Nomadic voices
Women's migration experiences and self-perception

Voci nomadi
Esperienze migratorie femminili e percezione di sé

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abstract

This qualitative study, carried out in the Naples area, is aimed at presenting the experience of migration, the condition of being a woman and the concept of integration. That is from the point of view of several immigrant women in order to reassess educational practices and designed to encourage the integration of women migrants within the social fabric of the host city from a pedagogical and feminist perspective.
Migration involves a rupture in the complex system of interactions between the individual and the country (context) of origin. The essay analyses these issues based on the words of the migrants themselves, in terms of representations of the role of women and the perspective of emancipation.

Keywords: immigrant women, feminist pedagogy, narrative

Questa ricerca qualitativa, condotta sul territorio della città di Napoli, ha l'obiettivo di presentare l'esperienza migratoria, il vissuto femminile e il concetto d'integrazione dal punto di vista di alcune donne immigrate allo scopo di ripensare da una prospettiva pedagogica e femminista le pratiche formative volte all'inclusione delle migranti all'interno del tessuto sociale della città ospitante. La migrazione, infatti, comporta una rottura nel complesso sistema d'interazioni soggetto-contesto di appartenenza. Il saggio analizza tali questioni a partire dalle parole delle migranti stesse, anche in termini di rappresentazioni del ruolo femminile e di prospettive di emancipazione.

Parole chiave: *donne immigrate, pedagogia femminista, narrazione*

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Introduction

The complexity of the society in which we live in is marked by the emphasis on difference, an epoch-changing category associated with issues such as sex, race, culture and religion.

It is a phenomenon linked to the increase, in Italy and in the rest of Europe, of contemporary flows of migrants and the associated problems of interaction and integration.

Inclusion is considered today as the main instrument for expressing citizens 'rights', the combination of social, civil and political needs that make up citizenship as a multidimensional path.

In particular, migration requires that attention should be focused on gender issues and the policies and actions that need to be undertaken.

Social and cultural life are becoming increasingly marked by the presence of different voices and identities, by encounters between women and men, girls and boys who ask permission to speak, demanding acknowledgement, occupying spaces and innovating languages, thoughts, behaviours and traditions.

Increasingly plural and transversal dimensions of action and relations result in unprecedented and varied forms of marginalisation and social exclusion, challenging the nature of citizenship, defined as an inclusive community that aims to restore the potential of social peripheries which are too often voiceless and lifeless.

One of the most powerful forces in contemporary world, is nomadism, as it coincides with the movement of huge masses of individuals, capable of evoking imaginary homelands and activating through an emotional and cognitive contamination, the continuing restructuring of its own vision of the world and their relationship with the others. This does not only represent an opportunity of creating social relationships and political collocations, but also a way of building and experimenting identities in opposition, so to get rid of stereotypes and contrast gender discriminations and social exclusion (Braidotti, 2005, pp. 21-22).

Particularly interesting, from a pedagogical point of view, is the definition of "nomadism", in the postmodern and feminist sense, by Rosi Braidotti, starting from foucaultian positions and by nomadic discourse of Gilles Deleuze regarding the need to place individual as embodied who based her/his discursive strategy on original and irreducible sexual difference, find the task of thinking every other difference (Crispino in Braidotti, 1994, p. VII).

In fact, she proposes that the representation of the subject in general is nomadic because social class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other specific traits are the differentiating axes, that intersecting and interacting subjectivity. The notion of nomadic refers to the simultaneous occurrence of some or many of these traits in the same individual.

Then, in her theorizing of this idea, the new "nomadic subject" Braidotti draws on feminist theory. Speaking as a feminist means nevertheless, to give priority to issues relative to gender, or rather, to the sexual difference in acknowledgement of the differences among women (Braidotti, 1994, p. 7).

For Braidotti the female subject is nomadic because of the multiple, incarnate, cultural and indeterminable and regardless of its being settled, since the female intellectuality, which was developed while circulating between the spaces of traditional awareness and places of feminist deliberation, have intersected the linearity of disciplinary procedural knowledge with the transversal nature of their own experiences.

So nomadism, in addition to being a physical experience, it becomes a mental attitude, a critical consciousness (awareness) that is escaping to compositions of thought and socially coded behavior, that opens new horizons of the meanings: go, relocate "in another story".

However, the nomadic also implies a profound difference in the relationship to the place that one occupies at any given time.

It is a trait that is not limited only on those who travel or to the people who have been alienated to lands that are far away from their own, nor is it a pure exercise of the mind. Rather it means asking one each self in each own place and admit the scope of doubt, the questioning of one's life, the reversing of agreements. Yet this nomadic trait focuses on a desire for dislocation and on multilanguage play.

The subject of travel and displacement, as metaphors of eternal search of oneself are exposed to the events of self- and hetero-transformational resulting from it, leading to the demolition of some absolute, for example, the values shared by the group.

From both sides, the sentimental and the epistemological, the transfer is painful: it is the creating theory on their own life.

Braidotti's notion founds a new model of subjectivity for European Union, based on trasnational process of identities and on post-national space. Pedagogical goal is to outline and focus with nomadic lense the condition of possibility to develop new critical devices to educate a non-anthropocentric and non-phallocentric subjectivity.

1. Migrant women: relationships, identity and integration

The contemporary scenario, in Italy and in the rest of the world, has been marked by an increase in flows of women migrants. Rising numbers of women inhabit our cities, speaking languages we do not understand and constituting an important presence for the communities of which they are a part. They take care of elderly and children for many hours each day, some-times even 24 hours a day. Through their daily work they become the over-seers of houses they do not own and enable other women to cope more eas-ily with the dual role of working both inside and outside the family home ("double presence"). Without their collaboration, most of the work of west-ern women outside the home would not be possible and many families would be faced with a reduction in the quality of their living standards.

They often immigrated alone to find a place in a labour market that is reserved for women. They are dynamic, productive and often play a lead-ing role in the migration strategy. They take it upon themselves to provide a future for their family by the decision to leave their country, through a family strategy which is well-organised and intended to improve their eco-nomic conditions, transforming themselves from housewives to breadwin-ners. This is a new aspect of the migration process which has traditionally been associated solely with male emigration (Macioti, Vitantonio, Per-sano, 2006, p. 32).

The journey is undertaken in order to achieve a economic improve-ment as the first option, followed by family reunification or, less frequent-ly, by travel for romantic reasons. Even though sporadic, there are other reasons behind emigration, such as self-discovery, the need for specialist medical care and escape from one's country of origin (D'Ignazi, Persi, 2004, p. 102). Although in recent years the trends related to women's mi-gration flows in Italy have changed, according to ISTAT, many of them work as caregivers and domestic workers (around one and a half million, more than a half without a residence permit) (Fondazione ISMU, 2014).

Nonetheless, being a migrant woman has many different meanings. Through their journeys, living as single women and having a job, some of these women experience emancipation and achieve unexpected levels of

freedom. On the other hand, others become slaves and seldom succeed in freeing themselves (in the case of prostitution or working for a "master").

Therefore, the women who seek Italian citizenship comprise a huge range of individuals with widely differing social, political, economic and juridical levels whose integration requires a deeper knowledge of their culture. These women bring to Italy a range of skills and spiritual experiences which represent a valuable resource, not just in economic terms.

On closer inspection, they are the true "driving forces" of integration, capable of overcoming discomfort, difficulties and fears more than men. They act as real "agents" of integration for the respective ethnic groups within the wider context of immigration (Cardinali, 2008, p. 34).

However, so little is known of them that they sometimes become invisible and there are few legal and social measures designed to ensure their full admission and inclusion within the host communities. Although they account for just under half of the entire foreign population in Italy (40%), women continue to live in conditions of social invisibility (also in the media, Campani, 2001): this situation is often accompanied by a state of isolation caused by being trapped exclusively in domestic roles or in caregiving, both from the point of view of their family or of their jobs (working as caregivers, domestic workers, etc.).

This invisibility often regards young women too. The main difficulty for girls lies in being on the edge of two identities, running the risk of falling into line with the adoptive one, accepting its worst elements, or clinging to their original identity even in its more narrow-minded, conservative guise (Patuelli, 2005; Marone, 2014).

Actually we can see a progressive little change in the media (Giorgi, 2012) due to high degree of internal differences in terms of migratory experience and legal status who make representation of migration as an not all male process (Bonizzoni, 2011). Though where they do become visible, migrant women are predominantly represented through cultural lenses, portrayed as 'the others': victimized figure, submissive.

Yet these migrant women have caused – both in their countries of origin and their countries of arrival – a redefinition of the roles in caring, family strategies as well as of policies regarding educational themes, services, inclusion and citizenship. This additional contribution is scarcely recognised because of prevailing representations and stereotypes.

The fact that their role within the community is barely acknowledged leads to the erosion of identity with serious consequences at a psycho-social level. Birthright citizenship (*ius soli*) and the residence permit represent the highest aspiration and the first step in regaining an existence as citizens and also as human beings with rights.

In terms of education, economic independence, working status and political status, women are still at a disadvantage compared to men, just like immigrants, and in particular immigrant women. These women, for instance, are less integrated than immigrant men in the labour market, regardless of their country of origin.

This statistic raises serious questions about the dynamics of intergenerational social mobility, suggesting that first generation immigrants are far more integrated than foreign workers born in the country of destination (second generation immigrants) (Di Bartolomeo, Strozza, 2014, p. 49).

More specifically, the dynamics of migration in Italy have called into question the social, economic and cultural system.

In particular, migration flows of women have provided an opportunity to make comparisons between the citizens of industrialised countries and countries in the southern hemisphere, highlighting the divide between men and women and their participation in the labour market and their salaries, their access to education and healthcare services.

There have been virtually no initiatives to recognise, accredit and update the qualifications possessed by migrant women in Italy. They have needs, aspirations and unexpressed resources. Above all, they need to be listened to rather than receiving welfare. Little attention is shown to the education they received before the migration event, contravening the obvious need to empower them in their strenuous attempts to reconstruct their professional careers and gain recognition for their qualifications on the base of their personal capacities and goals (Balsamo, 1997). So often theirs is a "frozen Professional destiny" (Campani, Chiappelli, 2014).

Their aspirations and goals are a crucial aspect of the integration process.

2. Telling about the migration experience: a qualitative study

Naples has become a melting-pot with widely differing experiences of female migration from the first arrivals of women from the Philippines and Cape Verde, in the 1970s, and the subsequent arrivals of Polish women, followed by Ukrainian and Romanian women in the 1990s.

Rather than being a single process, it is necessary to emphasise the co-existence of different migration models and a variety of social, cultural and economic ties. Half of these women are married, a third have left their children at home; some of them arrived alone, some have been reunited with their families, others have settled down and started a family, while still others keep on travelling back and forth between Italy and their coun-

try of origin. Almost all of them send money home to enable their children to study or to support their families (Bonora, 2011, pp. 6-7).

Being part of family networks (like Chinese women), rather than being alone, conditions their representation in the imagination of the host society, oscillating from the positive status of women who need to find their place in the host culture to the negative status of prostitutes (Miranda, 2014, p. 284).

The research carried out in the Naples area made it possible to study the experience of immigrant women by collecting their life stories through interviews.

An analysis was subsequently made of the conversations, which lasted about an hour each and dealt with various themes (the experience of migration, educational background, relationships with family and friends, rights, identity in general, the significance of integration, the affiliations and representations of the self, plans and goals) from a phenomenological perspective (Sità, 2012; Mortari, 2007).

The chosen theme, which offered wide margins of flexibility, made it possible to identify issues regarding the experience of the journey through territories and contexts that differ significantly in anthropic terms.

The aim of the research was to focus on identity representations and the ways in which seven women tackled the process of integration in the Neapolitan social environment. They have lived in Naples for over nine years, and come from two geographical areas: Sri Lanka and Ukraine. The objective was to analyse the process of integration from their own perspective and to contextualise the experience, redefining spheres of intervention domains from an educational perspective[1].

The study gave a voice to the women who could talk and think together with the researchers about the roles and existential conditions of women and to bring their stories to the fore (D'Ignazi, Persi, 2004).

Feminist research focused on subjective experience has changed the very concept of presence and participatory action, moving from the formal and juridical/institutional level to the personal and cultural/political level. This relativist and non-predictive method highlights the limits of traditional scientific thought which – by promoting its universal and neutral system – proves to be ill-suited to revealing the importance of the social experience of women (Olesen, 2000).

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1 Interviews and relative textual analysis have been addressed within the FARO project entitled Dimensions, measures and determiners of immigrants' integration in the societies of destination, coordinator and scientific responsible professor Salvatore Strozza, Naples, University of Study Federico II, 2012-2014.

Feminist research in the field of pedagogy (Lather, 1991) generally employs qualitative methodologies, using case studies, the collection of experiences and autobiographical material (Merrill, West, 2009).

Following a bottom-up approach, the qualitative method has the merit of underlining the perspective of the subject matter of the research (considered in their own specificity and uniqueness), as part of an analysis based on experience. This is the most innovative typology generated by feminist thought (Luke, Gore, 1992).

Female subjectivity occupies a foreground role in women's knowledge, supported – in relation to the socio-cultural context and the focus on their own and others' emotional states – by many different dimensions: care, desire, responsibility, curiosity, sharing and love.

This analytical methodology also highlights the researcher's perspective and their level of involvement (Demazière, Dubar, 1997). Indeed, the whole experience brought to light several problematic issues related to the subjectivity of the researchers carrying out this study, their position in the relationship (for instance, as white western women), their role in the context, the theme of power in the relationships between researchers and the subjects of their studies. It involves an "assumption of responsibility" towards differences between the women and within the research team which leads to a complete reassessment of the critical methodologies and the "female genealogy" of each person (whether interviewer or interviewee).

From this perspective, the space of the narrative makes it possible to include personal accounts into more extensive accounts, underlining the stances of interviewees not as a quantitative plurality but as a qualitative multiplicity where the feminine world becomes a factor in the destabilisation of identity and the plan, and, at the same time, a driving force for rethinking the future and giving hope.

In this way, one's name is marked inside a macro-narrative that appeals to a new form of responsibility, considering "life" as the subject, rather than the object, of research (Braidotti, 2008).

Firstly, it is necessary to adopt an undogmatic and anti-essentialist stance. In other words, we should question the social, economic, cultural and ethical categories for thinking about and describing emigration and immigration which are used implicitly and are often nationalistic (Sayad, 1999, pp. 367-368).

It is striking how terms such as "acceptance", "assimilation" and "integration" appear ethnocentric, skewed and biased. In this study, the term "integration" has different meanings according to the perspective employed (that of the interviewee or of the interviewer).

What emerges during the conversations is not the demand for abstract

rights but a pragmatic approach towards what is more useful to put personal plans into practice.

Moreover, not all the interviewees immediately understand the meaning of the term "integration" since it appears to be absent from their Italian vocabulary.

> *What can I say? Here there is the possibility of achieving all sorts of plans if you have any in mind. For me it was very important that I left my town, because I had many economic problems there and I thought only of working and earning money. Here, instead, I have economic security. I have got all the necessary documents and everything is sorted. I feel relaxed and I have also been able to do many things that were utterly impossible there.* [Natalia, Ukrainian, 55 years old, domestic helper].

The majority of the interviewees displayed a great capacity for acceptance. In several narratives, the concept of integration becomes synonymous with a "good life" (Spanò, Domecka, 2014, pp. 220-222), the possibility of having an acceptable life and achieving small plans in a modest sense, also implying the adaptation to the rules and constraints of the new environment and even self-restraint. In these experiences, this means the possibility of having a normal life: a home, a job, friends, a family but also feeling free.

> *The life I lead now… having a home, a job, friends in this country… yes, now I feel free, I feel integrated. When I used to work around the clock, no… I didn't feel good.* [Stella, Ukrainian, 39 years old, caregiver].

A restricted version of integration, sometimes confined to a neighbourhood or a low social bracket, sometimes restricted to small groups of fellow nationals, does not even contemplate seeking equality with ordinary citizens because "Italians are Italians" (Spanò, Domecka, 2014, p. 235).

> Q: *What does it mean for you to be Italian?*
> A: *Let's say that to be Italian you must be born Italian. It is difficult to tell, because I've never thought what being Italian means. Italians are Italians.* [Natalia, Ukrainian, 55 years old, domestic helper]

The participants describe their personal experience as immigrants, clearly expressing problems that are common to "migrants" and their conflictual re-definition of a female identity which is situated between two different cultures: the community of origin and the host community.

> Q: *If you could choose, which nationality would you assign yourself and what plans do you have?*
> A: *Well… as far as nationality is concerned, if I could choose, I think I'd choose dual nationality, oh yes* [Tani, Sri Lankan, 23 years old, student].

The themes of the journey and travel, the metaphor for the never-ending search for the self – exposed to transformational events arising from the self or other – lead to the destruction of certain absolute principles, such as the values shared by the community of origin (Leed, 1992).

In the physical and mental journey that continuously accompanies the displacement of men and women – driven by the historical and social conditions of their countries – being a foreigner represents both an opportunity and a chance. At the same time, the journey can be extremely traumatic and being a foreigner conceals a silent reality that risks degenerating into life on the periphery of human society (Deluigi, Wright, 2013, pp. 61-70).

The dual condition of emigrant and immigrant, being suspended between two worlds and the distance from one's roots, leads to a hybrid and mixed race culture in which different ways of being and facing reality merge, culminating in the transformation into figures who are doubly subversive, both in relation to the host community and the society of origin (Sayad, 1999).

> *I can't really explain. I feel comfortable here, even though I would like to go back… They are not the same they were before, 13 years have gone by and so I go back home, but after a while I don't feel at home any longer. After a week or two weeks, let's say, I already feel like a foreigner.* [Alina, 36 years old, Ukrainian, shopkeeper].

> *I went to Corso Umberto to look for a dress. I entered the shop. People don't realize I'm Ukrainian because I'm not blonde. The lady said: "Come in , come in…" So, I went in and began to look at the dresses but when I began to speak and she realised from my accent who I was, then the - how do you say it?- "sales assistant" said "Are you Ukrainian?" and I was lost for words. Then I looked at the stuff and the dresses but maybe even if there had been anything I'd liked, I wouldn't have bought it.* [Stella, Ukrainian, 39 years old, caregiver].

On the one hand, this lifestyle and line of thinking leads to the deconstruction of identities and their restructuring, creating richness and variety (Braidotti, 1994, p. 16); on the other hand, it is also painful, generating feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, fragmentation and loss, in a continuous cross-

ing of borders and reshaping of the map of the borders between bodies and discourses, identities and communities (de Lauretis, 1999, pp. 47-48).

Their children sometimes provide their only emotional refuge. Alone, without the support of their mother and the family network, without being able to count on their support for providing and transmitting care practices – especially when their own traditions do not correspond to those of the host country – they may feel disorientated.

This break with tradition and the accompanying difficulties affect family life and the capacity of both partners to perform their parental functions in serenity (Marone, 2012b).

This leads to the risk of conflicts arising within the conflicting dynamics of the couple, particularly in the case of interfaith families where the pressures exerted by the culture of the country of origin can trigger conflicts between educational principles of the mother and the father (Iavarone, Marone, Sabatano, 2015).

In other cases, migration engenders a rupture in the complex system of parent-children interaction and the separation from children causes loneliness, anxiety, pain and the idealisation of parental roles (Bonifazi, Crisci, 2014, pp. 157-169).

However, compared to native inhabitants, there is a greater capacity to provide support for their children and help them to acquire more independence from a cosmopolitan perspective (Longman, De Graeve, Brouckaert, 2013; Zanatta, 2011; Spanò, 2011).

During the interviews, some of them express their awareness of the need to regain possession of a part of their past lives, whose suppression has been facilitated by the complex path towards the host society, or has been put aside due to a sense of inadequacy and inferiority created by certain situations and contexts of the new environment (Ulivieri, 2010, p. 561).

> I feel that I have a huge hole within me, I suppose in relation to what I really am. I feel that there is a piece missing and as long as I don't get it back, I can't say whether I feel more Italian or more Sri Lankan; I don't know yet, to tell you the truth [she laughs]. [Tani, Sri Lankan, 23 years old, student].

The bonds of friendship and women's networks (together with associations and church communities) represent a crucial source of support for immigrants and particularly for women to help get oriented and settle down in a new socio-cultural environment (Battistoni, Oursana, 2012).

They clearly belong mainly to the economic category of domestic work

and their employers resemble sisters or mothers in their accounts. If they work for an elderly person, they speak about him or her as a grandparent or a parent. However, beyond their attempt to equate their condition with a family atmosphere, there is a profound sense of alienation which, even in their accounts and responses, reflects a significant social distance (Miranda, 2014, pp. 285).

> *Let's say that in my life I have everything that makes me feel good. The job is very demanding and exhausting. I wake up at seven or half past seven, and go to sleep at eleven. It is very tiring but if I have my two hours' break in the afternoon, I go into my bedroom, close the door, switch my computer on, then have a rest or do something I like, the job doesn't affect me. Let's say that we have an unspoken agreement with this family: I don't intrude in their life and they don't intrude in mine.* [Natalia, Ukrainian, 55 years old, domestic helper].

Sometimes no alterations are made to provide proper accommodation so migrant workers do not have their own personal space or private place.

> *Right, I've got my little home in their house because it has everything I need. It is a place where I can be alone, because if a person works without their own room the situation is extremely tough. Sometimes we need to close the door or write a letter or speak on the phone or well… do anything… just a spend a little time in our own little world.* [Natalia, Ukrainian, 55 years old, domestic helper]

The parts of the city occupied by local inhabitants during the week and leave at the weekends or during holidays are transformed by the presence of migrants into spaces of exclusion, often becoming places of gender segregation, of groups of women rather than men.

The descriptions of the move away from their own country, as well as the separation from their certainties and habits, have shown that the contact with otherness and the self-alienation imply an epoché – a suspension – that raises major issues of freedom, and even of fear and bewilderment (Fucecchi, 2000, p. 49).

This condition has repercussions on the life of the couple for some women who, after experiencing a certain degree of emancipation and resilience, cannot tolerate the constraints and compromises.

Language – a crucial factor for integration – is mostly learned in informal contexts and represents a considerable obstacle.

The educational backgrounds of these multilingual women are "extraterritorial" since their identities and their formative experiences took shape "in another place".

This opens up different spheres of meaning: going, resettling "within another story", going back to your "roots".

> Q*: What does being integrated mean to you?*
> A*: To be integrated one must have a slightly better position, maybe do some training or do another kind of job.*
> Q*: What kind of job in your case?*
> A*: In my case, I would like to do the job I used to do in Ukraine, to tell you the truth.*
> Q*: So working as a female nurse?*
> A*: As a female nurse, of course! I realise that I should do some training, follow a training course to be a nurse but not from scratch, I have already done my training and I have already worked!* [Lesia, Ukrainian, 40 years old, domestic helper].

Sometimes they feel hindered and this prevents them from looking too far into the future, falling back on their closest relationship rather than formulating a personal plan.

Migration can often influence and change gender norms, creating more gender equality and personal agency; at the same time, education and professionalisation has important effects in changing migrant women's everyday lives.

Conclusion

The first-hand evidence of these women shows their strategies, values, habits, lifestyles, expectations and disappointments, discrimination and objective difficulties, as well as their life and political plans. They reveal fascinating insights which can sometimes elude quantitative research.

The scope of our research is not restricted to the Naples area but can be extended to a global level where populations are migrating from one place to another. Meeting women from other countries represents an opportunity to reassess gender in a way that respects differences. Women affected by globalisation, when encountered in "flesh and blood", raise a series of questions related to their status as gendered "others" originating from old and new submissions, hierarchies and social disintegration.

Nevertheless, these issues are rooted in stereotypes such as race, sex, gender and class which have always been present in Italian society. Despite the many achievements obtained from the period following the Second World War until today, women continue to endure injustices, whether in the public sphere, the distribution of income and or the workload within the family home (Marone, 2012c).

However, in daily life, the discriminations that lead to the exclusion of the most vulnerable sectors of society are still widespread in Europe. The data has to be considered in relation to a context marked by migration, by virtue of which the measures adopted by each European country in terms of funding and policies to tackle the most pressing issues such as unemployment, exclusion and poverty in terms of funding and political choices differ and are not always adequate (Carmel *et al.*, 2015, pp. 27-87).

In the global village, the gender perspective has therefore taken on an essential role for considering active citizenship in a heterocentric sense, indispensable for promoting and supporting the social and political engagement of women, enhancing their capacities and experiences while respecting their diversity.

To gain the status of full citizens, women have to have the power to exist, to emerge from their 'clandestine' existence and tell their stories. Only in this way is it possible for them to regain control of their lives, negotiate their existence and thus overcome the barriers imposed on their identity in order to create new scenarios and innovative versions of the self and to make plans, letting other individual traits emerge.

In the case analysed here, the deconstruction of the monolithic notion of "woman" – which emerges from the personal and original definitions of integration given by the interviewees – made it possible to tackle the prejudices and stereotypes implicit in the cultural background of the researchers. It also enabled the researchers to explore the difficulties, relational unease and frustrations arising from encountering others, shedding light on the acceptance of emotions and feelings such as the sense of insecurity, emptiness and uncertainty, as well as empathy and "reflective solidarity" (Dean, 1996, pp. 140-174).

Nonetheless, it should be remembered that even though Italian women – despite being supported by legal prescriptions – still have to combat various forms of discrimination, the path followed by foreign women in their quest for cultural renegotiation and equal opportunities is even more arduous. It is strewn with obstacles in terms of stereotypes and prejudices, in their relations with society and with themselves, the creation of their identity and personal self-esteem.

Cultural discrimination is one of the most insidious forms of gender inequality and represents a means of reproducing the prevailing social order, carried out through the symbolic paths of communication and knowledge.

They eventually lead women to forms of action marked by the perception of inadequacy with respect to the role imposed by masculine control. This means that their own experiences and perceptions are diminished and dissipated, leading to continuous and unchanging impositions. It

places them in a permanent condition of distrust and symbolic alienation caused by their dependence on the expectations and plans of others, in which they themselves reproduce the prerequisites of their own submission, internalised with no possibility of escape (Bourdieu, 1998).

Educational research therefore needs to reflect more generally on the terms of gender, in other words the impossibility of ignoring the specific identity of migrants without underestimating other social divisions that overlap with the condition of being gendered people and contribute to the definition of the position of the migrants themselves (Marone, 2012a).

The bottom-up perspective that emerges from the immigrants' reconstruction not only enriches our understanding of their experiences, their thoughts and their words, but can also provide useful indications for research, theory and policies.

It emphasises the importance of acting from a structural viewpoint (welfare, social politics, education, etc.); as well as from the perspective of agency (i.e. the capacity to alter personal plans in relation to the context and vice-versa, an aspect that migrants are not acknowledged as having), namely of motivation and trust that can be turned into personal and collective well-being. This can be achieved if diversity becomes an opportunity for integration for all citizens, enabling everyone to have access to an otherness that is a preliminary step towards a more complex and open society.

In this sense, attention is focused on creating "networking" as a feminist practice, as a means of structuring thought, a fruitful approach for those pursuing policies of emancipation, and for those who need to moderate the oppositions that reduced them to the status of non-subjects, codifying their role.

This implies remaining on the margins and the boundaries in order to give a voice to those who lack one, overcoming stereotypes that see differences as dangerous and increase suspicion and fear, instead of learning to cope with them.

During the interviews, it was also possible to decentralise ourselves, seeing ourselves through the other's eyes.

The sense of displacement – the loss of points of reference that foreigners experience and from which they seek shelter – represents an existential condition typical of the ultramodern age: a frequent experience at different levels that becomes manifest in the relationship with otherness. By extending our vision beyond precarious work and precarious workers, it is possible to have a significant encounter at the level of knowledge and, more broadly, of existence.

Above all, an "intercultural" approach means learning to decentralise personal points of view in a complex manner: becoming aware of our self-

partiality, listening to and learning other languages, other cultures, without imposing our own personal positions or desires, without invading the other's life space with their own personal aspirations and expectations, without substituting them, talking in their place, as often tends to happen.

There is always a lurking danger of transforming "what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other" (Spivak, 1985, p. 253).

This practice of relationships suggests that we should think of humanity as a complex event that is driving us towards a new ethics of comparative gender, cultures and generations (Braidotti, 2008).

An ethics based on memory and narrative leads to questioning of the self and the world, the personal and collective story, care, supporting the desire of the other to exist: the acknowledgement of major differences in life, moving beyond the politics of identity.

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