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Migration Across Boundaries

Linking Research to Practice and Experience

Edited by

PARVATI NAIR and TENDAYI BLOOM

United Nations University, Spain

ASHGATE

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Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East
Union Road
Farnham
Surrey, GU9 7PT
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
110 Cherry Street
Suite 3-1
Burlington, VT 05401-3818
USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:

Migration across boundaries : linking research to practice and experience / [edited by]
Parvati Nair and Tendayi Bloom.

pages cm. -- (Studies in migration and diaspora)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4724-4049-5 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-4724-4050-1 (ebook) – ISBN 978-1-4724-4051-8 (epub) 1. Emigration and immigration--Research. 2. Emigration and immigration. I. Nair, Parvati, editor.

JV6013.5.M53 2015

304.8072--dc23

2015008818

ISBN 9781472440495 (hbk)

ISBN 9781472440501 (ebk – PDF)

ISBN 9781472440518 (ebk – ePUB)



Printed in the United Kingdom by Henry Ling Limited,
at the Dorset Press, Dorchester, DT1 1HD

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Notes on Contributors

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Acknowledgements

The editors thank all the contributors to this volume for what has been a rich and enjoyable collaborative process. It is their enthusiasm and their commitment that has given shape to this book. We also take this opportunity to thank Neil Jordan of Ashgate for his interest and guidance. As series editor, Anne Kershen has generously shared her expertise on migration and has always been at the end of an email for our many queries. We are grateful to her for her keen support of this book project. The idea for the book first germinated after a conference on 'Migration Across the Disciplines' at the Centre for the Study of Migration at Queen Mary, University of London, where some of our contributors were present. It further developed during a second conference, 'Displacement, Resistance, Representation: Culture and Power in Contexts of Migrancy', at which point more contributors entered the project. The editors would like to thank all those who contributed to the discussion and debate at these events. Subsequently, the editors were able to work on this book project under the auspices of the research programme on Migration, Media and Intercultural Dialogue at the United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM). We thank our colleagues at UNU-GCM for their support, as well as colleagues further afield within the United Nations University from the UNU Migration Network. We are also indebted to John Perivolaris for the cover image, as also to Javier Bauluz for generously sharing his image that is at the heart of Chapter 9. Many have been involved in the development of this book project. We take this opportunity, therefore, to thank all those who have helped us along our way and who have put in their efforts to pursuing questions of migration across boundaries.

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Chapter 7

Interdisciplinarity at Work: Ethnopsychiatry, Migration and the Global Subject

Francesco Vacchiano

Introduction: Which Interdisciplinarity?

The concept of interdisciplinarity arose in the early 1920s as a reaction to the positivistic reorganization of knowledge, which was parcelling it into discrete and partially isolated research traditions and programmes (see for instance Frank, 1988). The notorious Konrad Lorenz's remark about 'the specialist [who] knows more and more about less and less' is an apt synthesis of these concerns. Nonetheless, the debate came from afar, in the long reflection about the nature and status of knowledge which has characterized the history of scientific thought ever since Aristotle (Moran, 2010). Despite this longstanding reflection, epistemologists still appear to be rather dubious about how to define interdisciplinarity, besides some general observation about the importance to promote dialogue and cooperation among different research fields (Frank, 1988; Jacobs and Frickel, 2009). Indeed, reviewing the contemporary literature on interdisciplinarity, it is difficult to file away the feeling that behind the interest in the topic sometimes resides the need to produce a new specialization, a field of 'interdisciplinary studies' which ultimately behaves like a new discipline. While Hansson claims that 'most breakthroughs of long lasting importance have been the result of cross fertilization between different scientific disciplines and traditions' (Hansson, 1999: 339), he also observes that 'ironically [those] that have been truly successful have created new disciplines or radically changed old ones so that we tend back towards unidisciplinary research once again' (Hansson, 1999: 339–40). In point of fact, evoking interdisciplinarity as a prerequisite does not seem to overly change the logic by which methodology – that is a system of analysis defined and defended within a specific research tradition – is the framework that defines what kind of problems have to be addressed and which rules one is supposed to apply to them.

For these reasons, instead of trying to defend interdisciplinarity or summoning it as such, we may observe that reality and humanity are naturally complex facts, which may be approached through explanatory metaphors that, as refined as they may be (as in mathematical models or psychoanalytical interpretations), are approximations that remain at some distance from the very phenomena they wish to describe. In order to account for this gap, Gregory Bateson borrowed Alfred Korzybski's famous statement that 'the map is not the territory', arguing that

the categories of scientific understanding are necessarily situated on a 'logical level' which is different from the facts they aim to explain (Bateson, 1972). The complexity of scientific endeavour is due, not only to the resistance of nature to the *reductio ad unum*, but also to the fact that the same observation contributes to transform the processes according to the forms and norms of the observer. The analogy with Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle' in quantum mechanics is often brought forward to explain the halo-effect of models and methods on the matter of study. As the theorists of the second-order cybernetic have largely discussed, observer and observed phenomena become part of the same 'observing system' which influences the analysis and its results (Maturana and Varela, 1980; Von Foerster, 1981). Furthermore, whereas scholarly practice tends to craft scientific problems according to established views and norms, much circulation of concepts goes on without being explicitly recognized as 'interdisciplinary'. As Shove and Wouters have highlighted:

Giddens ... suggests that there is no such thing as sociological theory – instead he argues that different specialisms contribute in different ways to the emergence of a more generic body of 'social theory'. Blume goes on to suggest that the social sciences are held together by a common empirical point of reference, namely the social world. (Shove and Wouters, 2006: 3)

My argument is fully in line with these remarks. In my view, interdisciplinarity gains analytical and heuristic purchase when it is defined *a posteriori*, as a requirement imposed by the problems themselves rather than by a preceding rationale. In this sense, much of the best interdisciplinarity springs up from concrete problems and the consequent need to find out new responses through (and regardless of) the disciplinary boundaries, exploring different 'working metaphors' which run the risk of epistemic instability. We could say that a productive interdisciplinary attitude is made up of a fair amount of theoretical in-disciplinarity.

The relevance of these epistemological concerns, which justify my positioning for an inverted causality between phenomena and analyses, is reinforced by the need to consider science (and particularly social science) as a way of engaging with people and their worries, one which has historically motivated – well before positivism – the surfacing of a systematic interest in society. The primacy of this ethical demand, which releases epistemology from its disciplinary abduction, is even more significant as internal coherence is increasingly being used as a justification for flagrant anti-society initiatives (like in the economic dogma of austerity, the medicalization of social life or the 'management' of human mobilities). Furthermore, although all concrete problems are intrinsically interdisciplinary (that is, even when they are created within a given discipline, they may be tackled from different angles), some of them, for all their complexity and extension, demand not only a dialogue between existing fields, but also the quest for new hybrid paradigms.

Migration offers an excellent example of one of these issues that, as Brettell and Hollifield have argued, 'cries out for an interdisciplinary approach' (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000:vii). It is hence in a position of 'useful instability' that I consider my interest in migration as interdisciplinary, that is to say, as geared towards cutting across different research traditions and putting them 'to work' in an applied field, where theories are compelled to come to grips with ordinary problems. The field requires new approaches and the acquisition of the adequate 'polyglotism' to produce and discuss them (Morawska, 2003).

Drawing from my experience, as a psychologist and anthropologist in an outpatient clinic for immigrants' mental health in Northern Italy, I aim to show how applied intervention in a very practical field raises new questions which call for new interdisciplinary responses (in this case, a new clinical 'ethnopsychiatry') and how the resulting practice enables a study of the moral and subjective dimensions of contemporary migration.

This experience takes shape in Turin, a medium-sized Italian city that, due to its industrial history – it is the town of the main Italian car factory – has constituted a pole of attraction for internal and, since the late 1980s, international immigrants. In this sense Turin, together with the other poles of the so-called Italian 'industrial triangle' (Genoa and Milan), has represented one of the most germane test-beds of social integration well before becoming a destination of international immigrants.

It is estimated that around 2,300,000 people moved from the poorest rural areas of Southern and North Eastern Italy to the industrialized North West between 1955 and 1970 (Bonifazi and Heins, 2000). Owing to the short history of Italy as a single unitary country, regional differences in terms of language, social habits and cultural traditions were considerable and difficulties of cohabitation prevalent. These early tensions laid the ground for local xenophobic political movements, initially directed against internal immigrants before shifting towards the newcomers following the added international influx. By the mid-1990s, the stratification of old and new issues of diversity motivated a number of initiatives aimed at promoting social integration including, among others, the access to social and health facilities. Nonetheless, a number of early inquiries showed that health units – and particularly mental health services – were hard put to deal with their new users' differences in terms of language and body practices.

In order to tackle this issue, a small group of psychiatrists, psychologists and cultural mediators launched the Frantz Fanon Centre in 1996, a unit directed at developing a new practice of research and treatment in the field of mental health and diversity. The centre, an outpatient clinic operating within the National Health Service, was meant to set the groundwork for innovative treatment practice using the patient's preferred language as well as integrating history and anthropology into the clinical framework. Despite occasional periods of impasse, due to fluctuations in the political climate and the resulting attitudes towards an engaged and thought-provoking theoretical proposal, the centre persists and its practice constitutes a landmark not only for treatment, but also for the theoretical reflection on migration, bio- and psycho-politics of citizenship and social suffering.

Following this premise, in this contribution I argue that the work on the mental health of and with the immigrants inspires not only the elaboration of new interdisciplinary approaches, but also a critical analysis on the role of power (as well as the role of psychiatry) in suffering. Concurrently, I discuss how the interdisciplinary analysis of suffering may represent an appropriate way to explore contemporary migratory dynamics and their multiple processes of production. As I aim to show here, my idea of interdisciplinarity is mainly intended as a mindset to interrogate problems as they emerge in the concrete experience of people, a disposition which, joining different perspectives, allows us to come to grips with some of the ways of being, and feeling, in the contemporary world.

Clinical and Critical Ethnopsychiatry in Italy: The Frantz Fanon Centre

As mentioned in the previous section, the issue of diversity in psychiatry stood out as a new relevant topic by the early 1990s. This may seem odd if we consider that for almost four decades the urban reality of Northern Italy had been characterized by immigration. Moreover, an authoritative tradition of studies on Southern and rural areas had been well established since the end of World War II. In spite of the great quality of the research of Ernesto De Martino, Alfonso Maria di Nola, Clara Gallini, Amalia Signorelli, Alberto Maria Cirese and many other ethnographers of the Italian south – who explored, among other things, ritual practices, myths and strategies of bereavement, aetiologies and associated local body traditions and explanatory models – official Italian psychiatry had remained mostly unconcerned with these kinds of differences. As a point of fact, the very nature and structure of asylum psychiatry made social and cultural diversity almost invisible to the alienist's eye. Nonetheless, also during the revolutionary process of reform that had started by the late 1960s, and laid the groundwork for the new Italian social and community psychiatry, the strain to give patients new political recognition did not seem to generate any more thorough attention to their cultural background (Beneduce and Martelli, 2005).¹

By the mid-1990s, however, consolidated international scholarship and a series of clinically applied practices were not lacking: whereas 'transcultural psychiatry' had been well established in North America for more or less three decades, clinical 'ethnopsychiatry' was undergoing trials and development in France. Both of these were the products of their specific political and cultural environment, particularly with regard to the national policies of cohabitation and integration of the immigrants: the former, conceived between Harvard and Montreal in a context

¹ It comes as no surprise hence that the first psychiatric study on the symptoms and models of explanation among the Italian migrants was carried out abroad, by Michele Risso and Wolfgang Böker in their pioneering work on the Italian workers in Switzerland (Risso and Böker, 1992), one which, despite its great theoretical interest, ended up having limited impact on the psychiatry practiced at home.

marked by historical particularism and multiculturalism; the latter emerging in a milieu dominated by psychoanalysis and a universalist ideology of citizenship.

The bridge between the two was represented by Georges Devereux, who, in his longstanding personal and intellectual itinerary, had reintroduced and readapted the notion of ethnopsychiatry to the study of the healing practices of the Mohave groups of Colorado. In addition, Devereux was also among the first to consider western psychiatry as a form of local tradition, highlighting its social and cultural specificity (Devereux, 1951; 1961; 1970). After his return to France in the early 1970s, his reflections and experiences had started to inspire a handful of young anthropologists and psychoanalysts, among whom the remarkable and controversial personality of Tobie Nathan increasingly stood out.

By the mid-1990s, Tobie Nathan and his clinical unit on the outskirts of Paris – dedicated to his mentor Georges Devereux – constituted a reference that was impossible to ignore. The peculiarity of Nathan's 'ethnopsychiatric' method (Nathan, 1988a; 1988b; 1993; 1994) consisted in the use of the patient's preferred language through the involvement of a big group of native cotheraxxxxxpists in order to broaden their attention to local aetiologies, ritual objects and traditional remedies. A similar practice was being experimented with at the same time by the child psychiatrist Marie Rose Moro (Moro, 1994; 1998; 2009), who, at least until the late 1990s, had fruitful theoretical exchanges with Nathan.

By the mid-1990s, the experimentation carried out in Paris could not go unnoticed in Turin. In spite of its relevance, however, this practice was not transposed uncritically to the new context, but readapted according to the spirit of a gramscian tradition by which cultural formations are not considered as separate and self-sufficient wholes, but as the products of history and hegemony on a local and global scale. Concurrently, the social psychiatry which gained ground in Italy in the 1970s – radically inspired by the work of Franco Basaglia (Basaglia, 1974; Basaglia, 2005) – was still influential in promoting a critical attitude aimed at unveiling the political and social dimensions of suffering as the key feature of a 'political' way of conducting therapy.

In the wake of these converging genealogies, the figure better suited to synthesize this new research programme – aimed to look at the migrants' distress as embedded in a complex historical and political weave – was that of Frantz Fanon. A committed critic of colonization and a psychiatrist at the forefront of the experimentation of non-oppressive treatments in Algeria, Frantz Fanon censured the 'colonial situation' and its forms of reproduction within everyday relations, observing its 'mystifying' function for all the actors involved. 'Black and White', colonized and colonizer, both are 'alienate' since they are condemned to repeat unrelentingly that 'narcissistic drama' which renews the history of fighting – '*corps à corps*' – that defines their relationship (Fanon, 1952).

Frantz Fanon's criticism does not spare colonial medicine – 'introduced in Algeria at the same time [as] racism and humiliation ... as a piece of the oppressive system' (Fanon, 1959: 96) – and describes the 'drama ... of an impossible encounter in any colonial situation' (Fanon, 1959: 100). He discusses the role of medicine

as a possible colonial tool – a role that the French *résident général* in Morocco, Hubert Lyautey had previously overtly recognized when defining the physician as ‘the most important and efficacious agent of pacification and penetration’ (Lyautey, 1926) – but also the paradoxes of practicing therapy in an environment marked by violence and discrimination. In this setting, ‘for the colonized, the medical examination is always a test’ (Fanon, 1959: 102), and ‘the doctor always appears as a tangle in the colonial net, as a spokesperson of the occupying power’ (Fanon, 1959: 106).

Fanon’s writings are also a profuse source of inspiration for the clinician, particularly when he reflects on the mystification of interpreting the nightmares of the colonized either through the supposed ‘culture of origin’ or the lenses of a hypothetical universality of symbols. Highly significant in this sense is his critical discussion on ‘the supposed complex of dependence of the colonised’ (Fanon, 1952) proposed by Octave Mannoni, where he argues that history – and the power relations in it – constitutes a ‘psychic constituent’ (*constituant psychique*) and ignoring that is not only a technical mistake, but a way of colluding with power (Taliani, 2011).

Fanon’s incitement is more relevant and meaningful than ever. In particular, clinical intervention with immigrants brings to the fore the ways in which the historical relational dynamics between North and South are renewed today in a wide series of processes, not least the ones put in place to control mobility and produce citizenship (Mezzadra, 2006; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2010; Vacchiano, 2011). Moreover, not so differently from that which Fanon described, medicine and psychology often end up ratifying common sense representations about immigrants’ ‘emotional immaturity’, ‘parental incompetence’ or ‘antisocial reactivity’. Finally, Fanon’s insights are still compelling when he describes how patients distrust remedies and therapies proposed by the oppressive other (Fanon, 1959: 103–4).

Since the mid-1990s, referring to Frantz Fanon meant to place any intervention with new migrant citizens within an ethical and political horizon in which the clinical work could be thought of as an instrument of critical analysis and emancipatory intervention, instead of a tool to transform social suffering into pathology. Concurrently, it meant joining the debate on migration and, following Devereux, observing the same psychiatry as a specific historical construct entangled with power and based on categories whose significance – also by virtue of diversity – could be productively investigated.

The most valuable aspect of Fanon’s work, however, is that of unveiling the process whereby, in colonial psychiatry, madness and difference were considered signs of structural inferiority, the same as those produced by the relation of domination. In clinical and critical ethnopsychiatry, this teaching is applied by considering the various forms of suffering and healing not as mere symptoms or remedies, but as complex social and political facts (Beneduce, 2004; Taliani and Vacchiano, 2006).

The basis of this work is not only interdisciplinary, joining a psychological view on the subject with an historical and anthropological understanding of the society, but it also interprets clinical practice as an opportunity to expand new ways of intervening and to approach some of the most significant challenges of the present time, ones in which migration offers a chance of subjective transformation and a way to participate in a global moral community.

Houda, ‘the Muslims’ and the Autological Subject²

Houda, a tall Moroccan woman in her early 40s, came to the Frantz Fanon Centre in August 2000, referred by the Accident and Emergency unit of one of the major hospitals in Turin. She presented a creased stack of medical documents in which neurologists had formulated the diagnosis of ‘*cryptogenic partial epilepsy*’, a category used in neurology for some non-lesional epileptic syndromes where a precise focus cannot be identified (Kaczmarek et al., 2007). Papers explained that Houda suffered from recurring episodes of loss of consciousness, fainting and behaviour generally described as ‘bizarre’.

During the following meetings, she described getting up at night, going out in her dressing gown and talking with ‘non-existent’ people. Sometimes – she recounted – her facial expression changed, her eyes rolled and her voice altered. After these episodes, she found relief in the recitation of the *Qur’an*. Her account, besides making reference to signs that in Morocco are typically ascribed to those of being possessed (through the metonymical term *tāh*, ‘to fall down’), was full of allusions to figures and meanings from Moroccan popular tradition, particularly regarding the invisible and the body: the scent that preceded the episodes – the ones that she named ‘*crisi*’ (crisis) – was described as the smell of *bkhūl*, incense used to invoke the *ḥaḍra* (‘presence’, ‘manifestation’) of *jnūn* (spirits) in healing and ecstatic ceremonies (Geertz, 1971; Crapanzano, 1981; Pandolfo, 2006), the cats that roamed the courtyard had the unsettling features of those same spirits and the noises that afflicted her were depicted as signs of places inhabited by other beings (spaces where she was compelled to live in spite of being deemed unsuited since impure or dirty).

Houda said her symptoms began when she had a dream in which she offered some milk at the foot of a great tree, that reminded her of the *zāwiya* (literally ‘corner’, ‘recess’, often the sepulchre of a saint and by extension the brotherhood that meets there) where her mother’s father, a *fqiḥ* (Koranic expert and healer) used to teach and also heal ‘the illness of the white in the eyes’, most probably cataracts. Houda spent her childhood in Salé, a city that, despite being one step away from Rabat, still maintains a firmly traditional spirit (Brown, 1976; Carreira da Silva, 1999), kept alive by the preservation of customary healing practices and

² The names and some of the circumstances described here and in the two following paragraphs have been altered in order to protect the individuals.

collective rituals of Sufi origin (Dermenghem, 1954; Eickelman, 1981; Aouattah, 1993; Bennani, 1996). Houda confirmed those ties, describing her participation, with some other members of her family, in several meetings of local brotherhoods. Even so, she also tried to distance herself from these practices, by arguing that they are *ḥarām* ('illicit') and that she did not want to perform them anymore.³ However, the feeling that Houda was not as weak as she liked to appear gradually became apparent. Indeed, after divorcing from her husband, she had left Morocco on her own in search of a different status than the one of *muṭallaqa* ('divorced' but also 'disavowed', a condition that, especially in conservative areas, is judged with contempt and blame).

During almost four years of psychotherapy, this impression was mostly confirmed. It became increasingly clear that Houda was using her symptoms to try and negotiate with her family – mother, sister and only child (who in the meantime had caught up with her in Italy) – for a possible space of affective and sexual freedom. Indeed, the presence of the 'Muslims' (a common name for the mildest and most domestic *jnūn*) caused the departure of her relatives, who had initially moved in with her and imposed strict control over her relationships. Significantly, Houda's crises intensified their frequency whenever her relatives tried to get closer or to impose their needs over her desires for independence and self-determination.

Houda's symptoms and their function shed light on a process of subjective constitution and transformation that clinical work frequently highlights: whereas the subject is organized according to forms and norms transmitted in primary relations and in a local context (marked by specific modes of embodying values and meanings, symbols and speech genres), this system of signs and models is never closed and self-sufficient, remaining open to new identifications throughout life. (Moore, 2007). In this sense, primary identifications constitute the 'secure base' that embodies new values, relations and desires and, consequently, constructs the experience of diversity. At the same time, they also structure a way of functioning that limits the available possibilities of being and feeling. Symptoms are often bound up with that primary way of functioning that preserves its embodied trace, even when new moral configurations emerge.

3 The ambiguous attitude towards popular or traditional religious practices – a trait that frequently surfaces in ethnopsychiatric treatment – is an interesting sign of the stratification of values that characterizes contemporary ideoscapes, in which different discourses contrast and conflict within the same social (that is plural) environment. In this case, the ambiguity ensues from the influence of a movement of Islamic thought that stigmatizes traditional practices as diversions from the original norm. It is a cultured view (not by chance defined as 'modernist') which acquired momentum during the so-called 'Islamic renaissance' (*naḍḥa*) and was endorsed by the nationalist leaders, becoming almost hegemonic in many countries (Laroui, 1974; Pandolfo, 2000). In my clinical and ethnographic experience, many people involved in the traditional rituals tend to downsize their importance through rationalistic arguments when interviewed about them.

In another place and time, Houda probably would have reconverted and capitalized on her suffering in a similar way to her ancestors, turning herself into a *shuwwāfa* (fortune teller, female therapist and soothsayer), a figure traditionally allowed to be more autonomous by virtue of her ambiguous – and uncanny – mystical powers. In today's world, this is not possible, at least not for Houda, as she seeks out a new grammar from different and conflicting languages:⁴ values of the local tradition and popular Islam, postcolonial religious modernism and cosmopolitan desires of independence and 'self-stylization'. In her movement across geographies and modes of subjectivation, and her conflict between 'morbid gain' (Freud, 2004) and sincere hopes of recovering, she carries out an historical movement across different 'moral economies of duty and desire' (Bayart, 2007: 242), one which Povinelli has synthesized through the distinction between 'genealogical' and 'autological' subject formations (Povinelli, 2006).

Houda's health seeking behaviours fully reproduced these movements across multiple possibilities of the identity: she attended regular neurological examinations (albeit with an ambivalent attitude towards the antiepileptic drugs) and she continued her sessions with us. At the same time, during her customary stays in Morocco, she visited several *fuqaha*⁵ and took part in pilgrimages (*ziyārāt*) to a number of saints' shrines, asking to be delivered.

Whereas these different resources provided Houda with significant relief, a treatment in a biomedical sense – that is measured by symptom suppression – appeared impossible: how could she otherwise express her desire for independence without being exposed to disgrace and ostracism? And what kind of independence is that in which the subject needs to protect herself from its consequences? Nancy Scheper-Hughes' claim – inspired by James Scott's work on the forms of peasants' resistance – that 'illness is a weapon of the weak' (Scheper-Hughes, 1994), helps to illustrate how the suffering body and its lexicon may often represent the only means a person has with which to bargain for an alternative self without shaking the foundations of his or her relational stability. In this sense, we may consider Houda's symptoms, in effect, as an embodied form of Scott's concept of 'hidden transcripts'. (Scott, 1990).

Self-awareness of one's primary identifications and the production of an autological self are undoubtedly at the roots of the theoretical project of psychoanalysis, as a means to release the subject from the most dysfunctional restrictions associated with his or her story of subjectivation (a project with which Georges Devereux fully identified). Nevertheless, the work with Houda opens up the ambiguous but unavoidable role of belonging that she did not try to wipe out, but instead to counterbalance in a more convenient way.

The distance of her subjective conflicts from the symptomatological requirements of biomedical psychiatry is noteworthy. Nevertheless, even clinical psychology, when it thinks of the patient not as a subject (that is, a social being

4 For a similar case, see Pandolfo, 2006.

5 Plural of *faqih*.

constituted in the interstices between the body and the world), but as a universal mechanism ready to be classified, may produce resounding diagnostic blunders (the famous 'category fallacies', of which medical anthropology has widely discussed⁶). This is what happened to Houda when, during an electroencephalogram, she experienced a crisis that did not result in anomalous signs in the trace. Consequently, a psychological assessment was demanded and carried out by the clinical psychologist of the hospital using a procedure based on an uncritical use of the Rorschach inkblot test.⁷ The resulting diagnosis was emblematic of the unbridgeable distance between the multifaceted meaning of Houda's affliction and the professional certainties: Houda's story and predicaments are reduced to 'a neurotic structure of hysterical type, characterized by anguish, rigid thought, emotional immaturity, scarce emotional control, troubles in managing aggressiveness and sexuality, frustrated expectations that her problems may be solved by others'. The terms of this description widely exceed the field of the technique, betraying a moral judgement on Houda's capacity to control emotions in conformity with a preferential code, managing her aggressiveness and sexuality according to a model of emotional 'normality' (the nature of which remains obscure) and solving her problem by herself (and, I am tempted to add, silently).

As frequently happens with immigrants, the diagnosis fills the space of incommunicability with the normativity of a moral judgement disguised as a pseudo-scientific truth. In this case, unlike many others where consequences can be much more ill-fated (such as in decisions made regarding parenting assessment, mental competence, fitness to stand trial, etc.) Houda may happily ignore the diagnosis and keep on negotiating through the invisible beings who populate her intersubjective relations and her possible spaces of visibility (during one session, we witnessed one of her episodes first-hand during which one of her alternative personalities became apparent).

One day, Houda revealed she had a new friend, a compatriot that she was meeting in hiding. A couple of months later our sessions came to an end and she was preparing herself, with the consent of her family, to go on holiday with him to Morocco. Today, after many years, we still talk by phone from time to time and she keeps us informed about her very occasional 'crisis', that she accepts as a kind of comforting – and often rather useful – presence.

6 See for instance Kleinman, 1991; Good, 1994.

7 Named after its creator, the Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach, the Rorschach inkblot test is a personality inventory in which the perceptions of ten inkblots are analysed using a psychological interpretation derived from the standardized analysis of the most common reactions. For the fundamental role of imaginary in the test performance (deeply influenced by cultural and social variables), the a-critical interpretation of the subjects' response in case of patients of foreign origin may produce significant distortions in the final results (for a discussion see Moon and Cundick, 1983).

The Sacrificial Lamb and the Dispossessed Body

Princess spoke very good English, indicating a high level of education in her city of origin, Benin City, Edo State, Southern Nigeria. She was referred to us by a primary care service for immigrants, which she had turned to for, as was recorded in her papers, a persistent 'headache' and pain 'spread all over her body' but, the examiners could not identify any specific cause, while analgesics had proved ineffective.

Princess looked tired, yawned frequently and was unwilling to speak, unless describing her symptoms. As often occurs, her somatizations were much more composite than those in the medical reports, referring to feelings in the body and suffering barely identifiable by biomedical terms such as: a sensation of heat in the eyes, water in the brain, ants creeping all over the body, a general sense of weakness, an itching sensation in the legs, an insistent noise in the belly etc. Princess accompanied her descriptions with wide hand gestures, before withdrawing herself into a strained position, her elbows on her knees and her head reclined. 'I know my body is not good', she whispered.

I tried to fill the gap in conversation with what was clearly a precocious interpretation, meant to be a tentative hypothesis for her symptoms. I was actually asking myself, 'who was Princess?' and whether her story resembled that of many other young girls that we had come to know over the years.⁸ 'Do you think your body is refusing something?' I asked. She stared at me for a little while and then reclined her head again murmuring 'I don't know'.

Princess' symptoms are so distinctive that psychiatrists working in Nigeria have recognized them as characteristic of local ways of feeling and manifesting distress, and have tried to translate them into the common psychiatric nosography (Ebigbo, 1982; Abiodun, 1994; Okulate et al., 2004). Contrary to this approach, instead of assuming that the Western diagnostic system is the mirror of an undisputable universal reality, ethnopsychiatry looks for a meaning behind these body signs, assuming that their recognition as symptoms is a complex matter of social and political negotiations. Moreover, bodily manifestations are considered a unique expression of the person and her story, one in which her singular experience of multiple worlds and moralities can emerge. In this endeavour, ethnopsychiatry dovetails with human and social sciences, and particularly with medical anthropology, through the notion of subjectivity, intended as a construction emerging from the thin disconnection and connection between the individual and society (Pandolfo, 1997: 5).⁹

What was Princess's body trying to tell us? Was her intangible suffering somehow related to what is commonly known as 'human trafficking'?

8 See Taliani and Vacchiano, 2006; Beneduce and Taliani, 2001; Beneduce and Taliani, 2006; Taliani, 2012.

9 For a description, see below in this contribution.

The trafficking of women from Nigeria to supply the sex market in Europe, the Middle East and other African countries is a well-known practice, denounced by NGOs and international organizations and analysed by numerous journalists and researchers. The phenomenon came to the fore in the second half of the 1980s – years of economic crisis and structural adjustment in Nigeria – when a group of traders, women hailing from the Edo State, grasped the potentiality of the sex market (Aghatise, 2004; Cole and Booth, 2007; Braimah, 2013) and started to divert young women who were being relocated to local urban centres and ‘junction towns’ in Nigeria (Achebe, 2004) to Europe (primarily Italy and The Netherlands). Originally, women were commonly lured to Europe with the promise of legitimate jobs. Over time however, the true nature of their employment became increasingly known, even in the recruitment areas (mainly in the Edo and Delta States) (Fayoumi, 2009).

What makes the phenomenon a ‘uniquely Nigerian institution of commercial sex work’ (Achebe, 2004: 178) lies in its ritual and self-reproducing character, which builds on the power of local beliefs and on the entrepreneurial initiative of formerly exploited women (Carling, 2006; Taliani and Vacchiano, 2006). Women undergo a ritual in Nigeria, presided over by the traditional minister of a local shrine, in which they agree to pay for the cost of the journey with the proceeds of their work. The luckiest would arrive in Europe by plane thanks to forged documents, while the others would travel by land to Morocco or Libya, waiting there to embark on a ship. In both cases, sooner or later they would be confronted with the extent of their debt – which can amount to tens of thousands of Euros – and to the real conditions of their job, either in the transit countries or at the supposed final destinations. Despite hardships and the huge amount to repay, many women decide to keep the agreement, for fear of a mystical retribution or simply because they deem it acceptable to endure the situation for the two or three years needed to get out of debt. Thereafter, it is not unusual for some of them to turn into new ‘*madames*’ by buying other girls. It is in precisely this aspect that the process emerges in all its ambiguity and complexity in light of the moral conundrums that the trafficking of human beings always evokes.

Princess explains that she lives with some ‘sisters’, a term that in many places in Africa refers to social and experiential proximity. I ask her whether she is working; she laughs, then answers yes. I suggest she meets with a Nigerian colleague, in order to be able to speak in Bini, but she refuses; ‘you can’t trust them’, she comments. We start talking about Benin City and her hesitancy is quickly replaced by her telling a story pervaded with nostalgia and regret. Her father was a civil servant with a good position and three wives, but ‘a woman took him in the head’ (alluding to witchcraft), until her father started to sicken. The situation deteriorated and money decreased. One day a cousin went to her house, proposing the help of a friend who could ‘sponsor’ her to travel to Italy in order

to find work. Princess was mistrustful, but her mother insisted, worried about the financial straits of the family.¹⁰

In the ensuing meetings we concentrated on her symptoms, which were characterized by a changeable and mostly unforeseeable shape: sometimes worms in her head, other times water in the stomach or the sensation that her ‘feet [were] walking alone’ ... We did not look for a direct link between symptoms and meanings, but at the many innuendos regarding situations, problems and states of mind that enabled Princess to express her specific reality through her body. I asked her whether her feet knew where they were leading her and this brings up a series of associations about the future that the prophecies had uttered for her at her birth, the prenatal wishes expressed by her parents and the circumstances that gave origin to her ‘Nigerian’ name: *Iguehiduwa*, ‘destined to be rich’. We talked about water and the rituals of Mamy Wata – a figure of wealth and achievement typical of a ‘previous’ modernity (Ogrizek, 1982; Drewal, 1988; Frank, 1995; Drewal et al., 2008) – that she performed as a child and then put aside after the massive influx of Pentecostal churches. We discussed the figures of power in the traditional mythology (Shango, Ogun, Olokun), of which she talked with scepticism, while also recognizing ‘they may sicken or heal people’. Furthermore, we went through the many different local and international churches (Cherubim and Seraphim, Pentecostal, Anglican and Catholic) that she attended in different phases of her life. Princess defines herself as a Christian and attends the Deeper Christian Life Church in Turin. Nonetheless, as with many of her compatriots, her need of spirituality feeds a religious pluralism that reflects a multiplicity of concurring moralities and possibilities of being. Her way of evoking the local aetiologies is vague, blurred and uncertain, not only for it being a matter of something invisible, but also because their heuristic power is diluted among the multitudinous meanings of a changing world.¹¹

Our ethnopsychological work focuses on the possibility of building a sense of continuity alongside these plural and often contradictory forms, in order to help Princess find a way to locate herself and her conundrums whilst in the process of social transformation and personal change. Her symptoms describe the impossibility of conciliation in a ‘spluttered and babbled speech’ (Taliani, 2012: 588), which reflects the fragmentation of the subject. Her body is reduced to a series of spare parts, being traversed and penetrated by entities of any kind, that grapple to achieve her impossible task without suffering: accepting the exploitation

10 In Edo State, women do not usually inherit their husband’s properties, which are customarily bequeathed to the eldest male sons, decreasing according to the marriage order, that is, whether a son of the first, second or third wife. Consequently, women are under considerable pressure to create their own wealth to protect their future and that of their children (Okonofua et al., 2004; Fayoumi, 2009).

11 Ernesto De Martino registered the same blending of the symbolic efficacy when he ascertained the erosion of the Tarantism in the Apulian Salento in the late 1950s (De Martino, 1961).

in order to turn it into an opportunity for her life and future. 'I am the sacrificial lamb', she whispers one day, insinuating that she cannot envisage any alternative options to the obligations she originally promised to meet. Princess has been well informed that, if she reports her pimps to the police, she could join a programme for 'victims of trafficking', receive vocational training and perhaps – after a thorough verification of her allegations – be entitled to a residence permit. Sadly, Princess knows that the same permit, albeit attractive, would enable her to be nothing more than just another immigrant, one who, thanks to the vocational training, could at best aspire to clean an office floor or tidy up some shelves, fighting for the rest of her life against both a mystical and a concrete retaliation.

'The madame is good with me', she claims one day, almost as if to reconcile herself with something inescapable. It is difficult to see how she could negotiate a task that is essentially historical, coinciding with the transformation of the destiny of an entire group in an epoch in which 'the commodity form has saturated the social field' (Piot, 2010: 8), money is 'a substitute for life' (Rospabé, cit. in Graeber, 2011) and 'prosperity' (not without reason a basic theme of international Pentecostalism) makes the difference between who is condemned to remain marginal and those who attain another world – to which almost every migrant aspires to be rightfully admitted – considered as the 'first class' (Ferguson, 2006). Princess' body capital is all she has to negotiate access to this world. Her body at work – her 'only body' (Sayad, 1999) – is the site of a strain between her obligation to be productive (both as a migrant and as a woman) and the weight that she herself can bear under the oppression of that work. It is clear that, also for Princess, a cure – either intended in a biomedical sense as a relief from symptoms or psychoanalytically as an attempt of subjectivation to an agentive discourse – is not only impossible, but also meaningless, inasmuch as heat, water, ants, weakness, itches and noise are there to remind her of her 'choiceless choice' between the collective mission inscribed in her name and the only way she feels she may accomplish it. Her symptoms are probably the most appropriate representation of the double bind in which she is entrapped, between the obligation of success and the only way to achieve it by sacrificing the mastery of her body.

There is not a doorway into reality, since there is not a way out of her situation as an immigrant, where the only choice seems to be in the kind of exploitation she is able to bear. I could only go alongside with her in this research, letting her body show the way.

Vicarious Imaginaries and Children's Migration

The first time I met Salima she was bewildered and frightened, as any adolescent has the right to be when confronted with a psychologist. Although she was only 14, she had already been in Italy for two years, as an 'unaccompanied minor', which is how the administration defines the adolescents who travel without their family. It was only a few days since she had moved from one child care centre to

another and her edginess was palpable (and more than understandable). To our initial approaches in Arabic, Salima replied in the Italian slang of the adolescents of her age, admitting that her Moroccan was less and less fluent and that she only used it during her sporadic phone calls with her parents.

Over the following months, Salima got acquainted with us, behaving like a kid who recovers little by little her childhood mien. In my work with adolescents I have often been surprised by this sort of 'surrender' as soon as a little confidence emerges: boys and girls who arrive acting 'all tough', who see themselves as adults, bursting with self-confidence and sufficiency, will soon – if we are able to establish a safe and comfortable environment – allow themselves to show another side, as much concealed as essential. This facet has often made me reflect on how the rapid development imposed by migration – which is often preceded by an early need to prepare oneself for life – frequently obscures basic needs of attention and care that necessarily end up reclaiming their ground.

Salima tells of her daily hopes and an adolescent life in which the present is a challenge and the future a question mark. She is wary of the school, her peers and her new friends, but also the adults, from whom she still seems to demand a proof, as though their betrayal – a new abandonment – might come at any time. As usual, a story emerges gradually: a long journey, a man who delivered her to an uncle, her odd new life, with no school and two little cousins to take care of. And then, one day, her aunt's incomprehensible accusations of something bad that she allegedly did to her cousin and, consequently, caused her banishment from the house. But – she asked repeatedly – what could she have done that was so wrong?

'What kind of adults are those who don't understand a child?' she asks one day, finally free from an absurd guilt and aware that she could not be held responsible for her expulsion. This insight opened up a new stage, in which Salima tried to fill the emptiness of the distant family with memories: her beloved younger sister, her brothers, her friends and the school in Beni Mellal. As soon as her past flares up, the pain of her separation becomes more acute, along with her desire to punish her parents. She does this by applying the same distance to which she feels condemned, phoning more and more sporadically and refusing to answer when they try to get in touch with her. When she eventually decides to call, she hardly speaks: her mother sometimes weeps, her sister does not speak Italian, and, after the calls, she feels more angry than homesick.

One day I ask what she would think about me visiting her parents. I have to go to her hometown and, if she agrees, I could set up an encounter with them. Salima is intrigued by the idea and accepts. When I call her father I sense his apprehension, confirmed by his questions about where she is and whether I am bringing her back to Morocco. I express my desire to meet them and we finally arrange an appointment. In the meeting place I notice a knot of people who stare at me from afar, spending some minutes observing me before coming closer. After a warm greeting, we get into the car and head to the countryside, towards a

hamlet surrounded by sheep and slag heaps of phosphates.¹² Salima's mother and the four siblings ask for news of her and offer me tea and a simple dinner. The father explains that they are poor and chose to send Salima to Italy to give her a better future. I take some pictures for Salima and get ready to leave, when her father comes closer and says: 'I give you my daughter as you were her father'. I have heard this sentence many times over the years, a paradoxical formula which reaffirms the father's legitimacy at the same time as it confirms its dissolution, but it is also a way to entangle the interlocutor in the net of family duties and reciprocity.¹³ Despite being a blatant disregard of the local etiquette, I feel the need to argue that Salima still needs them. He abruptly silences me with a chilly 'don't send her back here ...'

When I see Salima in Turin, her curiosity is evident: 'what house did they show you?' I tell her of the sheep, the barefoot children and the mud floor and she bursts out laughing, although a shadow of sadness quickly comes over her. She understands perfectly: '*debber 'alā rāsek*' ('scrape by on your own'), the expression many Moroccan adolescents use to sum up their condition in the '*khārij*', the 'outside' world ...

I analysed the social and historical roots of this 'vertical exile of fathers' (Benslama, 2004) in several works (Vacchiano, 2008; 2010; 2014), trying to show how the metamorphosis of Moroccan society during the colonial and postcolonial period sparked off a transformation in the forms of identification, which altered the social balance between generations and moved the social centre of gravity from the old to the new and from the past to the future. The generalized crisis of social reproduction in the popular classes (experienced as unemployment or underemployment, ineffectiveness of the public education, spatial marginality and lack of social mobility), associated with the affirmation of new hegemonic standards of living, has given way to a massive engagement with international mobility since the 1990s. Although these changes have impacted upon the whole of society, the incremental restriction of the possibilities of regular migration for the adults has significantly contributed to turn children and adolescents into plausible candidates for cross-border mobility. In the many places where migration and transnationalism – with their real and imaginary virtues – have become more visible, adolescents have also taken on a more active role in the migratory processes, by their own choice or complying with the wishes of their families (Jiménez and Vacchiano, 2011).

Salima's family is not poor, but its social position remains fragile due to the fluctuating nature of the societal structure in which they live. Nonetheless, social instability does not fully explain their choice, which seemingly lies in a sort of desire of vicarious mobility. Salima's parents (and her father in particular) rely

12 The piedmont country which precedes the town of Beni Mellal lies in an upland known as 'phosphate plateau', its rich reserves whose exploitation began during the French Protectorate, are currently the country first economic revenue.

13 For a discussion, see Vacchiano, 2008.

on family solidarity in order to foster their own desire of social and geographical mobility, by entrusting the girl to their relatives in accordance with a model of 'fosterage' which is not uncommon in Morocco. However, they must acknowledge quite early on that migration and its predicaments have already jeopardized the extended family bond, causing a reduction of domestic solidarity around more restricted dimensions of consanguinity. I have observed this process many times over the years. Moreover, when a Moroccan family receives a request from the *bled*,¹⁴ their members can hardly decline, since breaking their social obligations leaves them exposed to collective contempt. More commonly, under pressure, they may adopt some dilatory strategy, postponing the choice until the guest's arrival.

What has to be explained, in my view, is not the withdrawal of the imagined foster family, but the determination of the family of origin on the migratory project of their children, for which the parents have often got into debt – Samira's father spent 6,000 Euros for her journey – or have publicly exposed themselves. This notwithstanding, economic investment and public honour are not always the only stakes: on the one hand parents sincerely desire their children's well-being and imagine, sometimes with a good deal of optimism, that it will be more easily attainable elsewhere; on the other hand they expect to receive some kind of support for the family from their children. This may be by directly requesting money or by emphasizing the daily difficulties of life at home (Vacchiano, 2010). In other cases, as with Samira, parents accept to defer the aid of their expatriate member until a later time, when the bond may be evoked to renew the family solidarity. In these cases, they project on to their children a desire of change and material transformation that corresponds with their frustrated aspirations, and this intensity is sometimes so strong that it prevents them from seeing that that same bond will end up permanently altered. In this drama of distance and want, in which the imaginary of the elsewhere is cultivated through the comparison with a world running at a different speed, children learn to grow up without their parents, relying – when it is possible and in the very best of the cases – on the true affection of a few professionals whose help is bound to expire when they come of age.

Despite her episodes of anger and anxiety, Samira accepts and performs all the tasks she is required to undertake as an immigrant: studying Italian and training for a job, finding employment and leaving the care centre, renting a flat and getting her papers renewed. Still, she is in no hurry to go back to Morocco, even when her brand new documents finally enable her to travel.

In seven years she has learned to accept many things. And yet, she is still not ready to submit to the most difficult one: that, after all her struggles, somebody in her family may say they were right.

14 From the classical Arabic *balad* ('country', 'region', 'inhabited territory'), the Moroccan term *bled* refers to the land of origin and the place of memory.

(Un)disciplined Reflections on Contemporary Migration

The stories of Houda, Princess and Samira draw on clinical practice, but are much more than just clinical vignettes. Considering them as such would mean disregarding their significance as experiences rooted in the present. And yet, they are also much more than stories of migration, since they shed light on some of the most compelling historical and political dimensions of today's world. What discipline might allow us understand them better? Community psychology or migration studies? Colonial history or human geography? Psychoanalysis or evolutionary psychology? The anthropology of the body or the sociology of mobilities? Drawing attention to the relationships between the imaginary and mobility, normativity and aspirations, the body and desire, modernity and individuality, global values and experience, subjectivation and agency, is to speak about many things at once, the meanings of which may only be tentatively grasped above and beyond disciplines.

These vicissitudes are the embodied recap of a tangle of histories in which some models took hold, clashed with others, produced values, were translated into languages, engendered motivations and choices, occasions and encounters, emotions, sensations, muscular tension and biochemical reactions: briefly, they turned into experience. And, like any experience, they are historical, since they illustrate the peculiar subjective possibilities made available in a specific moment and under specific conditions. Because of their paradigmatic features, these stories are presented here to help 'understand the present as a set of lived possibilities and relations' (Moore, 2011: 10).

Theirs is a time in which mobility, a human fact *per se*, has acquired a new tone within a world characterized by exchanges that are intense, but also deeply uneven. As the most recent processes of globalization have certainly influenced the intensity of movement across the globe (Urry, 2007; Castles and Miller, 2009; Castles, 2010), the access to mobility has become one of the most relevant mechanisms of social differentiation and discrimination of the present time (Bauman, 1998; Salazar and Smart, 2011). As Glick Schiller and Salazar have claimed, 'the ability and legal right to travel [has] become one of the criteria by which class is defined and class privilege upheld' (2013: 196). Consequently, a growing number of people in the world have started to claim their right to a better life by using migration as a way of 'projecting themselves into history' (Moore, 2011: 17).

In the stories above, however, migration stands out as indicative of many things simultaneously: negotiation of a new possible individuality, attempt of personal and collective transformation, calculated risk or (self)imposed sacrifice, investment in the future or uprooting which imposes a complete social and existential break. In their complexity, they depict a world of opportunities which pervades the imaginary by force of a new collective visibility: a world where the comparison with the elsewhere (Fouquet, 2007) and the 'desire of being other'

(Benslama, 2004) are the scaffold of a form of subjectivity underpinned by the dictates of the current 'regime of historicity' (Nancy, cit. in Bayart, 2007).

By the term 'subjectivity', I refer to an unconscious – and therefore corporeal – process in which the reality of social and power relations is psychically organized and embodied, giving shape to representations, beliefs, desires, feelings, symptoms, and other forms of association. Through these acts of appropriation, individuals craft their personal features and an original discourse on themselves that temporarily actualizes and reinvents the social norms of the moment. The concept, having emerged in the idealist philosophical tradition, was appropriated by post-structuralism and psychoanalysis, influencing postcolonial studies and filtering through to anthropology by virtue of the works of Stefania Pandolfo (1997), Sherry Ortner (2005), João Biehl (Biehl et al., 2007) and Henrietta Moore (Moore, 2007). Alongside the notion of morality (Kleinman, 2007; Zigon, 2008; Fassin, 2012), that of subjectivity, is one of the key topics of contemporary psychological anthropology, being employed to account for the relationship between the individual and the social world in an ideological scene where the classical notions of culture and ethnicity have reached a state of crisis.

Against this theoretical backdrop, through the idea of 'contemporary subjectivity' I refer to a set of ways of feeling and living in the world which pervade the local forms of life with a new cosmopolitan dimension, influencing the way people represent and depict themselves, imagine the future and build up their moral universe by mixing up values and imaginaries from diverse sites of production. Graw and Schielke have recently suggested that, 'local worlds are increasingly measured against a set of possibilities the referents of which are global, not local' (Graw and Schielke, 2013a: 12). Although, as anthropology and psychoanalysis have widely demonstrated, human beings have always experienced their identity in relation to each other, on the contemporary 'global horizon' (Graw and Schielke, 2013) the presence of the different other – more than ever plural and proximate – has become part of the daily physical experience, requiring the effort of comparison due to its diversity (or, in some cases, superdiversity: Vertovec, 2007).

This powerful imaginary that – probably like never before – saturates and transcends the boundaries of daily practice helps to inform a compensatory representation of the elsewhere whereby other possibilities of life become accessible and, sometimes, haunting. Nonetheless, against an everyday life of precariousness and uncertainty, this 'elsewhere' is often represented as a privileged status which epitomizes all the possibilities of a triumphant modernity: 'a space of imaginaries marked by aspirations to be and live better' (Fouquet, 2007: 84).

As contributions from clinical intervention show, in this world of global markets and values, this desire for transformation and participation – a 'claim to membership' (Ferguson, 2002) – represents not only a possibility of success, but also a new normativity.

Several authors have recently explored the links between mobility, the global imaginary and 'objectified' representations of modernity (in particular regarding

commodities and consumption). In her study on the expectations of modernity and the yearning for migration in Fuzhou, Juliet Chu describes 'the unrelenting desire of the Fuzhouese to leave China, despite the ever-increasing physical dangers and uncertain economic payoff of travelling through transnational human smuggling networks' (Chu, 2010: 4). Particularly, she emphasizes the 'inexplicable craze ... a 'frenzy' of illicit migration ... fuelled by the overflow of Fuzhouese aspirations' (Chu, 2010: 4–5). In a similar vein, Charles Piot observes the 'near universal desire on the part of Togolese to leave their country for what they imagine are greener pastures in Europe and the US' (Piot, 2010: 94). The observations of these authors do not differ much to what I have observed in North Africa over the last decade, either with local people or with the new West African immigrants. The idea of mobility as a 'shortcut' – frequently conveyed by many young immigrants – aptly illustrates the image of this epochal metamorphosis, directed at subverting a social and moral order where a place for oneself has become increasingly difficult to envision.

Although the stories of Houda, Princess and Samira exemplify the ambiguous possibilities of a world in motion – in which mobility is an opportunity to build oneself up, redefine one's own belongings, aspire to a better future, 'save' those left behind and negotiate a possible coherence among desire, reciprocity and coercion – they also speak of the suffering of those who choose (or are chosen) to migrate and inevitably undergo an irreversible transformation.

These stories also show how the migrant condition in Europe is marked by a series of normative procedures and narrative figures which bind the rights of the immigrants to their productive capacity, muscular utility, material performances and work efficacy,¹⁵ as well as to their ability to make themselves compatible with the public images of diversity.¹⁶ Despite this, a kind of appropriation is possible, through forms of 'strategic essentialism' whereby immigrants accept to submit to social and moral pressures in order to assert their needs of self-determination.

Migrants are key figures of the global present, subjects that embody the contradictions and the potentialities of contemporary transformations. Their suffering highlights the features of a world in which human beings and societies are mutually constructed in the struggle between desire and control, movement and localization, fantasy and domination, hope and confinement and in which every one of us tries to conciliate difference and identity.

15 An eloquent résumé of this condition is summed up in the definition of the 'legal immigrant' provided by the European Commission in the document 'Towards a Common Immigration Policy': 'legal immigrants contribute to the economic development of Member States because they are tax payers and consumers of goods and services' (European Commission, 2007, p. 8).

16 As the major of the Andalusian village of El Ejido declared some years ago: 'immigrants are too few in the morning and too many in the evening'.

Beyond Interdisciplinarity: Ethnopsychiatry and the Global Subject

In her article entitled 'Against Interdisciplinarity', Valerie Peterson claimed that neither disciplinary boundaries nor an often ill-defined and contested concept of interdisciplinarity necessarily benefited 'thoughtful scholarship and teaching' (Peterson, 2008: 49). Later that same year, Immanuel Wallerstein made a similar point, arguing that structures of knowledge that emerged during the long nineteenth century failed to grasp 'the existing world social situation' (Wallerstein, 2008: 5). As an alternative, he proposes 'unidisciplinarity' as the common effort to establish an 'historical social science [able] to take a sober and sustained look at the state of the world-system and where it is heading' (Wallerstein, 2008: 6).

Discussing Wallerstein's ideas, Kimala Price acknowledges the historical relevance of disciplinary thought, but also the need to investigate problems beyond disciplinary boundaries and thus, consequently, beyond interdisciplinarity. 'Scholarship', she claims, 'should truly be problem or theory-driven, as opposed to driven by specific methodologies, epistemologies, and frameworks that are discipline-bound' (Price, 2012: 57). Accordingly, she proposes the notion of 'intellectual hybridity' as a form of interdisciplinary interaction which draws on different research traditions in order to address new problems.

If ethnopsychiatry may be considered a new inter-discipline, its approach seems to respond well to this demand of intellectual fluidity, aimed at clearing the way for new theoretical contributions in a pre-paradigmatic situation (Kuhn, 1962). As a practice across boundaries, theoretically plural and intrinsically multi-sited (also in its methodology, which backs the clinical practice up with the ethnography in the countries of origin), ethnopsychiatry moves from the pragmatic need to come to grips with individual suffering in order to predispose a better treatment. In order to do so, it needs to explore the social and historical environment and the power dynamics that result in producing pain and/or illness.

Observed from the intimate experience of its actors, migration appears in all its historically-rooted ambiguity: on the one hand it represents a demand for freedom and self-determination which arises in countries where the postcolonial hopes of equality and democracy have often come to naught; on the other such demands are underpinned by a set of hegemonic benchmarks of being and having that are mainly moulded upon contemporary forms of power and success on a global scale. Nevertheless, these same dimensions are seized by the subjects in the form of fantasies and needs, dreams and aspirations, purposes and projects in order to give shape to new possibilities of life and existence. This way, contemporary subjects emerge by blending together their 'fragmentary engagements' with forms of 'large-scale otherness' (Moore, 2011) and the loyalty to their local (plural) belongings, associated with the forms of identification on which they rest.

In the life stories of many immigrants, mobility appears as the privileged way to integrate a moral community with the acquisition of the right to a sort of 'material citizenship'. Notwithstanding, personal aspirations often clash against the limits imposed by collective obligations and social constraints, which frequently bring

back up again the same structure of domination – between genders, generations, classes and groups – that migration aimed to subvert. Pain and suffering are the results of the difficult transaction between individual expectations and the set of duties, regulations, norms and restrictions imposed on the migrants, both in the country of origin and destination, directed at transforming their desire of change into a common profit.

Migrants' claim for 'global citizenship' (Rygiel, 2010) requires a new set of theoretical and applied instruments in a context where global structures of power constantly reformulate challenges and opportunities. Understanding these challenges, and their political implications, is probably one of the most compelling tasks of social sciences at the present time. To this end, putting interdisciplinarity to work is a way to combine reflection and intervention in order to detect the emergence of new conflicts but also the new possibilities of coexistence and relations.

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