and parsley and spices".

Van Dijk underlines how ethnic prejudices and ideologies are not innate, and do not develop spontaneously in ethnic interaction. They are acquired and learned, and this usually happens through communication, that is through text and talk. And viceversa, such racist mental representations are typically expressed, formulated, defended and legitimated in discourse, and may thus be reproduced and shared within the dominant group. It is essentially in this way that racism is "learned" in society.

In response to such rhetoric the author devotes the last part of the book to explaining and praising the benefits of migration, as a process of reparation, a solution for the future, a source of economic wealth. He quotes Enoch Powell's notorious speech "Rivers of Blood", in 1968, in order to discredit it. Powell warned against taking in brown – and- black skinned people. "He forecast doom for a Britain that would be foolish enough to take them":

> A half century later, the Thames is not foaming with blood. It's actually the opposite. (…) Even though the biggest factor in the Brexit vote was fear of immigrants, it is immigrants and their descendants who will help their new country in making the deals it seeks with their ancestral countries. They are ambassadors, each one of them" (Mehta, 2019, p. 208).

Mehta concludes praising migration for bringing people and families together, for creating global networks and spaces of multilingualism. In the US this happened and continues to happen.

> There are whole neighborhoods in New York where you can spend your entire day working, eating, playing, and dealing with the government without knowing a word of English. All you need is to access a network that speaks your language and for the network to be broad enough to provide the goods and services of a decent life. (…) Will the new immigrant fully assimilate? Does it matter if they don't? Immigrants should have the freedom to not melt entirely into any sort of pot; to speak in their language as well as their host country's, worship their god, marry as they choose. That is the meaning of

being American, and that is why the Quakers came to Pennsylvania (Mehta, 2019, p. 227).

In his manifesto-book, Mehta seems to adhere to the concept of superdiversity elaborated by sociologist Vertovec in 2007, which refers to multiple processes and effects of migration. It is a notion applied to the analysis of mobility of people and resources, also because of colonization and slavery as much as urbanization and economic aspirations. In criticizing the banal and overused notion of diversity, Vertovec wanted to rejuvenate the term, calling for "a new public understanding of diversity and diversification" (p. 206). Given how widely used diversity is, Vertovec argues for the importance of not treating "all differences as the same in nature or consequence" (p. 166). He writes that "superdiversity can be seen as a condition and a set of processes. The combining of the multiple – intersecting, multiple categories or, in this case, interdependent and mutually conditioning multiple processes - is its central approach and message" (p. 111).

Since the publication of his article in 2007, in both worlds of academia and public policy the concept has been subject of several interpretations and usages. (…) "Super-diversity was intended to address the changing nature of global migration that, over the past thirty years or so, has brought with it transformative 'diversification of diversity'. This has not just been in terms of movements of people reflecting more ethnicities, languages and countries of origin, but also with respect to a multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live" (Vertovec 2007: 125).

4. Conclusion: Re-writing America's National Song for a Counter-Narrative on Migration

To conclude our exploration of Mehta's pervasive, provocative writing, it is of interest to go back to its title and to the history behind it. The powerful meaning within the title reveals a history of re-writings, contamination, a pluralism of voices that aimed at responding to the official rhetoric of the American nation, a white Anglo-protestant community.

The song *This Land is your Land* comes from a famous gospel, *When the World's on Fire*, better known in the version played by the group The Carter Family in 1930. Woody Guthrie drew from that song to write his own version in 1940, a kind of America's alternative national anthem, in response to the well-known song *God Bless America* (1918) by Irving Berlin (1888-1989), which he considered non-realistic and partisan. Not by chance, the original title was "God Bless America for Me".

God Bless America,

Land that I love.

Stand beside her, and guide her

Thru the night with a light from above.

From the mountains to the prairies,

To the oceans, white with foam

God bless America, My home sweet home.

Here is Woody Guthrie's re-writing:

This land is your land and this land is my land

From California to the New York island

From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters

This land was made for you and me

The Guthrie version has been changed in the course of time; Mehta has found other variants in which there are additional verses which made it a protest anthem. Here are some of those verses:

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,

but the relief office I seen my people;

as they stood there hungry, I stood there asking,

Is this land made for you and me? (Mehta, 2019, p. 13)

Thus, Guthrie's song becomes not just the American anthem, but a universal migrant's anthem: "wherever in the world they come from, and wherever they are going. This land is their land; this land is our land".

These parallel verses symbolize and reinforce the concept of the legitimation of global movement that Mehta develops throughout his book, using different stylistic and linguistic tools. Telling the stories of people who migrate, work, suffer, and improve their condition to make their way in the world, the author can reverse the narrative of global mobility to an essential phenomenon that must be understood in all its multifaceted aspects. The manifesto results in a complex study of the relationship between language and migration that encourages a more mobile account of the analysis of language practice, according to Capstick's idea of shifting "the study of language and migration from its attachment to bounded territories by building on research projects that suggest that contemporary life is best understood through the mobility of people across places and the fact that we have much to learn from these *displacements*" (Capstick, 2021, p. ix).

Mehta is able to teach us a lot about global displacement, and the promotion of hybridity in languages and cultures is at the core of his writing, which comes to be a change-writing, a transformative text that revolves, re-discusses and re-thinks given assumptions and dogmatic statements about migration and racism today, stimulating readers and public opinion to intervene, protest and speak aloud. He has succeeded in realizing what Mary Ann Caws (2001) sees, in the manifesto, the display of some "we", explicit or implicit, against some other "they", with the terms constructed in a deliberate dichotomy, since the manifesto can be set up like a battlefield. "It can start out as a credo, but then it wants to make a persuasive move from the "I believe" of the speaker toward the "you" of the listener or reader, who should be sufficiently convinced to join in (Caws, 2001, p. xx).

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Notes

Note 1. Let us only consider some of her works: *The Cost of Living* (1999), *The Greater Common Good* (1999), *Power Politics* (2002), *Listening to Grasshoppers* (2010), *My Seditious Heart* (2019). For an analysis of the language of *My Seditious Heart* see R. Cimarosti, "Challenging Language. A Study of "Opposition" in Five Political Essays by Arundhati Roy", *Lingue e Linguaggi*, (64) 2024, pp. 135-154.

Note 2. Bold is mine.

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