

Immigrants and Castaways: Smuggling Discourses in Manuel Rivas' *La mano del emigrante*

Cornelia Gräbner

In "El apego y la pérdida", the first of four chapters that make up his book *La mano del emigrante*, the Galician writer and journalist Manuel Rivas writes:

En este libro hay un 'cuerpo a cuerpo', buscando de forma intencionada entre el relato de ficción y el relato periodístico. Me apasiona el contrabando de géneros (...) y este encuentro es la mayor respuesta que se me ocurre a la cuestión recurrente sobre el lugar de lo real y la "verdad" en el periodismo y la literatura. (9)

I have decided to do a close reading of several elements of *La mano del emigrante* in this paper because some of the questions that Rivas asks in "El apego y la pérdida", and particularly some of the issues he raises in the above passage, bring up important questions for the theoretical analysis of and writing on migration, especially in Europe. In the above passage Rivas poses the question of the relationship between literature, journalism, and the "truth" and the real or, phrased differently, of the truth of reality. I chose to write on *La mano del emigrante* because I contend that a reflection on this question can enrich both the theoretical and the political debate on migration. For, the question and the way in which Rivas poses it in his book enquires into the reasons for migration and argues that these reasons form a vital part of the identities that migrants develop later on.

When theorists address migratory identities, the reasons for migration are often left out of the analysis, or

figure only marginally. The result is that the theoretical discourses that Timothy Brennan describes as “cosmo-theory” neglect the experiences of coercion and oppression that are usually the reasons for migration. One element of Brennan’s critique that is particularly useful for my argument is

(...) that the culture of diasporic subjects is usually given a positive inflection in cultural theory without remarking on its coercive nature – that people often do not want to be diasporic. (2001: 674)

One of the results of this lack of sensitivity of cultural theory is that it becomes difficult to conceptualize the agency of migrants. Brennan argues that the discourses of cosmo-theory are characterized by

(...) the coupling of an overdeveloped sensitivity to significant cases of mixed forms of cultural life (...) with a relatively weak understanding of processes of power, labor, management, territorial control, or governance (...). It is not as though there were no role for agency in such theories (...). But agency is almost never seen in moments of civic participation. It is primarily about subject formation. Agency, in fact, tends to be seen as a gradual process of coming to accept a *fait accompli*. (2001: 677-678)

In *La mano del emigrante* Rivas smuggles discourses to account for the issues that are often left out of the literary and theoretical discussion.

I also chose to write about *La mano del emigrante* because I am concerned about the neglect of traditional European societies to address the impact that migration has on their own cultures and political imaginaries. The case of Galicia brings this difficulty to the fore because, as I will demonstrate, it contests the notion of homogeneity that public and theoretical discourses foster when it comes to the analysis of traditional European identities. *La mano del emigrante* allows me to make two important points: the first is that European cultures themselves have been immigrant cultures. The second

is that European migration was often the result of oppression; consequently, we have to ask who is in power now in European societies, the former oppressors or the oppressed. Rivas' writing brings out the depressing fact that those who suffered oppression, and who voiced dissent within Europe were largely denied participation in the construction of the cultural, political and social imaginaries that inform our societies, and that justify the politics of those who have power in our cultures. My analysis of Rivas' approach to this subject permits me to develop the concept of a "dissident Europe". I will suggest the development of "dissident Europe" as an alternative location for the articulation of European theories on migration.

La mano del emigrante

La mano del emigrante consists of four parts, each of them deploying a different discourse. The first part of the book takes the place of a preface and is entitled "El apego y la pérdida". The text, signed by "The Author", points out some of the central concerns of the book, among them the experience of attachment and loss that is so characteristic for migration, the memory of political repression, and the relationship between writing and reality.

The second part "La mano del emigrante" is the longest of the four texts. Because the plot and its presentation by Rivas are central to my analysis I will summarize them at this point. Rivas tells the story of two Galician friends, immigrants in London. The story is told from the first-person perspective by one of them, a narrator whose name we never learn. It revolves around the figure of Tito Castro, the narrator's friend, and Castro's hand. Castro has three birds, *paíños*, tattooed on his hand; from the start of the story, the narrator is fascinated by them and the movements they make when Castro moves his hand. As the story continues, Castro dies in a car accident while he goes to the airport in an illegal taxi with the narrator. While he is half-conscious in hospital,

the narrator fantasizes about losing his hand and having it replaced by Castro's; however, he has no feeling in the hand that is supposedly his friend's.

After he is released from hospital, the narrator travels to Galicia to bring Castro's ashes to his mother. He asks her about the story of the *pañños* on Castro's hand. But instead of answering his question, she tells him the story of Castro's childhood and indirectly, of the reason for his migration. Once the narrator assimilates and accepts Castro's story, his hand starts to function again. He returns to London, gets the tattoo of the birds on his own hand, and continues his life.

Crucial to Castro's story is the character of the *Caimán*. I will analyse this character and his function in detail later on, below. The *Caimán* is a member of the *guardia civil*, the Franquist police force, who in the story is intent on arresting Castro's father, Albino, because the latter behaves in an insubordinate manner towards the *Caimán*. After the end of the Spanish Civil War ("esta carnicería", "this slaughter", as Castro's mother calls it), nobody sets any limits to the power of the *Caimán*. As a consequence, Albino has to go into hiding. Castro's mother tells her son that his father has immigrated to Argentina, and gets her brother – who does live in Argentina – to write letters in the name of Albino. While Castro believes the story, his beloved dog Karenina, survivor of the shipwreck of a freighter by the same name, finds out where Albino is hidden, and barks when Albino comes to the house at night to see Castro's mother. Hence, Castro's mother has to take the dog away from her son. This is another one of Castro's experiences of attachment and loss.

These experiences become progressively worse. When Castro's mother gets pregnant, she has to invent a lie to disguise Albino's fatherhood from the *Caimán*. She makes a deal with a cousin of her husband, who pretends to be the father of Castro's little sister Sira – but to pass the story off to the caiman, she has to invent Albino's death.

After all these losses, Castro withdraws deeper and deeper into himself, spending all his days on the beach. He only connects with his little sister Sira, who follows him around wherever he goes. The two become inseparable, until one day, on the beach, the sea sweeps Sira away. Castro holds on to her with the hand that later on carries the *pañños*, but is not strong enough. The little girl drowns. Her body is found days later by Albino in the cave where he is hiding.

Castro's mother sees her son's travels and his migration as a flight from the traumas he has suffered, and from his feelings of guilt for Sira's death. However, her story implies – though it does not reflect on – the intricate connection between on the one hand Castro's traumatic experiences of loss and her own position as someone who has to take everything he loves away from her son in order to save her husband's life, and on the other hand the *Caimán's* abuse of power, poverty, impunity, and abandonment. The situation of Castro and his mother is primarily psychological and emotional. However, it cannot be separated – because it is brought about and is the flip side of – a situation in which political violence, impunity, poverty and abandonment create a situation that is psychologically and emotionally so lethal that it finally drives Castro out of his country.

The third story, “El álbum furtivo”, consists of photos from A Coruña and London. It combines images and motives from the other stories and integrates them into the seascapes and cityscapes of the two cities. Thus, “El álbum furtivo” functions as a connector between places and stories. At the same time, the album questions the fictional character of “La mano del emigrante”. For, “La mano del emigrante” is told as if it was a fictional story. However, the photos make it clear that many of the places that are mentioned in the story are real. With “El álbum furtivo” Rivas invites his readers to rethink the relationship between real places, imagined spaces, real people, and fictionalized characters.

The fourth and final story is a journalistic piece on Galicians who have suffered shipwreck. Rivas not only writes about people who themselves suffered and survived shipwreck, but includes those who lost family members through shipwreck among the shipwrecked and whose lives collapsed because of this loss. In doing so, “shipwreck” acquires a metaphorical dimension. Furthermore, most of the shipwrecks that Rivas writes about in the article are brought about by neglect or incompetence, and many of those that died because of shipwreck might have survived, had the authorities not reacted with disinterest and incompetence. This links the story back to the first two texts, in which authorities and order are connected with the abuse of power and with violence.

Shipwreck and Migration

A large part of “La mano del emigrante” is about what happened before Castro left Galicia, and about why he left. In this passage I will read Castro’s migration through the metaphor of shipwreck. I will argue that migrants like Castro will remain “homeless” as long as theoretical, literary and other accounts of migration, and the political responses to it, do not take into account the reasons that the migrants had for leaving, migrants like Castro’s will remain.

Looking back at his own reasons for leaving Galicia, Castro professes no regrets. Early on in the story, he gets into a discussion with one of the other Galician customers of the pub where he spends his free time. Challenged by the homesickness, the idealization of Spain, and complaints about England by his compatriot, Castro says:

Métete con el gobierno, como todo cristo, pero no maldigas al país que te abrió la puerta. ¿O es que tengo que explicarte por qué llegamos con una maleta de carton? Embarcamos en un tren como ganado. No había ni retretes. Tenías que sacar el culo al aire para hacer tus *business*. En la frontera de Irún, un tipo nos arengó hablando de la gloriosa historia de España. Españoles! Siempre con la cabeza alta! Qué cabrón, un

discurso! Mejor sería que nos hubieran dado una copa de Felipe II. (...) En las despedidas todos lloramos, sí. Pero, recuerda, ¿quiénes eran los que más lloraban? Los que quedaban en tierra. Ellos si que tenían morriña. Morriña de no poder marcher. (...) ¿Sabes una cosa? Quiero a mi madre, que es lo que me queda allá, quiero a mis muertos, quiero a la casa de la higuera, que ya no existe, quiero al mar del Orzán, quiero a los recuerdos, buenos o malos, pero no me pidas que ame a mi país. (21-23)

In his response to his compatriot, Castro positions himself in a no man's land. What once was "his country" is a place of abuse, and he has no desire to return to it. He misses things and people that are not there anymore, and otherwise maintains only very intimate and personal ties to his mother and the sea. These attachments show that Castro does not choose his allegiances for where he was born, but for how he is being treated.

His approach to his allegiances is received with anger, aggression, and lack of understanding by his Galician compatriots abroad. They clearly do not know how to react to Castro's priorities, and see them as a disturbance of their own means of identity construction. They construct their identities along the lines of traditional nationalist concepts of identity. However, Castro's choice of allegiances clashes not only their concepts of identity, but also with those that have been developed by theories of transnationality.

In her article "Migrancy, Memory and Transplantation in Manuel Rivas's *La mano del emigrante*", Yeon-Soo Kim takes recourse to such concepts. She argues that in the novel,

(...) 'Galicianness' is conceptualized as a productive cultural engine that can generate civic values indispensable in an era of cultural and political transnationalism. This position is possible because the author views Galician identity as founded on an emotional disposition to adopt the experiences that accompany a long history of migration rather than something that draws purely on cultural essentialism confined

within a territorial boundary. (...) In other words, Galician identity is essentially global and 'transcultural' (a culture in transit), and capable of finding a 'home' in unfamiliar cultures and places. (117)

Such a "universal" redefinition of Galicianness – one that bears a curious resemblance to the definition of Galicianness proposed by Castro's interlocutor in the pub in spite of the marked differences in the characteristics it assigns to it – homogenizes Galician identity just as much as Castro's interlocutors or the representative of the Spanish government do. Therefore, I contend that it is not a satisfactory approach to understanding identity in the way that Castro conceptualizes it. For, Castro makes it clear that his allegiances are not based on cultural identity. They cannot be because the *Caimán* is also Galician, and while he walks free and continues to haunt the later generation, like Rivas', Castro cannot have a home.

Different readings of the paíños, the small birds tattooed on Castro's hand, clarify my point. According to the epigraphs of the story, the paíños are small birds that for the longest part of the year live in the open sea. In Galicia there is a saying that the paíño is the last thing a seafarer sees when he goes out to sea.

In the article I quoted above, Kim argues that Castro's decision to tattoo the paíños on his hand "can be construed as his wish to transform guilt into hospitality". (116) Contradicting her, I argue that the tattoo of the paíños reflects Castro's insight that with his past and his memories, he will never be able to have a home anywhere, and that nobody can grant him the hospitality that he himself symbolically grants to the pianos; creatures that, like him, cannot have any other home but the sea.

Crucial to my reading is the role that the past played in Castro's present. The realization of its importance comes for the narrator when he realizes that many of Castro's gestures that seemed idiosyncratic to his London friends – like calling

all dogs “Karenina” – were not an expression of idiosyncrasy. In stead, they referred back to his past, performing a communication with himself and his memories that none of his friends could understand. According to my argument Castro’s past – and not migration – turned Castro into the homeless character we get to know through his mother’s story.

The fourth piece of the book, “Los naufragos”, supports my interpretation. I read the story as an indication that Castro the migrant is a castaway of his country, or rather, of those who turned his country into what it was. Phrased differently, and in keeping with the metaphors that Rivas develops through his smuggling of genres, one could say that Castro is a migrant because those in power shipwrecked his family. Living as a migrant is easier than living as a castaway in one’s own country. Castro’s father Albino chooses the latter option. He spends years hiding in a cave, watching his family slip away from him, turning “white” because he never sees the sunlight and going blind because he lives in eternal darkness. His son Tito no longer has to suffer “morriña de no poder marcher”. In the case of Tito Castro, being a migrant adequately represents and even naturalizes his status as a castaway of his country.

Thus, I contest that the “search for a home” that underlies Kim’s analysis of *La mano del emigrante* is not Castro’s endeavour. Castro is not looking for a home. He knows full well that there is not one for him because nothing can heal what happened, and no European country has constructed its identity taking into account experiences like those of Castro. In spite of all its changes and supposed breaks with our fascist, colonial and dictatorial pasts, Europe has not managed to create European identities that give a home to memories like Castro’s. As things stand in early 21st Century Europe, the *Caimán* might very well still be the neighbour of Castro’s mother Chelo.

Thus, Castro's case clearly brings out the conceptual difficulties with the analytical approach that Kim (among many others) takes to migratory identities. Castro's case makes it clear that there is no home while there is impunity, and that "hospitality" is necessary only because "home" cannot provide justice and a space for Castro's memories. These reflections bring me close to a conceptualization of "dissident Europe". However, to start with this conceptualization, I need to turn to the technique that Rivas uses to tell the stories of Castro's and others who have suffered shipwreck: the smuggling of genres.

Smuggling Genres, Smuggling Discourses

I want to return now to the question about the "recurring question about the space of the 'truth' and the real" that Rivas raises in the very beginning of the book. After my analysis of the importance of memories for migratory identities like Castro's, and after emphasizing the importance that the realities of violence, abuse of power and poverty have for the production of such memories, the importance of the truth and the real has become all the more obvious. In "El apego y la pérdida" Rivas argues for "more reality" in literary texts. He writes:

Italo Calvino decía que el momento más importante del escritor es cuando levanta la nariz del papel. Es una forma magnífica de sugerir que la clave está en la forma de mirar. La mirada antecede a la escritura, pero también la guía por el lado oculto de la realidad. Pero eso nada tiene que ver con la operación mágica. La categoría de lo *mágico*, aplicada a la literatura, pudo tener su gracia, pero se ha convertido ya en una desgracia. Es una categoría inservible, perezosa, un nuevo academicismo. Nos remite a una "division de tareas", en la mente y en la concepción del mundo, que inutiliza el propósito literario. La mirada literaria sirve para ensanchar, en todas las dimensiones, el campo de lo real. Para crear, para inventar, más realidad. (9-10)

In this passage Rivas makes several important points. First of all, he argues that writing is related to looking at what is around the writer. The look at “the hidden side of reality” subsequently guides writing. Rivas makes it clear, however, that this has nothing to do with “magic”, a category that he fervently rejects as “a new academicism”. He argues that the concept of magic in writing re-establishes a “division of task” in our minds that goes against his proposal to “create, to invent, more reality.” His treatment of the *Caimán* gives important clues as to what this proposal entails.

The caiman appears in two of the four texts that make up the book: “El apego y la pérdida” and “La mano del emigrante”. In fact, we as readers meet the Caimán before we meet any character in the book, with the exception of the author. The book starts like this:

Conocí al Caimán desde niño sin haberlo visto nunca. Otros niños tenían miedo del Hombre del Saco, un ser terrible y barbudo que vagaba por los caminos y se llevaba para siempre a los críos descuidados. Yo temía al Caimán y sabía que existía. Mi padre me había hablado de ese guardia que para él, y los jóvenes de su tiempo, encarnaba el mal. Como también encarnaba el orden, me fui formando la inquietante idea de que orden y mal podían ser dos caras de un mismo ser monstruoso. El *caimán* disfrutaba haciendo daño y uno de sus placers era suspender las verbenas de la fiestas populares al poco de empezar. Cuando se alejaba, los mozos cantaban resentidos: *Se va el caiman, se va el caiman, se va para Barranquilla!*

Los golpes de billar de la vida me devuelven de vez en cuando a la existencia del Caimán y sus disfraces. Y al tarareo de esa canción como un conjuro contra el mal. (...) Es uno de los hilos reales, visibles, que entretejen la material de este libro. (7-8)

In this short passage, the caiman is the all-too-real figure that embodies both order and the abuse of power, both order and evil. The *Caimán* scared Rivas when he was a child much more than the man with the sack possibly could have, because Rivas

knows that the *Caimán* is real. Read through the passage on magic that I quoted earlier, Rivas' experience of the *Caimán* struggles with a mythification of reality. The figure of the *Caimán* could easily be interpreted as mythical and magical, just like the man with the sack. In this interpretation, "the people" would have turned the *Caimán* into a figure in order to personalize and make tangible an abstract abuse of power. However, Rivas makes it clear that the *Caimán* is real and that the abuse of power is not abstract, but concrete: *someone* abuses power. Thus, if I as a cultural analyst read the figure of the *Caimán* as a metaphor of oppression and violence I would interpret the terror of the real *Caimán* out of lived reality and into two texts: the mythical one supposedly composed by "the people", and my analytical one. Consequently, I would stop looking at the *Caimán* and his activities in real life, and he would continue his terror without me contesting it. As a tool for analysis in this context, the concept of "magic" functions as an escape from the much more brutal reality the writer sees when he lifts up his eyes from the page.

The "division of tasks" that Rivas mentions in the passage I quoted above is a result of the division between "reality" and "magic". The "hard facts" of reality that create the conditions for the production of imaginaries are often relegated to representation in journalism, whereas the consequences they have for the individual are reserved for literary, fictional genres. Rivas uses the figure of the *Caimán* to bring out that such a division is untenable for a writer who "lifts his eyes up from the page" and wants to participate in the creation of new, more humane realities.

Thus, I contend that Rivas' technique of "smuggling genres" has wider, political implications. In his analysis of Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame* Timothy Brennan characterizes one of these implications as the recovery of the Political in literature (76). To bring out the efficacy of Rivas' literary strategies and their and his affinity with Rushdie, I will

discuss some elements of Brennan's analysis of *Shame* and relate them to my own analysis of *La mano del emigrante*.

Brennan writes about *Shame*:

His [Rushdie's] strategy is a bit like Julio Cortázar's in *Hopscotch* – the author as critic of his own work, standing outside the fictive, forcing us back into an everyday history. The fairy tale self-destructs precisely because fictiveness is inappropriate to a contemporary dictatorship (...). All of this is Rushdie's point, moreover, which is why his narrator is not a narrator at all but an author as confessor. "I can't do this," he keeps saying. "I hate these people and I have to say so openly," he continues, and "literature is such a small club, after all, against so large a beast." This is not the utilization of genre but a comment on genre: a joke, if you will, an intentionally superficial gesture calculated to display its own inadequacy. (76)

In "El apego y la pérdida", Rivas comments much more unashamedly and directly on genre than Rushdie does in *Shame*. Yet, just like Rushdie, he argues that genres do no longer provide useful tools for a literary engagement with reality. Both authors do not discard the practice of genres completely: for, it stands to reason that if an author mocks and undermines genres, then this implies that genres and the function they have in the production of meaning are still in place. I contend that both authors resist and question the power of genres.

Resistance always takes place *against* something or someone; resistance would not be resistance without a clearly identified "other". Rivas' act of resistance takes into account that at least right now in the minds of his readers, the rules of genre continue to establish the unfortunate "division of tasks" he writes about. The literary discourses informed by genres cannot (yet) be replaced by a borderland region where there are no genres. Before something new, like this borderland region, can be inhabited, one has to contest the old ways of thinking. Rivas, like Rushdie, would not think that this can be

done purely through fiction or journalism. As Brennan writes, “fictiveness is inappropriate for dealing with a contemporary dictatorship”. At the same time, non-fiction does not productively engage the way in which people experience the consequences of these dictatorships. Thus, Rushdie according to Brennan questions the genre of fiction from within fiction because the relationship between reality and story proposed by traditional narrative is no longer viable in the face of contemporary dictatorships, and Rivas smuggles the journalistic into the fictional and the fictional into the journalistic. Both writers share the concern for the “space of the ‘truth’ and the real” in texts that are written about situations of coercion. Both writers also coincide in the realization that the experience of coercion has to be expressed as much as the conditions and strategies of coercion. Therefore, they try genres on and mix them up, “as if to express the multi-front novelistic war required to capture a place and a politics that are too painful to deal with in a single mode (...).”(75)

One can now focus on Castro’s existence as a migrant and interpret his migration as an accomplished strategy of survival. Kim chooses to do so, by mobilizing the analytical instrumentarium of contemporary theoretical approaches to and discourses on migrancy and transnationality. Alternatively, one can argue that the complicity between order and violence that Rivas writes about in the very beginning of the book has made it impossible for Castro to live his identity in his own country, and that consequently, migration was the only means of psychological survival open to him. From that perspective, people like Castro are indeed confronted with a Europe that offers them a space where they can survive: almost invisible, without being understood, and celebrated as transnational individuals, consigning them to an eternal migrancy, similar to the ghost ship of the Flying Dutchman, to stick with the metaphoricity of seafaring. It is important to note that Rivas does not see the definition of Galicianness

through migration in such a positive light as Kim does. Galicianness would be fundamentally redefined if Galicia as a nation or autonomous community would react to the experience of the Castro family and grant them “the right to lead in cultural matters” (Brennan 2001: 686). But this is not the case. Interestingly, it is also not the case in the country Castro migrates to, in the U.K. Thus, European identities are not redefined; they stay exactly as they are.

Chelo’s bitterness after telling the story is significant for this argument:

Parecía cansada y arrepentida: No debería haber contado todo esto.

¿Por qué?, protesté.

Porque no sirve para nada. Sólo para hablar sola. Para eso, sí.

Bebió un trago e hizo un gesto de sonriente amargura.

Solté la típica tontería de consuelo: Pero, al final, ustedes dos salieron adelante.

Lo que siento, dijo la madre de Castro, es no haber marchado yo. Tiempo después de morir mi marido, Ramón me escribió. Él había emigrado a Alemania. Fue de los primeros en marcharse allá. De minero, en Aquisgrán. Me envió el dinero para el viaje. Casi no sabía escribir, pero me puso una cosa muy amorosa: Hay calefacción, Cheliño, y es gratis.

Pero no se marchó.

Pues no. (66)

I do not want to resign myself to the situation that has led to such bitterness and defeat. Neither do I want to celebrate the survival techniques of the castaways in a recreation of the song that attempts to ward off the *Caimán*, and finally does not. I want to remember the impunity of the *Caimán* and the long-term consequences of his activities, and I want to propose a model of reading, of cultural analysis, and of politics on the

basis of my knowledge and the memories of migrants like Tito Castro.

Dissident Europe, Solidaric Reading

Crucial to my endeavour is a point that I made earlier, namely, that the *Caimán*, too, is Galician and that therefore, any cultural or national identity is heterogeneous, not homogeneous. This is possibly even more important in countries or continents which lived under regimes of coercion. For, under these regimes the citizens have the choice to form part of the regime, to resist it, or to find the middle way of trying not to get onto either side which, almost always, leads to complicity. This complicity manifests itself in very interesting ways once the regime is over: for, the latter group and the regime start sharing a common interest: the return to a “normality” which, for those who resisted, is all the more abnormal because it leaves unresolved, and therefore perpetuates, the traumas of the past, while pretending to take the side of those who suffered the traumas.

Many of the castaways of recent European history, and of European politics, have become migrants. In cultural theory and in politics, these migrants are hardly ever considered to be victims of shipwreck. As a consequence, the violence that lies in the act of making sure that they would suffer shipwreck, or in actively shipwrecking them, is being assumed into the premises of the theoretical approaches of transnational theory and, interestingly, into the ideologies of most post-1945 states. The connection between order and violence that Rivas so keenly points out in the very beginning of his book, is hidden under the myth of functioning democracies, and since these democratic states supposedly represent and take into account what we as citizens think and feel, we are deprived of the right to officially articulate and contest this connection between order and violence. The political situation of Galicia, where Franco’s minister of tourism Francisco Fraga was in power until very recently,

made this contradiction painfully obvious. In more covert terms we encounter it in most Western democracies.

One of the few ways out of this predicament is to recognize that European, white cultures are heterogeneous, and that the imaginaries upon which contemporary powers found their legitimacy are developed on the basis of the imaginaries of those who have been in power in the past. Under these consequences, it seems logical enough that European societies do not accommodate migrants; for, they cannot possibly admit that their own intellectual predecessors were responsible for, or actively tolerated, the shipwrecking and consequently, the migration of their own compatriots.

The experiences of our own migrants have become “politically inarticulate”, as Brennan terms it in *Wars of Position*:

What has become politically inarticulate in our own time weighs us down and oppresses us because we too have experienced trauma. Important codes cannot be deciphered because whole lifetimes have been silenced by Western ideological colonizations after 1989. The story of the non-Western world, the meaning of the postcolonial, makes no sense without the socialist East and its elaborate meaning, feeling, and valuing. It is time to translate that experience into a language that has so far only purported to understand the other. (64)

I want to amend this passage and add to it in some respects. Brennan points towards a lack of discourses, a lack of language, and because of this lack, to an imposed incapacity to decipher certain codes. I would specify in the context of this article that these codes make resistance to those in power possible.

Brennan applies this notion mainly to postcolonial theory. I will borrow his concept of the “politically inarticulate” to argue that at least in countries like Germany and Spain “what has become politically inarticulate in our

own time weighs us down and oppresses us" because a dimension of our countries' histories is excluded from our present. The existence of the "politically inarticulate" confines us to a discourse that in the last consequence accepts the defeat of those who offered an alternative. Our states and our theories have not picked up on their intellectual heritage. Sadly, we have to experience that neglect and silence are also a form of violence and of shipwreck; one that is just as efficient as active shipwrecking because it has more practitioners, seems less violent, and is therefore less easily recognized and more widely accepted

From this point of view I protest Brennan's reading of contemporary Europe because he, too, homogenizes it. Dissident Europe figures in his book only as defeated. This hampers his own argument. For, he cannot follow through on one of the most important possibilities he opens up in his book, a practice that I for now call solidaric reading and that, I suggest, he himself practices in his analysis of *Shame*.

In Brennan's analysis of *Shame*, the political concerns he shares with Rushdie outweigh his disagreement with some of Rushdie's public performances. Similarly, the political concerns that I share with Brennan outweigh my reservations for some positions that he takes, and the ones I share with Rivas outweigh the profound difference in our locations in terms of culture and geography. In all cases, the disagreements are clearly expressed but can be accommodated in the space created by our shared concerns. The space created by these shared affiliations and the recognition of "traditional" European and North American cultures as heterogeneous might just be the one that allows us to find the new language we need for the articulation of the "politically inarticulate", and for a theory and a cultural politics that grants migrants "the right to lead in cultural matters" (Brennan 2001: 686-687).

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