

## Introduction

Migritude from a Comparative Perspective

From December 22, 2018, to January 25, 2019, the US government was partially shut down as its president demanded a border wall blocking Mexican and South and Central American refugees and immigrants from entering the United States. The shutdown was the longest in history and had effects far beyond the 800,000 federal workers it furloughed (Wamsley 2019). The president's discourse surrounding his demand was consistently racist, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant (Van Ramshorst 2018: 253). In February 2019 the president registered a national emergency in order to follow through on the construction of around two hundred miles of a massive wall at the US-Mexico border. To justify the more than \$5 billion cost of the physical wall, he continues to use inflammatory scare tactics of an "invasion" by migrants, drugs, criminals, and gangs from Central America and Mexico that allegedly threatens the security of the nation. Tragically, this dubious rhetoric has incited white supremacist domestic terrorism and myriad hate crimes in the United States and elsewhere.

While our contemporary political landscape is characterized by unprecedented nationalist populism, a UN report recorded 68.5 million people forcibly displaced at the end of 2017 (see Barron 2018). These numbers continue to increase, marking the present as the period of the greatest global refugee crisis since World War II, with more migrants and more kinds of migration defined by law and policy than ever before in recorded history. In both Europe and the United States, migrants are narrativized largely through debates over policy and border law, which dehumanizes and stereotypes them as security threats and economic burdens. With the twenty-first century being defined as the century of migration (Castles and Miller 2003; Nail 2015), it has never been more important to rethink immigration materially, discursively, economically, and politically. Indeed, echoing the widespread condemnation of anti-immigrant xenophobia and policing, authors and activists like Fatou Diome, Shailja Patel, Abdourahman Waberi, and Igiaba Scego confront intersectional issues of immigration, diaspora, globalization, and racism against migrants while also highlighting differences in region, class, gender, and sexuality that limit the

movement of many people. These authors contribute to a new literary, cultural, and political genre, or body of work, called *migritude*. Since this recent era is characterized by openly belligerent nationalism and anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, this special focus section of *minnesota review* aims to study and combat these violent trends while unpacking migritude cultural production across the globe.

This special focus section, the first of its kind, explores the relatively understudied concept of migritude. Since migritude is an emerging area of discourse and practice, its definition is constantly shifting and expanding. Rather than attempt to define the term and the concept it represents, which is in some ways to limit and therefore do epistemological violence to it, we leave *migritude* ultimately as defining, or in transit. In this introduction, we assess migritude literature and track how others have conceptualized it, whether authors themselves, scholars, students, or activists. This special focus section brings together new literary works and scholarship on migritude across continents and languages. The term *migritude* comes to us independently from two sources: francophone African literary studies, inaugurated by Jacques Chevrier's (2004) remarks, and from Shailja Patel's 2006 performance piece *Migritude* and her eponymous book based on it (Patel 2010). For Chevrier in the francophone context, the texts of migritude create a new postnationalist identitarian space and "designate both the thematic of immigration that is at the heart of contemporary African works, but also the expatriate status of most writers. . . . [Migritude] is a third space, [a] simultaneous disengagement from both the culture of origin and the receiving culture" (Chevrier, quoted in Thomas 2007: 5). Here, *migritude* indicates the work and ideas of a group of younger African authors, most of them born after independence in the 1960s, such as Calixthe Beyala, Fatou Diome, Abdourahman Waberi, Alain Mabanckou, and others who have lived both in and outside of Africa. Beyond the identitarian gestures prevalent in earlier work on migritude, these authors narrate the material and psychic being-in-the-world of the migrant within the current context of global movements while emphasizing that the past of immigration and conceptions of the immigrant are irreducibly entangled with the history of colonialism (Foster 2019: 9).

Studying this francophone African literary context, Pius Adeganmi (2005: 967) observes that "migritude evokes two mutually reinforcing ideologies, as well as a negation. *Migration* of course implies the location of these new writers in the diasporic space of Paris, while *negritude* evokes the deconstructive black politics of the

texts vis-à-vis the dominant narratives of their context. But *migrITUDE* negates the return to source philosophy of *negritude*. For the *migrITUDE* writer, Paris is home and it is the context in which s/he seek to articulate a resistant black identity that refuses to construct Africa as a site of salutary return.”

Ayo A. Coly (2010: xii), however, critiques the “postnationalist turn” in francophone African literary criticism: authors’ supposed “lack of a direct confrontation with colonialism allegedly has emancipated this postcolonial migrant offspring from roots and national attachments in favor of multiple passports, euphoric vagrancy, and self-indulging cosmopolitanism.” Against what has recently come to be called Afropolitanism and related models of Afropeanism, Coly argues that texts like Fatou Diome’s novel *The Belly of the Atlantic* instead represent an “anticolonial and nationalist narrative of home” (105; see also Rofheart 2013; Nathan 2012; Haskell 2016).

*MigrITUDE* cultural production and the various uses of the term *migrITUDE* have not been limited to francophone African literary contexts but have appeared in anglophone and italoophone literature and scholarship and have migrated into the spaces of South Asian diasporas and Europe beyond France, such as Britain and Italy. Shailja Patel’s project, for example, expands the definition of *migrITUDE* to include South Asian migrations from the imperial period to contemporary neoliberal globalization and beyond. Describing her performance piece in an interview, Patel (2007) stated that she “was looking for a word that captured migrant attitudes or the idea of migrants with attitude, a generation of migrants who don’t feel the need to be silent to protect themselves.” Patel’s *MigrITUDE* debuted not as a text but as a performance in Oakland, California, in 2006 and was performed internationally, including in Nairobi, Kenya, where Patel is from. In addition to reciting poetry and prose and blending elements of South Asian and modern dance and yoga, Patel unpacks onstage her trousseau of saris from a suitcase given to her by her mother while relating vignettes of colonial and immigrant histories, including her own personal story (Reddy 2016: 179–80). Although the bridal trousseau Patel’s mother insists on giving her suggests a more privileged immigrant status (than, for instance, those of “coolies” whose job it was to carry luggage for others), she empathizes with those coming from less advantaged backgrounds. Vanita Reddy, *migrITUDE* scholar and attendee of Patel’s first performance, describes Patel’s one-woman spoken-word performance as a “story of three cross-continental South Asian migrations: the early twentieth-century colonial migration of Indians to East Africa, the

mass expulsion and political and economic disenfranchisement of East African Indians and their subsequent migrations to the global North in the 1970s, and Patel's own journey from Kenya to Britain to the United States in the 1990s" (see Reddy's article in this issue).

Describing both the performance and text-based iterations of *Migritude*, Patel stated that she coined the term *migritude* "as a play on Negritude and Migrant Attitude. It asserts the dignity of outsider status [while celebrating and revalorizing] immigrant/diaspora culture"; she has also described her project as framing the "politics of intersectionality and global justice" (quoted in Monegato 2008: 237; see also Taylor 2014). *Migritude* shares a suffix with the term *negritude*, a black antiracist and anticolonialist literary and activist movement that would have a profound impact not just in Africa or Paris, where it originated in the 1930s, but throughout the world and in many languages. *Migritude* thus builds on black antiracist and anticolonial literary genealogies to theorize the policing of immigration, attendant anti-immigrant and racist discourses, and the global North's own complicity in the creation of the migration it seeks to interdict at its colonial and imperial borders (Foster 2019: 9). At the same time, Patel's vexed sense of Indo-Kenyan identity invokes the troubled racial and ethnic politics of migration in postcolonial contexts outside the North that complicates the invocation of *negritude* within *migritude*.

Most dominant discourses over "crises" of migration fail to acknowledge, or disavow, the material histories that compel migration, such as imperialism or the economic policies of neoliberal globalization. In fact, Marx's concept of "primitive accumulation" states that the condition for capitalist production is expulsion (Marx 1867). *Expulsion* can here mean the exile of peasants and indigenous peoples from their land through various colonial practices or depriving people of their political rights and criminalizing their being and movement. As Thomas Nail (2015: 12) explains, "Without the expulsion of the people, there is no expansion of private property, and thus no capitalism." The combined forces of imperialism and capitalism prompt migrations through elements of coercion that include histories of colonization, slavery, indenture, economic struggle, environmental stress, civil war, and persecution. In its historical and contemporary forms, it is this figure of the migrant—this body and its being-in-the-world—on which the anxieties of the nation-state (with its colonial heritage) play out.

However, we must also consider the forces that shape, stop, or police movement and the ways in which these forces create not security but crisis. In their introduction to a collection of essays titled

*Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crises*, Jenna Loyd, Matt Mitchelson, and Andrew Burrirdge (2012: 1) argue that “borders and prisons—walls and cages—are global crises. Walls and cages are fundamental to managing the wealth, social inequalities, and opposition to these harms created by capitalism and the present round of neocolonial dispossession.” Such confinements and detentions contribute to what Loyd, Mitchelson, and Burrirdge call *global apartheid*, “a condition in which the wealthiest regions of the world erect physical and bureaucratic barriers against the movement of people from poorer regions of the world” (1). These barriers and attendant identity categories that regulate movement combine to make manifest the condition of global or modern apartheid. They suggest that, when we think about movement, immigration, and the world, we should consider the violent, often governmental expropriation of free movement (e.g., via the transnational institution of the passport regime) from most of the world’s travelers, issues that migritude literature engages (Foster 2019: 8).

A comparative study of migritude cultural production therefore might intersect at least five general locales or spaces, broadly conceived: (a) the global South; (b) the global North or, more specifically, the global South *in* the global North, for example, immigrant neighborhoods within such northern nation-states as France, Britain, and the United States, like *banlieues* or ghettos; (c) the transnational in-between spaces such as Lampedusa, the Libyan coast, immigration centers, or refugee camps, airports, checkpoints, and immigration control, each mediated by the international system of nation states; (d) colonialism as a historical space that continues to impinge on the present, since so much of what catalyzes and shapes immigration in the twenty-first century has roots in the practices of empire; and (e) the ontological “third space” of secondary citizenship, the condition of having temporary, partial, or no documentation as a space from which to assert a voice and stake a claim. All of these spaces are themselves on the move, in tension with new circumstances, and are produced by multiple, overlapping, transhistorical, and transnational contexts.

Migritude is critically attentive both to the materiality of contemporary immigration and border regimes and to discursive constructs. In the twenty-first century stateless, unrepresented, and unrepresentable persons are read as challenges to democracy by both right-wing nationalist and liberal state apparatuses. Migritude views globalization as inextricable from its imperial pasts and critiques its limits in checkpoints, passports, and borders that, contrary to idealiza-

tions of global flow, are symptomatic of larger institutions such as European Union or American immigration control that, de jure or de facto, monitor and interdict nonwhite bodies along the lines of race, gender, and heteronormativity. It figures immigration as both individual and systemic, integrated into larger global processes, while often drawing on early and mid-twentieth-century anticolonialist discourses such as pan-Africanism, negritude, the literature of the black diaspora, and African literature and history more broadly. For example, West African writers Fatou Diome and Alain Mabankou, who now live in France, acknowledge the promise of negritude in their novels at the same time as they problematize its failures. Negritude emerges refashioned, in a sense, as twenty-first-century writers take on the racialization of immigration in addition to its heteropatriarchal normativity.

Italy, usually excluded from postcolonial mappings, is also an important site of black diaspora literature and scholarship. Pap Khouma, Amara Lakhous, Cristina Ali Farah, Igiaba Scego, Gabriella Kuruvilla, and others draw attention to the italoophone context of African, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian diasporas in southern Italy and their relationship to the current migration crisis on the coast of Lampedusa (see Eleanor Paynter's article and Ashna Ali's interview of Scego in this issue). As we mentioned above, it also includes the histories of South Asian diasporas, indenture, and, as Lisa Lowe (2015) has astutely described it, the intimacy of four continents, as charted, for instance, by Shailja Patel's various migratory routes. Patel's *Migritude* reimagines political and literary moments of colonial history in the context of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century global capitalism and "new" economic and cultural configurations ushered in by our age of asymmetrical flows of capital and people (Foster 2019: 31).

More recent theorizations of migritude include South Asian, Caribbean, and other global locales, identities, and genre configurations, asserting that migrant ontologies are legitimate while troubling questions of what qualifies as appropriate literature within the stringent boundaries of the nation. For example, Brinda J. Mehta's article in this issue explores migritude from the lens of South Asian indenture and *kala pani* (black water) narratives, while Neelofer Qadir (2018) argues that Patel's *Migritude* reanimates the histories of the Indian Ocean world. The concept of migritude proves flexible and resonant with other migrations, including South-South routes where migrants are also likely to be unwelcome. It has some kinship with coolitude, which recovers pride and celebrates the history of Indian indentured workers

and their descendants in the West Indies and broader diaspora (Carter and Torabully 2002). Khal Torabully proposed the concept of coolitude to specify the migrations of indentured servants compelled to leave their countries of origin due to the catastrophic economic and cultural consequences of European imperialism, leading to a vast chain of Asian, specifically Indian, indentured migration from 1843 to Mauritius and to West Indian and South American plantations. In the 1860s and 1870s laborers left for French colonies such as Guadeloupe, crossing various oceanic and continental borders, including Fiji, East and South Africa, Malaysia, Burma, and then Ceylon, among other places. Despite enforced arrivals, their descendants are now considered invasive outsiders and threats to full independence of these former colonies, demonstrating, like Patel's story of expulsion from East Africa, that duress and demonization are not limited to the imperial centers of the North.

Despite the overwhelming traffic in people, the stories of the *girmit* (the rural Hindi pronunciation of "agreement" or indentured contract in the Fijian context) in the agricultural colonies received less attention than the slave trade and the later mass migrations of traders, technocrats, and educated, skilled workers to the metropolitan centers. Torabully also links coolitude—the condition of being coolie—to Aimé Césaire's concept of negritude, liberating it from Hindu inflections of *kala pani* as a taboo crossing and embracing new creolized coolie identities in the Caribbean and elsewhere, destigmatizing the term *coolie*. However, in contrast to negritude, Torabully's coolitude does not seek a return to continental or ethnic origins. Coolitude is also related to migritude in its balance between the abject and the defiant, the oppression and the conditions of possibility in such migrations. The affective dimensions of displacement in a single life and across generations are explored by many migritude texts and also speak to "refugitude," Khatharya Um's and the Critical Refugee Studies Collective's articulation of material and existential refugee experiences, which represent much more than mere politico-legal statuses (see Um and Gaspar 2016; Critical Refugee Studies Collective n.d.).

The articles in this special focus section necessarily address migritude from multiple points of entry, spanning much of the globe and the literary geographies of narrating displacement. Vanita Reddy's "Femme Migritude: Shailja Patel's Afro-Asian Poetics" expands the parameters of migritude by unsettling the binaries of nation and diaspora, Africa and Asia, black and brown Atlantics, among others. Situating the current era of anti-immigrant, race-based xenophobia in

transnational contexts (which would include the United States, France, and Germany), Reddy argues that these discourses are not historically discontinuous from a long history of nativism and racism in these countries, nor is ethnic nationalism restricted to the North. For South Asian migrants from Africa in the United Kingdom, the demand to “go back to where you came from” is complicated by shifting homelands and multiple diasporas. Their movements crisscrossing the South and the North are in more flux than the simple home-and-away, Africa-and-France dynamic of conventional migrature literature, but at the same time the endogamous insularity, racialized capital, and settlement politics of Asians in Africa render suspect straightforward claims of their exclusion or victimization. Reddy uses the concept of femme migrature, influenced by Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting’s theory of femme negritude, to explain Patel’s rejection of the heteronormative, blood-based, and domesticating demands of the Indian diaspora. Africans and Asians are rendered proximate but incommensurable, emphasizing that migrature operates across a wide racial, geographical, and historical spectrum of differences and similarities.

Brinda J. Mehta’s “Migrature and *Kala Pani* Routes in Shumona Sinha’s *Assomons les pauvres (Let Us Strike Down the Poor)*” explores the clandestine crossings of Bengali-speaking immigrants from the India-Bangladesh border, itself a tenuous space, who cross various other borders to seek asylum in France. The tense divide between Frantz Fanon’s native town and settler town in the colony is transferred to the metropolis in the spatial dislocation of the *banlieues*, where the migrants live precariously on the margins of the French capital. Linking the *kala pani* history of Indian indentured labor in the nineteenth century to different European colonies with the flight of economically and ecologically devastated people from the subcontinent in the current century, Mehta identifies enduring constructions of criminality that re-create older forms of migrant flight, rejection, and racism. The migrants, however, bring with them their rural inventiveness and orality, which they use to fashion Bengali “narratives that bend, shape, reveal, and dissimulate the truth about their situation” while seeking asylum. Their illegibility not only to the French bureaucracy but also to the middle-class Indian narrator who is their translator ultimately reinforces their illegitimate status in Paris. The narrator’s own violence against them casts a shadow on the immigrant dream of gaining refuge in the “promised land” of France, drawing a bleak picture of the repeating conditions of trauma in migrature even as the migrants’ tales disrupt codes of subaltern silence.

Yumna Siddiqi's article, "Mobility in the City: Rawi Hage's Novels of Urban Migrants," argues that the subjects of Hage's novels conformed Michel de Certeau's notion of creating the text of the city as one walks through it. Similar to the *tusi-talas* of Sinha's novel, they draw upon "a rich verbal medley to tell [their] myriad stories," but their constrained, underground, nonhuman forms challenge liberal celebrations of urban geography as inherently enabling unhampered mobility and multicultural difference. Unlike the more privileged citizens who traverse the city, which resembles Montreal, the severely restricted social mobility and interactions of Hage's narrators inscribe a very different text of the city, a migitude narrative that charts their joblessness, poverty, unwantedness, and lack of access to the vaunted pleasures of the city. But, as Siddiqi argues, even these states of subjection provide spaces of agency and storytelling. While the subjects of Hage's novels, like Sinha's, are perceived as unwelcome vermin that threaten contagion, they accept, like Ralph Ellison's invisible man, their subterranean status and even their dehumanization, reveling in insect forms that defy human attempts to destroy them or curtail their movement. As defiantly errant pests, they ingeniously navigate the "dark crevices" of the city and embrace their uncongenial conditions of existence while defying bourgeois moral codes of urban(e) life. Scripting Chevrier's notions of a "third space" in illegal ways, they seem uninterested in comfortably belonging to either the home or the immigrant nation. But in the very declaration of their existence, they resemble Patel's "migrants with attitude" who unapologetically speak for themselves and inhabit the spaces they claim, however clandestinely.

Eleanor Paynter's article, "The Transits and Transactions of Migitude in Bay Mademba's *Il mio viaggio della speranza (My Voyage of Hope)*," emphasizes the significance of life writing, which functions as both memoir and testimony in migitude narratives. Paynter notes that life writing foregrounds the self-representation of migrant subjects (as against having their stories told or translated by middle-class narrators) and also situates the primarily Western audience as witness to the experiences of migrants, sometimes insisting on their empathy and ethics of engagement. While they intersect with postcolonial literature, such narratives also expose the limits of the term, particularly, as Mehta and Siddiqi also demonstrate, by accentuating colonial modes and routes of migration that persist after colonialism proper. Using Ann Laura Stoler's concept of duress, Paynter notes the structural, systemic pressures "that enact empire and imperial tendencies," remapping migrant flows from the former colonies to the urban capitals of empire.

Rather than romanticize these metropolitan centers as paradise or Eldorado (reversing colonial discourses of “discovering” the New World), Mademba reveals that migrants who are forced to leave their home countries do so mainly in search of employment, with few illusions about their reception in the countries where they seek a living. Against the relentless media coverage and the anti-immigrant official rhetoric that reduce them to a homogeneous and faceless collective of parasitic hordes, the singular life narrative is a form of literary activism, a migritude narrative that dwells on the significance of the individual’s life story. Mademba’s text also rehearses the forgotten history of colonialism, especially in Italy, and reminds the readers of its racist and exploitative effects that have not ended with the official end of empire.

Ashna Ali provides a timely interview with Somali-Italian writer and literary activist Igiaba Scego. Scego insists on the significance of the individual stories of the migrants rather than the dehumanizing statistics that usually categorize them in global news coverage. Although she rejects the label *literature of migration* in Italy, we include her as a migritude writer who challenges the trajectory of movement in the history of empire, where colonialism and settler imperialism were presented as ideal for the colonies but movement from the South is now rendered as a pestilential imposition. She studies the larger history of migration despite not having undergone the migrant journey herself, but she refuses to position herself as an outsider in Italy who can then predictably be asked to “go back home.” Home, for her, is now Rome, although she does not disavow her Somali ancestry. For Scego, the intimacies of colonialism uncover a family inheritance, with an earlier relationship between Italy and Africa, particularly in the case of Rome and Libya, and a later genealogy of Somalia as a former Italian colony. By drawing links with the Jewish and African American diasporas, Scego, like Fatou Diome, deconstructs the impermeable notion of the national subject, revealing the palimpsests of global migrations. Rather than build divisive borders, Scego speaks in metaphors of opening doors and building connections brick by brick between so-called insiders and outsiders.

If Scego wants to (re)build relationships, Patel, with whom she sees some parallels, wishes to smash and take apart fortress Europe by presenting the militant migrant’s perspective. In her new poem in this issue, “What We Talk about When We Talk about Movement,” Patel exposes the notorious double standards of empire, where invasion from the North was justified, and like Scego, she challenges the limits on movement from the South by inviting the speaker in Venice to

broaden his outlook on migration. In calling for the sledgehammering of the wall that keeps migrants from the South at bay, Patel reflects the violent history of colonialism that is usually ignored in beleaguered nationalist discourses of being overwhelmed by migrants. Patel's own activism rejects walls and borders, defiantly embracing a perspective that seeks free movement and global humanitarianism.

Rosemary Haskell's article, "Migritude's Progress: Fatou Diome's Twenty-Five Years in Afrique(s)-sur-Rhine," looks ahead to the future of migritude writers who have become establishment figures in their new homes. Presenting a survey of several of the Senegalese French writer's works, Haskell demonstrates that even within the work of a single writer migritude discourse does not present a unified narrative or single story. Focusing on female protagonists, Diome emphasizes the liminality of contemporary migritude writers who draw on experiences of African migration while preserving strong memories of the home they left behind. At the same time, like Scego, Diome embraces her French identity, having lived there for twenty-five years. Critiquing the assimilationist, anti-immigrant rhetoric of far-right French politicians like Marine Le Pen, Diome challenges "epidermal" nationalism and advocates a new multicultural French identity that accepts rather than assimilates difference, suggesting that nations can be open structures rather than sealed capsules.

In the introduction to Patel's *Migritude* Vijay Prashad (2010: iv) argues that the book is "not simply about migrants. It's about the *condition* [our emphasis] of migration—of *migritude* [emphasis in original]. It is not a cultural anthropology of migrant lives, but rather a philosophical meditation on what it means to live with the concept of Migrant." However important the individual story, Prashad suggests we must look to the structural and ideological conditions and histories of immigration, not individual movement or histories alone. Material and social environments, therefore, both produce and police migration, while discursive concepts and categories capture migrants (*capture* here in both the metaphorical sense of identity and, literally, in terms of the militarized and socialized policing and targeting of immigrants). The histories of these global and local forces also echo in the present. We must therefore look to the important and timely contributions of migritude cultural production and activism that meditate on and challenge immigration and its relationship to new and insidious forms of global apartheid. Furthermore, as racist nationalism and right-wing xenophobia intensify in the United States and elsewhere around the world, we would do well to heed Patel's call to emu-

late generations of migrants and allies “with attitude” who speak out against the silencing of voices, the policing of movements, and the dehumanizing of difference. It is this migritude momentum, emboldened by its politics and rising to the challenges to freedom, that anticipates the rallying cry against inhuman border politics: “No human is illegal.”

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