

‘Why should they draw if you don’t draw yourself?’: Luisa Passerini, *Conversations on Visual Memory*, Review for *History Workshop Journal*.

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We welcome the invitation to review a book which puts conversations at its heart. Conversations between the two of us about migration, race and class have stretched over time and place, and been interwoven into our thinking, our research and our writing, some of it collaborative. The conversations that form the substance of Passerini’s book similarly stretch over long periods – some of them lasting several decades – and across continents. In reflecting on them in *Conversations on Visual Memory*, Passerini highlights her career-long interest in intersubjectivity and how knowledge comes to be made through relationships and interactions.¹ The eating, walking and talking that, often invisibly, sustain academic work are here explicitly tied to Passerini’s intellectual journey, as she seeks to make sense of research material collected as part of a European Council funded project with the unfortunate acronym BABE: ‘Bodies Across Borders: Oral and Visual Memory in Europe and Beyond’. There is a candour in exposing how the author herself came to frame things in different ways over time, something which effectively undermines the fetishizing of authorial projects and brings a distinctly plural voice. If nothing else this book is clear that the intellectual work of academics is often at its most productive, creative and generous when it forms part of a shared conversation. And, as *Conversations on Visual Memory* shows, this process can fruitfully encompass not only academics from other disciplines, but artists and film-makers too. Passerini also threads a further set of conversations through the book, between Italian language teachers and adult students on their courses, with stories to tell about experiences of international migration and the unsatisfactory terms such as ‘migrant’ that are often used by other others to relate them. In this way she continues, and extends, a life-long concern with pushing at the boundaries of academic convention in a career which has encompassed anti-colonial, Leftist and feminist struggles and which saw her pioneering oral history as an academic methodology.

Passerini’s decision to make these conversations, her own intellectual journey and her personal mappings of place central to the book stemmed from a disquiet which emerged as she grappled with the material that formed its original starting point. The project asked participants to produce visual representations of their mental migration maps – their journeys from their place of origin to Italy. Hyper-alert to the ethics surrounding field work, and mindful of the limits of oral history, Passerini became increasingly uncomfortable about the assumptions underpinning the project. She writes of one particularly telling episode involving a young woman who:

handed back the blank sheet of paper we had given her; she had signed it with her name, written clearly in the bottom right corner, but she did not want to draw her itinerary or anything else, and she did not want to comment. Silence seemed the right choice for me too ... I no longer had the illusion of “giving voice” to the narrators who had shared their stories with me. [p.13]

¹ See also, Jeremy Popkin, *History, Historians and Autobiography*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005: 257-260.

It was the process of reflecting and talking with others outside the project that prompted Passerini's decision to shape the book as a 'story I could narrate myself' [p.13]. Here, spending time out of place – in New York rather than northern Italy – was crucial, giving her the 'courage to be myself among others, while also being another, and to join my voice to an ensemble of voices that would reflect my experiences in the course of the research' [p.13]. Thus in the Acknowledgements and the Preface the reader learns about the wider work of the project, the team of people paid to work on it, and the students and teachers whose encounters form a continuous spine for the book around and through which Passerini relates other temporalities of conversation and interaction. Sometimes, as in the final section of Chapter 3, the detailed recounting of Passerini's own conversations and encounters with long-standing friends tips into over-indulgence; but at its best it reveals how connections across disciplines and methodologies can inflect work with new dynamism and new perspectives. Bringing together - in words and images - her decades-long conversations with academic friends, on the one hand, with BABE project research participants' temporal and spatial evocations of migration journeys, on the other, is at times powerful and affecting.

Thus this book is unusual and not only because it is freely available on-line and illustrated in colour. Described early on as an 'experiment', it moves well beyond any focus on migration, becoming an act of textual weaving that brings attention to the visual, spatial and motor elements of the linguistic act. How do we move our hands when we speak with another person? What actions are required of hands that type out words or scribe them with a pen? How do these shift as a person ages? Through such questions, Passerini articulates an engagement with the human condition, with frailty and mortality.

Like her classic 1980s work *Fascism in Popular Memory*, this book is divided into parts, in this case defined by different kinds of interlocutors, academics in Part One and visual artists in Part Two. In the first of Part One's four chapters, Passerini opens up the book's concerns with mapping, and in particular with the mental maps that people carry in their heads. As these themselves change over time, so their (re)telling reveals shifting stories of individual lives. Here, via thinking through what distinguishes human mental maps from those of animals, she brings to the foreground the conceptual discussion of intersubjectivity through her quarter century-long friendship with the late psychologist Jerry Bruner. The reader learns how she found his use of intersubjectivity overly constraining, and how this prompted her to draw on her own oral history background, causing her to see intersubjectivity as 'the interactive process of constructing memory and historical knowledge' (p.22). Yet, part of the point of the chapter is not the conceptual disagreement itself, but the way in which her conversations with, and readings of, Bruner influenced and shaped her thinking:

[m]y conversations with Jerry and my desire to dialogue with the maps that I collected were deeply intertwined within me, each reinforcing the other in fostering my own vision and memory. The maps had prompted me to interrogate him, and it was my memory of the exchanges with my friend that enabled me to see the maps in new ways.' [p. 31]

The second chapter begins to weave BABE project conversations into the book, particularly those from the Turin part of the project, where the team conducted research over five years from 2013. Their focus was on people who migrated to Western Europe from countries in the Global South and the peripheries of Europe during the preceding twenty year period and who were now attending one of the city's language schools. Here students were asked 'if they would be willing to draw maps of their migration itineraries' [p. 34]. Like several other chapters, this one names as authors research participants whose maps, verbal presentations or recorded narratives are drawn on extensively in the chapter. Revealing the first of multiple ways in which the students repeatedly challenged the project's initial expectations, one participant and chapter co-author, Magdy Youssef, chose to draw a map of change over *time* rather than *space*. Youssef chose to take charge of the time period covered by his verbal narration, speaking in his presentation only about Egypt prior to his departure and Italy after his arrival. Although he intervened orally during class discussions he declined to be interviewed. Referring back in part to her discussion of Jerry Bruner in the previous chapter, Passerini reflects how Youssef's resistance made her and her research team 'become aware of the implicit forms of ethnocentrism that [they] conveyed.' [p. 39]. She acknowledges that she had expected Youssef to draw a map of his actual migration itinerary, and takes up Youssef's implicit challenge to think through how time might be inscribed in the map in different ways. In doing this she draws attention to how the meaning of Youssef's map changed during the project given the ever harsher policing of the EU frontier and the rising number of deaths of people attempting to cross the Mediterranean into Europe. Another chapter co-author/research participant, Blerina Cuni, similarly confounded the research team's expectations and drew on the importance of time, producing, instead of a map of her journey from her native Albania, a drawing of a well-known archaeological site there. What connects Cuni and Youssef is the positive portrayal of their national heritage, which Passerini comments on - addressing an undefined 'we' in an instance of unremarked-on ethnocentricity - noting 'the value that these trips bring to Europe and to help establish a link with a heritage that can be ours too' [p. 43]. In the chapter's final passage, Passerini warns against a reductive reading of the maps, acknowledging that her interpretation of them, and of the accompanying silences, is one of many that were possible.

In Chapter 3 Passerini reflects on how more research participants 'maps' challenged the team's preconceptions, this time through using writing rather than images. Mihail Tirdea, who came to Italy from Moldova not only chose to write but explicitly refused to draw. Passerini's co-researcher Giada Giustetto is a significant presence, working as a language teacher for part of the project, interviewing many of the participants and - more conversations here - discussing the meanings of their drawings with Passerini. The two researchers reflect not only on the care and sometimes elegance some people put into the writing but also the colours used. And Passerini puzzles over her own expectations of visual images rather than writing, seeing this map writing as a reversal of their request. This prompts her to return to the self-critical mode to ask rhetorically whether 'the voluntary insertion of writing [was] a way of claiming a level of complicity that our "anthropological" request had sought to downgrade'. Had the assumption that the participants would prefer to draw been based on 'infantilizing' assumptions because 'drawing is usually assigned to a phase of life labelled as childhood'? [p. 66] At the same time there is a confessional tone in parts of the text that implies Passerini and Giustetto's awareness of their white European

positionality without making it explicit. 'To us...[with] our exoticising gaze... the Persian letters appear particularly decorative, elegant and beautiful' [p. 57]. In fact Passerini's self-critique 'flawed by ethnocentrism and exoticism' [p. 58] is later applied to all the 'maps' that use writing rather than 'drawing'.

At this point she turns to the late 1970s and early 1980s when she was working on *Fascism in Popular Memory*. This was a time when historians largely dismissed *oral* history and Passerini's conversations with philosopher-anthropologist Gianni Carchia and with the anthropologist Jack Goody brought important 'interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary' insights into her own working methods. Passerini recalls how it was Carchia's argument that 'the anthropological interpretation of graphic tools as "primitive" was part of the violence inflicted on polyvalent forms of knowledge in archaic societies' [p. 71]. Thus the students' maps, she concludes, were more than acts of resistance or refusal, they rather '[expand] the very idea of a "map"'. Using writing, the migration maps discussed in this chapter all demonstrate how this too is a form of 'visual expression' and so implicitly draw on the 'common roots' of 'writing and graphic art' [p. 74]. But, Passerini also argues that 'the drawings were ultimately emphasizing the historicity of [the research participants'] experience, refusing to flatten it under the label of migration'. Moreover, they have the effect of turning the gaze onto the researchers, requiring them – through revealing both uneven and connected histories – 'to accept being placed... in the position of the other' [p. 75].

And yet, for all this discussion of the gaze also being placed on the researcher, and despite Passerini's close attention to the multiple complexities involved in the narration/representation of migration stories, there are some surprising lacunae in her own self-positioning. In an unselfconscious moment in Chapter 3 she mentions that in addition to debating conceptual matters of common interest, she, Jack Goody and Goody's wife Esther Newcomb discussed 'common expat friends' from times they had all spent in southern Africa, using a term that effectively distinguishes them, as white academics based at Global North institutions, from people conceived of as 'migrants'.² Similarly, she neglects to reflexively critique the mobility of the academics she discusses, who, like her, move from institution to institution around the world: it seems entirely unremarkable that they should meet and go for walks at Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin where Newcomb had a fellowship in 1989-90, whereas some readers might reflect on how such privileged settings came to be taken for granted. At other times it is Eurocentricity which is not acknowledged, for example when it takes the form of discussing Europe as though it had a bounded culture that included "'the discourse of love, and hence in a sense its practice'" that could be attributed to 'the development of literacy' [p. 83].

The final section of Chapter 3 is bookended by Goody, his conversations with Passerini, and their effect on her thinking about the maps made by research participants Youssef Boukkouss and Tarik El Amiri. Boukkouss's map, with its combination of writing and drawing, provides an 'illustrat[ion] of graphism as a mode of communication' [p. 78]. Boukkouss uses the figure of the letter Y as the centre of his map, Y also being the first letter

² Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor, "'They called them communists then... What d'you call 'em now... Insurgents?'" Narratives of British military expatriates in the context of the new imperialism', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36(8): 1335-1351.

of his name in English. Places along the 'Y' that he holds dearest in his heart are signified by the picture of a red heart – this applies to his birth place and the home of his natal family, Kourigba in Morocco, and to Grenoble in France, his wife's residence. Critically important for us is the way that the map queers the commonly understood hierarchy of migration whereby it is an international move that necessarily has more significance in a person's life than moves within a country.³ Boukkouss' life involves regular journeys between Turin and Grenoble to visit his wife and causes Passerini to reflect on a 'lack of a final arrival, at least at this stage of his life' [p. 81].

The final map Passerini discusses in this section is that of Tarik El Amiri. El Amiri produced two maps of his route from Morocco to Europe showing, through an accompanying photograph of his oral presentation, how 'hand, body, and voice were fused together in his messages' [p. 90]. The thick black lines on the map indicated the harshest times of his journey, and, when combined with oral and written narration, they made palpable the physical hardship of the experience of travelling by foot across Spain: 'I just threw myself on the ground, I wanted only to sleep. I believed I was going to die' [p. 92]. Passerini returns to her concern with the physicality of speech and gesture to observe that the 'bodily movements' El Amiri used in his presentation expressed 'affects, senses, bodies, landscapes and environments... that were literally expressions of body memory' [p. 93]. She concludes by referring back to what she learned from her conversations with Goody, that '[v]isual art' helps understand the links between 'the visuality of writing, the omnipresence of materiality, and the relevance of mobility' [p. 94].

The visuality of participants' written maps prepares the ground for the stronger emphasis on art in the second half of the book, which takes up the idea, as photographer Eva Leitolf put it in a 2015 interview with the author, of the importance of 'discourse between the different disciplines, how they could talk to each other' [p. 101]. Part Two thus shifts away from conversations between *academic* disciplines to those that Passerini has with artists, but even then the migration maps produced by participants in the BABE project remain a constant pole or axis around and in relation to which these other conversations occur. Passerini's conversations with artists are contemporary with the BABE research and thus take place in a narrower time frame than her decades-long interactions with some of the academics she writes about in Part One. Chapter Four opens with a discussion of Leitolf's portrayal of the traces of German colonialism in twenty-first century Namibia and the way in which her work contests any settled territorial definition of Europe. Some of Leitolf's photographs are reproduced in the book, and, through them, Passerini pulls no punches in condemning the violence and injustice of German, British and Belgian colonialism in Africa. It is unfortunate that she reproduces the term 'natives' without any caveats and refers to 'ethnic groups' [p. 102] as though these were simply a feature of African society, with the implication that white European people can side-step ethnicity. But her condemnation of colonial rule is unequivocal and, alongside it, she also uses Leitolf's work to discuss anti-colonial cultural resistance in Namibia, for example through mocking 'parodies of the colonizers' customs and attitudes' [p. 106] and through carnivalesque. Passerini's discussion here also relates to Leitolf's changing representational modes, using images of people in

³ Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009.

Namibia in her earlier work and later producing landscapes that are absent of people ‘avoid[ing] a visual “emotainment”’ [p. 109].

As in Chapter 2, Passerini insightfully connects such absences in visual art and in some of the research participants’ migration maps with her own analysis of silences in oral history. She juxtaposes an image of an empty dinghy at sea made by Mohamed - a BABE participant originally from Syria, who had crossed the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece returning to a continent that he had visited regularly as a tourist in earlier years - with *Zodiac Boat* by Ai Weiwei. Mohamed was one of forty-five people travelling in the dinghy, which they were made by a smuggler to inflate for themselves. Summarising Mohamed’s narration of his own life story in an interview, Passerini shows how his verbal presentation contained much about resilience and self-preservation thus challenging the common tendency of many sympathetic media accounts of boat rescues to depict them as passive victims. Elsewhere she notes how Leitolf aims to keep her art critical by ‘maintaining freedom from exaggeration, and giving value to silence and secrecy’ [p. 118]. This gives rise to the implicit question of what the balance should be between valuing privacy and silence and aiming to make public and give voice?

The chapter then moves to another artist: Victor López González. And explaining that he ‘is an artist who bears the mark of migration’, Passerini for the first time explicitly breaks down the categorical distinction she has so far maintained in the book between ‘migrants’ and ‘artists’. That she feels this needs to be said is consonant with the general tenor of the book, where the term ‘migrants’ is implicitly used throughout to refer to people who are poor. However, González’s work photographing women in their role as cross-border porters aims to transform the attitudes of viewers from seeing the women as victims to seeing the ‘hope and struggle’ in what they do and the possibility of ‘a different potential life’ [p. 122]. Because he produces images entirely without voice or text, the question remains as to how these women themselves would prefer to be portrayed.

The issues of representation, and, by implication, the unequal power dynamics which often underpin it, are threaded through the book. The work by artists that is reproduced and discussed in the book and the oral, visual and written narratives of the ‘mobile people’ – a collective term for participants in the BABE project – share, in Passerini’s view, a capacity to challenge ‘geographical stereotypes’ [p. 132]. All are produced ‘through acts of intersubjectivity’ [p. 132], to return to that recurring theme of Passerini’s scholarship. Chapter 4 continues with the work of BABE participant Ludmila Dmitriev, who travelled from Moldova to Italy overland, and her wish ‘for a more mobile, open and inclusive Europe’ [p. 135]. This apparently inclusive aspiration is then, rather curiously, adopted by Passerini, who writes that ‘the role of images and of imagination in cultural history can be considered as constituting a step toward a more democratic history of and in Europe’ [p. 135]. Why this strikes us as strange is the contradiction between the anti-colonial critique at the start of the chapter and the bounding of a Europe-specific project here. Yet, the European or non-European origins of ‘mobile people’ are elided in a more class-oriented – ‘us’ and ‘them’ – follow-up statement based on Passerini’s experience of listening to a large number of participants. This directs the readers’ attention away from the often-privileged mobility of Global North-based academics and professional artists: ‘the memories of mobile people are already mixed *with ours* within multiple encounters in which new shared subjectivities are

being constructed' [p. 135, emphasis added]. Passerini ends the chapter with an urgent call for more research as a way to express critique and outrage at the enormity of humanitarian tragedy that continues to unfold on Europe's borders.

Chapter 5 enables Passerini to go deeper still into her conversations with artists, now seeing these as part of a collective encounter between art and cultural history. In particular she draws on Ursula Biemann and Angela Saunders' film *Europlex*, revealing how the genre of video might offer a 'global perspective on mobile bodies and a geopolitical view of borders' [p. 143]. Following from this we see Passerini taking an explicitly anti-colonial position denouncing 'the narrow and hierarchical nature of the traditional forms of European identity' and exposing 'crucial features of "Fortress Europe" in relation to migrations to and across the continent' [p.142]. Passerini's engagement with Biemann is critical, and she tries to keep some distance through using the term 'reverberation' rather than 'resonance' to describe the connections between their substantive concerns.

The subject of Biemann's *Sahara Chronicle* is transit migration through the Sahara. The method is to use a 'chorus of figures' out of which emerge two case studies so that the collective story is interwoven with individual ones. A migration intermediary, Adawa, is interviewed and portrays himself as a resistance actor, 'at the margins of the law' [p. 162]. Whereas Biemann considers this individual story an exception, Passerini disagrees and sees it as part of the collective story. While Adawa's interview is set in a geopolitical context thanks to the systematic approach adopted by Biemann, the discussion of BABE participant Abdou Cissé's narrative is 'situated within an analysis of memory and subjectivity, understood as agency and performance in the process of mobility' [p. 163]. In a brilliant passage, Passerini shows that, located in an historical analysis of the colonial division of the Sahara by European powers in the nineteenth century, Biemann both uses a systemic approach to present the video as a 'critique of advanced capitalism' but also 'refut[es] the notion of total sovereign domination' [p. 164]. But Passerini is again more concerned with intersubjectivity, as we see when she and the BABE team showed some research participants parts of Biemann's film. One, Hanane Radouane, a woman who travelled to Italy from Morocco, was angry that it suggested people migrate from Africa to Europe out of 'poverty and hardship' [p. 165]. Pointing to the map she had made she told the audience "'Here is my smiling face. My trip too has been like that...'" [p. 166] Passerini comments that the 'autobiographical mode' often gives rise to 'contradictions between experienced difficulties and narrative optimism' [p. 167] and she counterposes Hanane's story with one from *Sahara Chronicle* to show the 'critical distance' between her own approach and Biemann's – one which, she argues, is narrow enough to enable 'critical dialogue along parallel lines' [p. 169].

Interestingly for us because of our earlier joint work, Biemann builds on some of the insights of mobilities studies, considering the relation between migration and other mobilities and between 'people who are not allowed to move' and 'communities situated beyond their confinement'.⁴ Biemann critiques the power of European border enforcement and at the same time shows the causal connections between different kinds of mobility, the

⁴ Ben Rogaly, *Stories from a migrant city: living and working together in the shadow of Brexit*, Manchester: MUP, 2020.

‘multiplicity of movements’ [p. 153]. Passerini shows how one of the BABE participants Fabiola Sanmaniego illustrated such multiplicity through her migration map that told the story of her move to Italy leaving three children behind in Peru. The acknowledgement of complexity here is important, though, as we suggested above, Passerini is not consistent in seeing the mobilities of elite actors such as herself through the same critical lens: ‘The point of departure can be either a situation of extreme danger or poverty or a sense of curiosity and a willingness to change. Moreover, the movement itself can be dramatically difficult and the arrival successful as well as tragic’ [p. 151].

In relation to academic mobilities, Passerini pays more attention here to the movement and connections across disciplines and indeed issues a challenge both to ‘traditional geography’ and ‘traditional historiography’. Beyond close consideration of the interplay between visual, oral and written sources, the disciplinary categories she sets out to revise here are underspecified: it is not clear what exactly the ‘traditional’ is that she is critiquing in each case. It would have been helpful perhaps for her to place herself more clearly in conversation with particular scholarship within the disciplines of geography and history. There is a more convincing discussion of how the kind of video essay created by artists such as Biemann - and also Irit Rogoff - offers a ‘postcolonial revision of the anthropological mode of knowing... the dislocation of subjects implies the disruption of collective narratives in the field of vision, inviting to a new knowledge order’ [p. 158].

Indeed, it is through her dialogue with Biemann that Passerini most successfully articulates the critical intent of the BABE project’s conceptualisation of Europe. Now ‘native’ is used in inverted commas and counterposed with ‘new’ Europeans – the latter itself also in inverted commas - and she portrays the BABE project as ‘challeng[ing] common representations of European history and identity’ [p. 169]. Passerini candidly acknowledges that she has been ‘stimulated’ by Biemann’s art, even though Biemann does not, unlike BABE, place Europe centre stage. Chapter 5 concludes with a statement of BABE’s approach to democracy in Europe, and with Passerini expressing greater pessimism at the time of writing than she had at the start of the BABE project. The final sentence moves explicitly away from the implied white European native ‘we’/ ‘they’ categories of earlier parts of the book: ‘In their production of spaces, mobile people create new connections between many parts of the world, thus giving a vanishing Europe a new possibility of existence’ [p. 171]. Yet for all the acknowledgement of the ‘complex positionality of being a European by birth and location’, this far in the book has yet to mention ‘whiteness’ nor has its analysis explicitly incorporated ‘black Europeans’.

Chapter 6 uses Passerini’s autobiographical material as a mirror to discuss the art of filmmaker Bouchra Khalili, weaving in the work of some BABE participants. Here we see Passerini’s own involvement in the liberation movements of the 1960s – in Lusaka, Cairo and Dar es Salaam – set in conversation with Khalili’s installation ‘Foreign Office’. Importantly, the chapter starts with art that maps the offices of resistance organisations from various anti-colonial struggles that were within close proximity to each other in Algiers. And it is here in the discussion of the Black Panthers, and Passerini’s own work on African liberation movements and her personal friendship with some anti-colonial leaders, that several of our questions over where colonialism would come into the book were finally answered.

Taking a critical approach, this chapter tackles two of the key themes of the book: migration and mapping. Firstly, the chapter argues for the need to expand and challenge understandings of ‘mapping’ and to move beyond seeing it as a ‘description of an itinerary and its accidents’ [p. 213]. In doing so, Passerini introduces the idea/metaphor of a ‘constellation’ to illuminate how mapping is about ‘establishing connections that are being forged between people, places, objects, temporalities, and socio-political phenomena’ [p.213]. This picks up on some of her previous work, which has aimed to consider how newcomers to Europe are active agents, not only in their own lives, but also in the remaking of Europe [p.214]. Following from this, the maps elicited from participants aimed at discovering ‘new ways of imagining Europe, which can only be done in interaction with those who have arrived and are presently arriving’ [p. 223]. Here we see the political project underpinning BABE, the insistence that Europe - and indeed every place - is constantly being remade by everyone living within its borders.⁵

Secondly, Passerini raises the point that people often resist being described as a ‘migrant’, and argues that the use of the term – with its focus on movement – misdirects our attention from the violence underpinning their structural disadvantages. In Passerini’s reading, to be a migrant is to be deprived (by states and by others) of full citizenship, as much in the places they have left as in the places in which they now live. Hence behind work to make migrants visible – in culture as much as in law – is a demand for ‘equal civic belonging’ [p.202]. As Khalili puts it “‘if you continue to define them as migrants, you will never be able to see them as equal citizens’” [p.224]. This then, is perhaps behind Passerini’s continued side-stepping of acknowledging her own mobility and self-ascription as a ‘migrant’: despite her political activity and Leftist-politics, her Italianness and Europeanness have ensured that her enduring privilege expressed through mobility has acted in combination with, rather than opposition to, full citizenship. In this formulation to ‘be’ a migrant is not the same thing as to be mobile: what is needed, Passerini argues, is not a ‘humanitarian position’ but rather a ‘political position’ (p.224).

In this she chimes with Les Back and Shamser Sinha’s findings in *Migrant City*, which demonstrates the impact of immigration control and surveillance on the everyday life of international migrants in London, from the experience of waiting for the Home Office to process applications for documented status to the limits immigration regulations place on people’s ability to work, travel and even socialise.⁶ While agreeing with the importance of acknowledging the legal and economic barriers placed on multiple categories of international migrant by European states, we argue additionally that there are disturbing political, as well as emotional costs, to insisting on a sharp distinction between, as Bridget Anderson has put it, ‘us and them’.⁷ Paying attention to the multifaceted oppressions faced, for example, by people categorised as undocumented migrants or as asylum seekers, should not distract us from also doing the work of breaking down the category of ‘migrant’ per se. As we have argued both together and separately elsewhere, this approach should not deny the structural violence of borders and citizenship, but rather add to it an awareness of the

⁵ Doreen Massey, ‘A global sense of place’, *Marxism Today* (June 1991), 24–29.

⁶ Les Back and Shamser Sinha, with Charlynnne Bryan, Vlad Baraku and Mardoche Yembi. *Migrant city*. London: Routledge, 2018

⁷ Bridget Anderson, *Us and them?: The dangerous politics of immigration control*. Oxford: OUP, 2013.

shared experience of displacement by people who have had little choice but to move residence (within or across borders) and those who have not been able to afford to move at all, even if they wanted to, and who may feel alienated by the pace and extent of change going on around them.⁸ Such an approach can be humanising, and can work against the stigmatisation of people classified as ‘migrants’ towards greater solidarities among working class people and racialized minorities. Perhaps ultimately, given her painstaking efforts to write her own intellectual and physical journeys alongside those of the BABE participants, this is the political position which Passerini is reaching towards throughout this impressive, unusual and sometimes maddening book.

⁸ Doreen Massey, ‘Landscape/space/politics – an essay’, available on line at <https://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/> accessed November 2019.