



## Saúde e Sociedade

Print version ISSN 0104-1290 On-line version ISSN 1984-0470

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# Beyond borders and limits: Moroccan migrating adolescents between desire, vulnerability and risk'

Para além das fronteiras e dos limites: adolescentes migrantes marroquinos entre desejo, vulnerabilidade e risco

## Francesco Vacchiano

PhD in Anthropology. Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, University of Lisbon, Institute of Social Sciences.

Address: Av. Professor Aníbal Bettencourt, 9, 1600-189, Lisbon, Portugal.

E-mail: fravacchiano@gmail.com

| This research was initially funded by a PhD grant of the University of Turin and then by a post-doctorate grant provided by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). I carried out my post-doc research at the Center for Research in Anthropology of Lisbon (CRIA-IUL) between 2010 and 2012 and at the University of Lisbon, Institute of Social Sciences, (ICS-UL), from 2013 onwards.

## Abstract

This contribution analyzes and discusses the case of the migration of “unaccompanied” children and adolescents between Morocco and Europe. This analysis was originally presented as a contribution to the Project “Anthropology of Interfaces” (FCT/CAPES). The article examines the ways in which young migrants give meaning to the world and to the experience of mobility, in an attempt to explore the construction of the youth’s experience between contemporary global and (g)local worlds of experience and meaning. The theoretical perspective inspiring the study lies at the intersection of anthropology, psychology and migration studies and is based on the concept of subjectivity, understood as a form of orientation to the world and embodiment of historically and politically defined norms, values and meaning. This orientation influences the imagination and defines specific forms of thinking, acting, speaking, suffering and giving meaning to existence. The article shows that the subjective construction of postcolonial youth and their families is moulded upon a globally-fashioned “desire for modernity and participation”, which clashes with the normative process imposed by the new “discipline of the borders” in Europe, manifested through the bureaucratic and administrative procedures of the so-called “reception”. The combination of these two dynamics concurs in producing the experience of marginality and the following risk also in terms of “disposition to be sanctioned”. Conclusions delve into the paradox of a process in which young migrants are pushed back to the prescribed marginal place in the world which the infringement of the border had tried to subvert.

**Keywords:** Youth; Migration; Morocco; Institutions; Borders; Vulnerability.

## Resumo

Este contributo analisa e discute o caso da migração de crianças e adolescentes “não acompanhados” entre Marrocos e Europa, aprofundado e utilizado como caso de estudo no projeto “Antropologia de interfaces” (FCT/CAPEs). O trabalho prende-se em particular à análise das formas de atribuir sentido ao mundo e à mobilidade, na tentativa de explorar a construção da vivência dos jovens migrantes na relação entre mundo global e mundos (g)locais de experiência e significado. A perspetiva teórica que inspira esta análise situa-se na interseção entre antropologia, psicologia e estudos migratórios e fundamenta-se no conceito de subjetividade, entendida como forma de orientação ao mundo e incorporação de normas, estruturas de valor e de significado, histórica e politicamente definidas, que influenciam o imaginário e a representação, definindo as maneiras específicas de pensar, agir, falar, sofrer e dar sentido à existência. O estudo salienta como a construção subjetiva dos jovens pós-coloniais e das suas famílias é orientada por um “desejo de modernidade e participação” de matriz global que choca-se com os processos normativos impostos pela nova disciplina das fronteiras europeia, manifesta nos procedimentos burocráticos e administrativos do chamado “acolhimento”. A combinação dessas duas dinâmicas concorre para produzir a experiência de marginalidade e o risco consequente, também em termos de “disponibilidade para ser sancionados”. Nas conclusões enfrenta-se o paradoxo de um processo em que os jovens migrantes são reenviado ao lugar marginal prescrito e que a infração da fronteira tinha tentado transformar.

**Palavras-chave:** Jovens; Migração; Marrocos; Instituições; Fronteira; Vulnerabilidade.

## Breaking down barriers

Rashīd left Casablanca aged 15. His ‘attempts’ (*muḥawalāt*) to emigrate started as a game. He still remembers playing with the neighborhood kids in Sidi Bernoussi, throwing tires onto the road and then trying to climb aboard the trucks forced to halt. Nobody knew whether those enormous vehicles were actually going *l-barrā* (‘outside’, ‘abroad’), but it was funny to imagine how it would be to go elsewhere. The point is that some of his friends did finally succeed, and the idea began to gain ground in his imagination. He would look at his father, who he respected so much, but he also saw that his income as a stone mason was barely enough to make ends meet. He would look at his older brother, who wanted to get married but did not have money, and spent his days wandering the city searching for a job. And he would then look at his neighbors, returning from Europe on summer, *‘aīd l-ādhā* (the Feast of the Sacrifice) or the month of Ramadan, who always arrived with good clothing, shoes and, as he says, other “modern things” (*hajāt ‘aṣriyya*). “Enough of messing around” – one day he thought – and the following day hopped on a bus to Tangiers. He lived in the street for eight months, calling home now and again, sleeping in the port and trying to avoid aggression from the police or “security” agents, assaults from other boys – the most dangerous being those living in Dār al-Barūd<sup>2</sup> –, and the perverted lust of the adults who came near at night demanding “filthy acts”. It was no longer a game. Rashid learned the timetables of the boats and the models of the trucks, the nooks where he could squat and the times when checks were less strict. And it was hidden in a truck that, one day, he managed to sneak aboard a ship bound for Genoa-Italy, where he disembarked in September 2008.

Sālim was born in the countryside, in a small village in the El Kelāa des Sraghna region of Morocco. He was the oldest son of a man who had lived in Italy, working in door-to-door sales. Despite his largely informal work, he managed to get his papers and return from time to time to visit his family – a wife and

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<sup>2</sup> The Dār al-Barūd “bordj” (fortress) was built in the second half of the XVIII century upon the old Portuguese city walls and the bastions of the York Castle, erected by the English during the 22 years in which they controlled the city. The port area, located directly beneath the fortress, is currently being renovated. During the years of my research, the ancient westerly bastion was occupied by young men waiting to stow away on trucks about to embark for Europe.

five children – in Morocco. On one of these trips, he suggested taking Sālim back to Italy with him, with the idea of stepping him in as the breadwinner of the family. Sālim was only 16, but he thought this was a reasonable suggestion: he was not fond of school and supplementary courses (virtually compulsory as organized by his same teachers) represented an extra burden on the family. Moreover, going to Italy was a clear step up, as his many friends who had gone there were to testify. His father's unstable employment meant that formal family reunion was out of the question. A solution was thus found through the services of a *semsār* ('intermediary', in this case a trafficker): his uncle sold part of the family land to provide him with fake documents and a ticket to Europe. Sālim reached Turin in January 2007.

Karīm comes from Ksar Sghir, a small port around 20 kilometers from Tangiers. The view of the Spanish coastline from his windows had been with him since childhood, similarly to the stories of the people from the village who crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. Some used to return on summer or for celebrations, some called to greet on the main festivities, other simply disappeared off into the world. His father had often thought of going down the *khārij* ('overseas') route, but, in the end, his job in the port was enough to cover the family needs. However, some other parents began to send their children to Spain: sometimes paying the *semsārā*<sup>3</sup> who organized the 14-kilometer trip across the Straits in a 'patera' or 'zodiac'<sup>4</sup> (some of whom were from the same village and accepted deferred payment); sometimes through an arrangement with the local fishermen, who transported the boys across and then left them on a small raft to reach the coast. Karīm's parents saw this as a good plan and the boy finally reached the Spanish coast one night in July 2010. The plan was perfectly understandable: to make for a reception center, get his documents legalized, study and learn a job and send money back

home. A normal expectation, of course, although perhaps also quite a heavy responsibility for him.

These are three situations I encountered during my research on young people and migratory subjectivity in Morocco, Spain and Italy. The research took place over ten years and its central theme was the life stories and the ways of representing experience by Moroccan children and adolescents directly and indirectly confronted with migration. The spur derived from my work as a psychologist in the Frantz Fanon Centre of Turin, an ethno-psychiatric clinic for immigrant citizens. I explored the theme further during my doctorate in anthropology, in the form of an ethnographic study between Europe and the Maghreb carried out between 2002 and 2008, and again as part of a broad research project focused on post-colonial youth, contemporary subjectivity and mobility<sup>5</sup>. The testimonies and life stories I cite here are only a small part of the numerous situations I encountered – both in clinical work and in ethnographic fieldwork – and which, altogether, inspired the reflections I present here. The material, which includes also formal and informal interviews with families, social workers and institutional actors, was collected in different places and different situations: in the neighborhoods of origin in Casablanca, Rabat, Khouribga and Tangiers; in reception centers in Madrid, Valencia, San Sebastián, Barcelona, Turin, Rome, and Agrigento; but also in the youth detention center of Turin and in the Frantz Fanon Centre in Turin.

I make use of the stories of Rashīd, Sālim and Karīm, true stories with altered names, to introduce the general characteristics of a relatively recent phenomenon, consisting of children and adolescents who experience cross-border migration without the presence of a responsible adult. Their cases illustrate the variety of itineraries, motivations and strategies to move and describe the precursors of a process in which young people take an active

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3 As above, "agents" or "intermediaries".

4 'Patera' is a kind of fishing boat typical of the Cadiz area. The term is used on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar to refer to the ship transporting "illegal" immigrants. 'Zodiac', a private company producing speedboats, is the term used in Morocco to describe the inflatable rubber boats also used for "clandestine" trips.

5 See note 1. My warmest thanks go to all of those young people I met during the years of work and research – for their willingness to exchange stories and worldviews –, to the colleagues at the Frantz Fanon Centre of Turin and to the friends of the Al-Khaima Association in Tangiers (and to Mercedes Jiménez in particular). Thanks also to Diogo Lidónio, for his help in editing the Portuguese version of this article.

role in the choice but also parents may envision their children's mobility as a fulfillment of their own aspirations. The situations I discuss in this article concern exclusively boys who, in the case of Morocco, make up the bulk of the adolescent independent migrants. However, the phenomenon does also involve girls, who mainly - although not exclusively - travel with smugglers and whose cases I have referred to in other works.

Although children and adolescents have always been key figures in human mobilities, their role has taken on a new relevance recently (Suárez Navaz, 2006; Jiménez and Vacchiano, 2011; Suárez-Navaz and Jiménez Alvarez, 2011), not only for their increased number in Europe (European Migration Network, 2010), but also because their movement constitute a litmus test of expectations, desires and aspirations of young people from the Global South today. This article focus especially on the analysis of their subjective orientation in relation to the world, in a bid to explore the contemporary young people's experience between global values and (g) local worlds of meaning. The theoretical perspective inspiring my analysis is situated at the crossroads of anthropology, psychology and migration studies and builds upon the concept of subjectivity, understood as a historically constructed form of feeling and experiencing the world by embodying socially and politically defined norms, values and meanings. Subjectivity is crafted at the intersection of body, mind and world through the physical experience of things and relations and defines specific possibilities of thinking, acting, speaking, suffering and explaining the existence (Biehl et al., 2007; Luhrmann, 2006; Ortner, 2005; Moore, 2007). As Henrietta Moore has recently put it: "How we are placed in space and time links to modes of being - specific ways of thinking, feeling and acting, or relating to things, to others and to ourselves" (Moore 2011, 1-2).

## Childhood as a productive category

It is certainly well documented that, in many places of the world, children may represent a resource for

their family, not only in the so-called "traditional" societies (to which Morocco certainly does not belong). Even in the Global North, at the lower levels of the social scale, it is common to come across children and adolescents who contribute economically to the family revenues, and all the more so in times of crisis of the parental productive capacity. Additionally, mobility is not a new form of children's productivity, as suggested by the cases of the Italian children playing barrel organs in the streets of France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bianchi, 2002; Bianchi et al., 2003) and of the many children and adolescents dispatched away from home as domestic servants in various places of the world (Signorelli, 2006)<sup>6</sup>. Emmy Werner has recently reported that the first immigrant who reached the newly-inaugurated Ellis Island "Immigration Station", on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1892, was the young Annie Moore on the day of her fifteenth birthday. The girl came from Ireland, travelling with her two siblings, aged seven and eight, in order to join her parents, who had emigrated three years before (Werner, 2009). Forced migration is another instance, being transatlantic slave-trade an extreme case in which more than 2.5 million children may have been involved (Vasconcellos, 2008). Despite these major historical antecedents, the element of newness is represented today by the legal and regulatory dimensions which transform children into "minors", and - more specifically, when mobility takes on transnational dimensions - in "migrant" or "unaccompanied minors" (Petti, 2004; Vacchiano and Jiménez, 2012).

From a historical perspective, Fass notes how "even in the most traditional and hierarchical society, and in times of significant change, children can be seen as the "salvation of the family" (Fass, 2005, p. 949). This idea reverberates almost literally with the words of the numerous Moroccan adolescents who explain their migratory endeavor as a mission conceived to "save their parents" (*'aṭaq l-wālidīn*) (Vacchiano, 2010). Along the same lines, Suárez-Navaz (2006) correlates the appearance of new migratory actors - women alone and children - to the "crisis in the traditional system of dependence":

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6 For Morocco see Sommerfelt (2001), Lahlou (2002) and Human Rights Watch (2005).

The impact of the capitalist forms of production on gender and generation is well documented all over the world. The proletarianization of the young adults, as well as of women and children, has substantially altered the system of dependence on which not only domestic production but also political authority and the main mechanisms of social cohesion were based (p. 6).

Moreover, young people become the best runner in international mobility also by reason of the selective mechanisms created by the current system of border devices around the globe. Contemporary “border regime” sorts out the “protectable” from the “deportable” (De Génova, 2002) according to their supposed vulnerability, allowing to escape repatriation to some very specific classes of migrants: minors; asylum seekers who can claim to be individually persecuted or traumatized; proven victims of human trafficking, and a few more in some exceptional cases. This way, adolescents’ cross-border mobility represents also a geography of the movements deemed possible according to the lines of selective permeability drawn by the contemporary bureaucratic border apparatuses (Tsianos and Karakayali, 2010).

In the new transnational social space, therefore, children and adolescents end up being defined (and defining themselves) as the specific actors of productive mobility. They incorporate a mandate of social transformation for themselves and for the historical redemption of their kin. Nonetheless, their bent to travel needs to be interpreted also as the consequence of a new form of consciousness - a kind of “global sensitivity” - of which young people are interpreters and according to which the parental crisis can, in turn, be understood. The young observe the adults through the lenses of the present (it could not be otherwise), ratifying their defeat against the demands of a modern world from which they are excluded. At the same time, parents from the lower classes devolve upon their children their hopes of redemption, whose meaning, although doubtlessly existential, is molded upon some eminently material requirements.

If social conditions in the contexts of origin constitute a good explaining factor (a specific analysis of the Moroccan case can be found in Vacchiano, 2010), their effect should be assessed against the backdrop of the common benchmarks of living that mold the

everyday perception in these contexts. These are standards influenced by global hegemonic norms defining what is desirable and, consequently, desired:

*I decided to leave when I saw the emigrants come to spend their holidays here... they had a car, they were well dressed, had nice shoes... Can you imagine it? My neighbor is maqārish [illiterate] and after three years in Italy he turns up like that... so I thought: “just think what I could do”. (Mohammed, Turin, September 2007).*

Visiting emigrants are often described as evidences of a world at different speeds: on the one hand the daily repetitive time in the neighborhood or village; on the other hand, the ‘shortcut’ - *qte’ t-req* - to the historical transition to a new, coveted state: “modernity”. On the one hand the existential lay-off, represented through categories such as *qanṭ* (‘despair’ or ‘isolation’), *malāl* (‘boredom’), *ḥogra* (‘humiliation’, ‘contempt’), or through the unrelentingly repeated phrase: “*makāyn maddār*” (‘there is nothing to be done’); on the other hand, movement, being in time, change, speed and acquisitive power - consumption -, with their overtones of consolation and comfort. Observing the moral values attached to these forms of personal achievement, we may infer that modernity is not just a time “other” or belonging to other people somewhere else, but the significant set of materials which frames the representations of oneself and the world.

Young people (and their families) are “contemporary subjects” because their world is modern, despite being experienced through deprivation - on the “passive side of globalization”, as Bauman (1998, p. 7) has put it: a deprivation experienced with grief and humiliation and thus perceived as a conviction. James Ferguson uses the term “abjection” to highlight the conflict between the representation of a global “first class” world and the (growing) awareness of the distance from it (Ferguson, 1999). Contemporary world, moreover, has produced a subject whose sense of self can no longer be based on a tradition of immobile repetition: as Habermas has argued, modernity “has to create its normativity out of itself” (Habermas, 1987, p. 7).

More than a structural element of the modern world, globalization can be seen as a form of intuitive representation, a “vision” or a type of “consciou-

ness” of the contemporary world. As Robertson has observed, “globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (Robertson, cit. in Bayart, 2007, p. 6-7). The young Moroccans grow up with this open “consciousness of the world” and develop a set of expectations that are framed within a form of global subjectivity. These expectations are not necessarily at enmity with local discursive traditions: popular Islam, the hegemonic definitions of monarchy, the traditional beliefs and so forth represent “explanatory models” of the reality which intersect with the forms of cosmopolitan modernity, creating hybrid figures of alternatives modernities. Young people are deeply involved in this adjustment, attempting to craft a coherent world by putting together and mixing the local and the global. Their task is something similar to a “*bricolage*” (Bennani-Chraïbi, 1998), in which producing meaning represents a collective investment for the future.

Beside the effort to reconcile these dimensions, many young people have to deal with a significant load of expectations placed on them by their family. For the practical requirements of the contemporary daily life, and according to the current communal wants of “integration through consumption”, families’ hopes for social improvement are often expressed through the material lexicon of things through images of their “comfort” (Miller, 2008). In extreme marginal conditions, this lexicon may become the only language in which common aspirations can be voiced.

*When I call home, my mother always tells me that something has broken, or that she is so tired of washing clothes by hand, that they’ve run out of everything... you know what that means... she doesn’t need to ask... (Moahsim, Turin, September 2007).*

The signs of this material accomplishment do not simply consist of status-symbols, but epitomize the success of a winning form of being, built upon consumption, mobility, communication and freedom as the main markers of a new way of being citizens.

The language of consumption is explicitly directed to a youthful target audience (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2005), normally sensitive to the elements

of status attached to objects. This way, fashionable trousers instead of a worn out suit, a designer t-shirt and, particularly, sneakers (*‘šberdīla’*) – as admired and coveted as, in most cases, economically unattainable – have come to represent major objects of desire, which end up to revert on the subject in form of “dispossessionment” (Stearns, 2006). It is a “subtractive” dynamic, which produces discomfort further amplifying the feeling of marginalization and isolation.

Mobility – both in the sense of social ascent and right to move – frames another set of significant expectations. Youth often convey their feelings of existential suspension and “waitness” (Honwana, 2012) through the ideas of “being stuck”, “to stand still”, “to stay put”, or through other local categories that put across a sense of imposed immobility. Particularly, the different (and unfair) pace of the world appears in the shocking difference of opportunities of those who can move: in the first place, the ruling class of today’s Morocco, largely trained in foreign universities and used to send their children to international schools and then overseas; secondly, the visiting emigrants, whose scant fortune produces an excess of visibility; thirdly, tourists and foreign visitors, whose freedom of movement makes the restrictive system of visas and permits flagrantly unrighteous. It is undeniable that mobility represents one of the main resources on a global scale today, just as its control is one of the most significant ways of exercising power today. As Bauman as early as in 1998 contended:

Mobility climbs to rank of the uppermost among the coveted values – and freedom of movement, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our late-modern or postmodern times [...] Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation (Bauman, 1998, p. 2).

Being “local” – immobile, isolated, on the fringes of an alienated space – is thus perceived as a reason of disaffection and pain, for the inescapable comparison with the many successes that mobility entails. Lacking alternatives, only communication – sometimes an imagined form of mobility – can mitigate these feelings. In Morocco almost all the young people, similarly to their “western” counterparts, spend a great part of their time using devices that

reduce distances and rebuild a sense of community. Through the web, they open themselves to a wider world and feed an imaginary of escape through contact with friends, relatives and acquaintances abroad. By means of the social networks and their materials they share experiences with friends who have left earlier, information about reception centers in Europe, itineraries to avoid controls, day-to-day survival tactics and hints about how to cross borders. Through their networks, young people nurture a trans-local imaginary projected onto an anticipated and coveted elsewhere.

Similarly, the yearning for freedom can be understood in a profound relationship with the system of constraints and possibilities that I am describing. In the majority of the cases I came across, freedom was far from having an open political connotation: in view of the lack of a plausible perspective of change - in Morocco, for the time being, the so-called “Arab spring” has had still a partial impact<sup>7</sup> - the yearning for liberty is expressed in a more individualistic way, as desire of self-construction, personal struggle against the limits, cultivation of self-esteem and right to differentiation. This way, the idea of migrating as a personal sacrifice for the family, appears at times as a rhetorical justification which provides the individualist project with a form of collective legitimacy, in concordance with the publicly admissible values.

This set of elements - represented both by the factual conditions in which subaltern classes live in Morocco and by a contemporary subjectivity which has already taken on the dictates of the contemporary “global horizon” (Graw and Schielke, 2013) - contribute to shape an emotional disposition (individual, but also collectively shared) in which feelings are molded upon an “other (and outer) place”, an imaginary time and space where one day life will be possible. This “elsewhere” is a place of open possibilities and alternatives, where the individual

will finally find his place and his just reward and remuneration. It is not a mere geographic projection (sometimes one does not even know where it is), but first and foremost a metaphysical entity, entirely defined by one’s own self-projections and expectations. It is a virtual and a too-real place at once, built on the idea of a symbolic compensation, which takes a material form in the signs of a possible modernity. The present is gradually invested by the force of its images and the everyday quest for meaning ends in a certainty: the “elsewhere” is the only place where life is worth living. Risking does not seem so daunting, while the idea of sacrifice pays off the possibility of getting lost. Not even death can scare someone who, at heart, feels immobility as the most painful form of death-in-life.

This powerfully motivating imaginary construction ends up to clash against a reality which is much more complex and hard than one could ever imagine. From margins to marginality the step is sometimes very short...

## Desire and punishment

The most used word to define illegal immigrants in the Maghreb comes from the Arabic verb “burning” (*ḥaraqqa*), pronounced in the vernacular way: “*ḥarrāqa*” are “those who burn” documents of identity - as the early illegal immigrants seem to have done - but, also, metaphorically, interdicts and prohibitions and, therefore, borders. The term has recently spread all over the Maghreb due to the dramatization of migration engendered by the restrictive European border policies. The powerful affective dimensions of the migratory endeavor makes the burning a passage invested with all of the subject’s physical and moral energy (Pandolfo, 2007).

*I burned three times leaving from Casablanca’s port... The first two times I was sent back on the same ship, from Marseille, but the third I got throu-*

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<sup>7</sup> Despite being an important novelty in the Moroccan political landscape, the “20th of February Movement”, emerged in the wake of the uprisings in Tunisia, Yemen and Egypt, acts in a context in which authority is solidly constituted around the figure of the monarch. His legitimacy is reinforced through images of religious preeminence having a large public impact. Aware of his bearing over the people, the Moroccan monarch anticipated the explosion of the protest through a well thought-out institutional makeover, promoting some changes in the Constitution so as to suggest that he was reducing his prerogatives. The result - very partial in transforming the actual power relations - consisted mainly in weakening the protest and, at least while I am redacting these lines, in the marginalization of the 20F Movement.

*gh. Marseille was filled with compatriots... certain Moroccan boys attended a children's center, or something of the sort. I was not interested in that. I needed to make money for my family [...] I stayed there for one month, but there was nothing for me. Then a friend told me about Turin... I knew what Moroccans used to do there. Everyone from Sidi Moumen knows what is in Turin. I thought I could make a little money to send home... there, everyone is poor, there is nothing to do, they are in need [...]. At the beginning I made good money. Everyone said I was good. I tell you, I didn't spend much, I wasn't like those who spend everything and are always drunk... no, I sent money home... then I was nabbed. They came by car and found me with "zetla"<sup>8</sup> in my pocket. But now I'm going to get out and I won't do that anymore... ullah [I swear]! (Kamāl, youth detention center, Turin, May 2007).*

*I was 16 when I arrived in Turin... I went to Ceuta and I lived with some guys for a while... One day I took a boat to Spain. My uncle sent me money from Turin and I caught a train... I worked in construction for three years, the company hired me because I am good at laying tiles... I sent money home, and when my brother came too my uncle helped us renting a room with some other Moroccans. After that I stopped getting work, and then my uncle said I couldn't stay as I didn't have any money. At home, back in Morocco, everyone asked what was happening... (Abdelhamīd, inpatients psychiatric unit, Turin, April 2009).*

Crossing the sea holds all the features of a new beginning. It is not uncommon that parents ratify their children's new status with expressions of recognition and investiture (Vacchiano, 2010). In this process, time suddenly accelerates, in the swift transition between immobility and action and from childhood to adulthood. The transformation into a migrant, with its load of new obligations, makes it urgent to prove one's own capabilities - both to

oneself and the others - and money turns out to be the better distinctive mark making the difference between success and failure. Consequently, money tends to become a measure of individual ability, family loyalty and personal moral value. Strength of character, resistance, bravery and slyness are all desirable qualities of a little entrepreneur ready to "burn" himself for his goals. It is as though, in a "mimetic excess" (Taussig, 1993), the neo-capitalist dictates of speed and risk take an embodied form in the physical and emotional configurations that they produce. He who "runs fastest" and knows how to "get by", involving his whole body for the acquisitive (and transformative) purpose is, therefore, he who best knows how to interpret the principles of the new world and the ways of living in and commanding it.

In this configuration of subjective dispositions, feelings and values, it is not surprising that many young migrants try to keep away from the institutions for minors' reception, preferring to rely on compatriots or natives who promise a quicker access to money and to all that comes with it. Available to self-employment and eager to accomplish their migratory mission, they are easily drawn into circuits of labor or sexual exploitation or petty crime - stealing, dealing drugs, assaulting - which provide at first an ambiguous appearance of success. Through these movements, the young migrants - who are now "unaccompanied minors"<sup>9</sup> - step progressively into a new form of marginality, represented by a pain chain between deviance and punishment: their specific "vulnerability", in this sense, is not so much defined by being "fragile" from a psychological or physical point of view - which, in some cases, may also occur - as by being exposed to a process in which willingness for self-exploitation and following retribution (through prison, corrective measures and, as time goes by, exclusion from the possibilities of legalizing documents) are recursively reproduced. We should remember, however, that many countries, while

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<sup>8</sup> A piece of hashish, ready to be dealt.

<sup>9</sup> Recognizing the growing impact of children migrating alone in Europe, the Council of the European Union coined the definition of "unaccompanied minor" for all "third-country nationals below the age of eighteen, who arrive on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long as they are not effectively in the care of such a person" (Council Resolution 97/C 221/03 of 26 June 1997). The resolution is consistent with the commitments assumed by the European countries upon signing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which include specific obligations to protect all the children living in or passing through their territory.

formally provide programs and facilities to receive and protect foreign minors, thwart concurrently their efforts through flawed age-assessment tests, poor-quality interventions and major obstacles to legalization (Parousel, 2011; Vacchiano, 2012). In such cases, informal or illegal circuits end up providing more reliable and attractive resources, being also consistent with the objectives of departure. This scenario differs among the various European countries, where discrepancies account also for distinct welfare-state models and traditions of social working. A description of the different reception models and their consequences have been covered elsewhere (European Migration Network, 2010; Senovilla Hernández, 2007 and 2012; Kanics and Senovilla Hernández, 2010) and is beyond the scope of this discussion. It bears noting here that accepting to join an integration program - following all its steps: language learning, vocational training, legalization etc. - requires a negotiation with the time whose outcome is not taken for granted. Indeed, the many adolescents who flee the educational establishments do not see the point of spending time there when opportunities appear finally so accessible and close. When questioned about the meaning of their flight, many emphasize that they simply have no time to waste “playing like kids” or doing something “unproductive”. The gap between the image of themselves as active entrepreneurs and the delayed time of adulthood in our (and also their) society combine with the discrepancy between the synchronous and punctual time of the desire - “here and now” - and the diachronic, prolonged and everyday time of the institution<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, in the words of contemporary young migrants, a new accent can be perceived, a tone which vibrates in harmony with the principles of a time of acceleration and speed. If swiftness is one of the common transcultural denominators of adolescence today, this is also due to the promise of “emancipation of time” that modernity constantly renews (Giddens 1991; Miller 1994). For post-colonial

young people, hurrying cannot be merely circumstantial: it is “historical”, to the extent it represents the voracious aspiration to belong to the present - to “be in time” (Bayart 2007) or, as observed by Fethi Benslama, “to be other” - in all its distinctive characteristics (Benslama, 2004). Haste does stand for the imperiousness of a “claim for membership” (Ferguson, 2006) to the world and its opportunities, an attainment that can no longer be postponed. This way, the recurrent references to illicit and punishment in the young people’s discourses - synthesized through notions like *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*<sup>11</sup> - highlight the moral contradiction between the urgency of the acquisitive mandate and the dimension of “sin” that it implies. There is no lack of examples, indeed, of colleagues and acquaintances who, at the junction between desire and limits, have come to ‘lose’ themselves (*ḍaiyy’a*), ending up in prison or, worse, as addicted or insane.

## Conclusions: being modern

In a work concerning Africa and/in the “new world order”, James Ferguson discusses the transformation of the idea of modernity in the shift from a finalist order (well represented by the idea of “development”) to a moral global order: seen from Africa - suggests Ferguson - modernity does no longer appear as a possible, and therefore credible, promise - an objective within reach or a plausible process towards an attainable goal (a form of *telos*) -, but rather as a specific and institutionalized global order of things - a *status*, representing the “condition of being first class” (Ferguson, 2006, p. 186). Young Moroccans, as with their peers in many other places around the globe, grow up with the legitimate ambition to embrace this status, through the subjection to and the appropriation of a way of “being-in-the-world” made of movement, consumption, self-construction and desire for change. To this aspiration corresponds a feeling of systematic

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<sup>10</sup> For a reflection on time of mobility and time in institution in the French reception system see Duvivier, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> In classical Arabic the two terms, which may be traduced as “licit” and “illicit”, are not necessarily opposed (for instance, *ḥarām* is a polysemous term which includes also the idea of the “sacred”). However, the two concepts are opposed in the common use, taking on an undertone of ideas like “the good” and “the bad”.

exclusion - a sentiment of immobilization and confinement - resulting from the alliance between mechanisms of class reproduction in Morocco and border devices that reinvent the historical power relations between Europe and its South (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2010). Facing a world “in movement”, they perceive the burden of their own stillness and dispose themselves to challenge it through an absorbing personal commitment. Moving “at any cost” turns into a vital imperative, by which the subject finds a possibility of self-determination and differentiation.

Young Moroccan migrants are aware of their weighty social mandate tied up to the need of “generational redemption” of their families. The idea of “saving the parents” represents not only the awareness of the historic failure of their progenitors’ generation in the post-colony, but also a powerful rhetorical strategy to reaffirm family ties when they are more intensely placed under tension. The commitment towards the family and the urgency of one’s own desire require a complex negotiation with time: the fantasy of a rapid transformation through a new (“modern”) status is at odds with the reality of the everyday obligations, in which the visibility of personal success is often a pressing imperative (Sayad, 1999).

The misunderstanding cannot be more striking: instead of providing with a rapid success and a new enhanced status, being a migrant means to be exposed to new forms of classification in the country of arrival and having to take on much more complex responsibilities. The imagined shortcut to the new status thus leads to a new marginality. Escaping from vulnerability (that I defined as a cycle unremittingly reproducing self-exploitation and repression) requires one to break painfully with desire, accepting the complexity of a reality which is different from what had been imagined. “Submission” to a different time - the time of growth, but also the time of everyday, step-by-step work - corresponds to the only possible strategy of “subjectivation”. As Judith Butler, commenting on Foucault’s reflections on the relationship between power and subjection, observes:

No individual becomes a subject without first becoming subjected or undergoing ‘subjectivation’ (a translation of the French *assujétissement*). [...] A power exerted on a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject’s becoming” (Butler, 1997, p. 17).

The young Moroccans migrants leave their country in search of a new and different opportunity of belonging, defying local social boundaries and the barriers to transnational mobility imposed by Europe. Their ideal and emotional impulse is shaped by an aspiration for social redemption, a desire of participation, a hope for change, based on a compensatory imagine of the “elsewhere”. The reality of global power relations appears to be much more complex, pushing the subject back to its historical marginal place and recalling what challenging the limits may eventually entail: burning the borders or getting irreparably burned.

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Received: 07/17/2013  
 Reviewed: 11/03/2013  
 Approved: 01/07/2014