

INTERCULTURAL CONTACTS: A CRITICAL READING OF ACCOUNTS OF SOME MOROCCAN IMMIGRANTS

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Abstract: *This article revolves around immigration and cultural encounters on the basis of the life stories of a number of immigrants belonging to the same Moroccan geographical area. Most of them were interviewed in the August of 2015 when they were back 'home'. The point of departure strives to address culture shock and its main symptoms and how it is coped with. Mobility compels the following questions: What happens to the individual migrant when s/he is placed in immediate juxtaposition with a new environment and peoples? How does s/he react when s/he inhabits a cultural space s/he is unfamiliar with? His/her endeavor for acculturation is met with numerous hurdles due to communication difficulties and the nature of culture encounters which are not usually bias-free. While literature maintains that culture shock is a fleeting psychological unrest that fades away with time, I have come to realize that this is not the case with my informants. Far from being cured, this feeling of stress and anxiety is merely palliated. It remains quiescent in their subconscious and is triggered by encounters in which they think that they are relegated to the margins of otherness. Analyzing the migrant's oral narratives against the backdrop of Foucauldian discourse analysis, I come to infer that they are imbued with some ambivalence where the text involuntarily fluctuates between what it manifestly states and what is nevertheless constrained to mean. The Moroccan migrant is at times confused as to where to place his/her hosts. Do they represent an object of attraction or repulsion? This semantic undecidability evokes Homi Bhabha's interstitial perspective since most of the migrants find themselves located on the cusp between two ways of life that are not necessarily antithetical.*

Keywords: *culture shock-acculturation-epistemic dualities- structures of attitudes and references.*

1. Culture shock:

1.1. The Manifestation of Culture Shock.

The process of mobility has become more prevalent today than ever before thanks to unprecedented access to sophisticated means of travel, globalization of industry, pervading learning exchanges and growing migrant, refugee, and foreign worker movements. All these acts of border crossing entail some intercultural contacts with individuals whose lives, identities and languages are more or less different from those of moving populations.

Less wonder, then, that the encounter with a different ethno-cultural background is one among other criteria on the basis of which the journey should be

defined. A set of questions are being asked in a kind of ominous silence by the migrants interviewed and palpably suggest that they are aware that facing the unknown cannot be dissociated from experiencing some culture shock. All of them, with the exception of Ayoub,¹ who was born in the receiving society, express their impending fear of the unfamiliar. As soon as they embark upon the journey westward, they confess that the usual sense of equanimity characteristic of life at home deserts them as they are claimed by a fit of nervousness and panic. The physical journey, onboard an aircraft, ship or bus, is concomitant with a host of questions that augur the ineluctability of culture shock once they set foot in their host environments. Hamid cannot help keeping these questions at bay: *'Will everything proceed as planned? Will my limited knowledge of Spanish enable me to be employed? How long will it take me to adapt? While adaptation is possible, what about integration?'*² He wondered.

When asked about this psychological feeling and its effects on the experience of migration, Ahmed³ admits that being displaced from one's home brings about mixed feelings of excitement at times and perturbation about accessing a strange world at others. He explains:

On the other side, I began to reflect upon the other world. A stream of thoughts and a series of questions crossed my mind especially because all the look and appearance of this world suggest that this is a totally different space. The neatly designed architecture, the clean streets, the overall organization and the people going about their business serve as a reminder that this is the land where one can climb one or two rungs higher on the social ladder and accomplish his dreams. At this juncture, the new land is elevated to the status of a lost paradise I have been in quest of for years. Here I was no longer repelled but attracted to the foreign environment. I think any migrant in my position would be claimed by the same impression. Unfortunately, as one moves deeper into the Spanish society, this feeling of euphoria starts to dissipate to be supplanted by chronic anxiety and stress. The first question I couldn't help raising was: where am I and can I achieve a sense of selfhood here?

It seems that Ahmed has initially gone through a kind of honeymoon⁴ stage in which novel experiences and the newly-accessed environment have an aura of

¹ A school boy in Italy; he was interviewed in his ancestral home in Morocco on August 20th, 2015. He is thirteen of age

² A middle aged school dropout interviewed in his local district in Morocco on September 16th, 2015. He is 42 years old. He has been in Spain since 1999.

³ A forty- year-old university graduate ; he was interviewed in his home town in Morocco on August 20th

⁴ The experience of the foreign guests, within their host environment, can be accounted for in terms of U-curve and W-curve. The former entails the feeling of joy that characterizes the outset of the encounter with a new cultural background; it tries to explain this fleeting period of honeymoon that will turn soon to a feeling of anxiety, restlessness, anger, stress, etc. resulting from the guests' inability to come to grips with their hosts' 'way of life'. This experience is what may be termed culture shock. However, as time goes by, these guests gradually integrate in the social texture of the host society and therefore gain a

attraction around them. However, this proves to be a short-lived feeling when some ontological questions addressing selfhood emerge into the light of day. Ahmed's main preoccupation is how to accomplish a sense of selfhood once culture shock "fades away" and the intricacies of life under the foreign sky come into prominence.

In the same vein, Abdelghafour⁵'s account reveals that for a migrant moving elsewhere culture shock is a matter of fact. In this regard, he narrates:

I went through a kind of culture shock. It was obvious that a man from a Third World country would easily notice a big discrepancy between the two culturally disparate backgrounds. Its period was very long and I was claimed by it throughout my residence. At times, it was dormant and at others it came to the surface. It was intermittent but it was never cured. Its symptoms were not acute as I had adopted coping mechanisms. I accepted my destiny because I was responsible for it. The main cause of this feeling is the difficulty of integration. You were forced to live in a country that was culturally different. You felt that you were not accepted as the other. They didn't show it but it lay hidden beneath the surface. When you enter in a dialogue with a Spanish citizen, you understand him/her and his perspective but he will never understand your way of thinking and here lies one of the sources of culture shock.

This migrant, who has spent such an extended period of time in the 'hostland', subverts the claim recurring in literature that culture shock is a serious health problem that comes to a halt sooner or later. For him, this feeling of anxiety has remained uncured all through his residence overseas. More than twenty years over there, and despite having reached or surpassed a certain threshold of communicative competence termed 'the acculturation threshold' by H. De Glass Brown, is not enough for Abdelghafour to deal with the complications inherent in relocating to a foreign geographical location.

Like the other literate migrants I happened to meet and listened to as they unfolded their tales, this BA holder has successfully scraped his way through 'tourist, survivor, and emigrant' stages, but he cannot attain the fourth phase of "citizen" despite his proficiency in the Spanish language. This being the case, the shock caused by the inability of the locals to understand him in spite of all his efforts to integrate in the fabric of their society is a chronic ailment, whose symptoms have seemingly disappeared but whose pernicious effects have always remained a millstone around his neck.

sheer amount of self-confidence. The W-curve is concerned with the guests' feeling of temporary isolation following their return to the fold. After spending a considerable period of time abroad, they take some time to readapt in their native community. In practice, however, this doesn't apply to the majority of the migrants under study. All of them- with the exception of Mobarik, who has become an American citizen, and Ayoub, who was born in Italy- confess that culture shock is almost a chronic problem that can be cured only through a journey back home once they have made a fortune.

⁵ A middle-aged university graduate; he was deported after spending seventeen years in Spain. He was interviewed on August 22nd, 2015 in his village.

For Mobarik⁶, whose experience of movement is quite different as he made his way to America through World Disney program, culture shock can occur even within one's homeland. This is how he relates this part of the interview targeting this issue:

I think you go to the next city over and there is culture shock. That's a given. But I don't think it was as intense as people usually position it. I believe this is our case, as I mentioned earlier, because we had an organization that started up the whole program that took away some of the intensity of culture shock. I would say it was easier than other people experience it in other places. When I left Orlando (New York was a point of entry) I moved to Georgia, which was one state over. I didn't travel very far. But now to your question even after I left the World Disney to live on my own, I didn't go through a great deal of culture shock. By that time I had developed alternatives and coping mechanisms. I had friends outside the World Disney program and I had met what would be my future wife and was introduced to her family. So, I had other support mechanisms. Therefore, in my case culture shock was transitional and it just faded away over time. It was not a very distinct period.

At least Mobarik is not compelled to make such a chaotic intrinsic journey as complicated as that experienced by undocumented migrants or 'boat people'. The serenity and legitimacy surrounding his movement to the USA augurs well for him. For instance, he is not obliged to unleash his worries about living elsewhere the way Mohamed⁷ does as his interrogations, during the odyssey, bear witness to: 'what on earth could be the difference between Spain as a civilized world and Morocco as a developing country given that geographically Spain was only a few miles away from Tangiers'? Another set of questions revolves around the experience of migration as regards the location he is heading for: 'Where is my brother living? What does the city look like? What is the nature of the work am I going to do?' Later, when he sets foot in Toledo, it becomes quite clear that what he suffers from can be pertinently diagnosed as culture shock. He states: 'I underwent enormous psychological pain. I lost appetite and accordingly weight. I would smoke two packets of cigarettes per day given that I had never smoked when I was in my home community...'

This feeling of anxiety and abnormal stress surrounding the process of migration is due to moving from one cultural environment to another. This transition is elucidated here:

Certainly no culture is composed of herds of clones who have been defined by their environment; nevertheless, each culture is fashioned by pervading and prevailing tenets-whether they are conscious or subconscious, spoken or

⁶ He left Morocco for USA as a sophomore. He is the only migrant questioned in English (the others were interviewed either in Arabic or Amazigh language, their native tongues) and spared me the task of translation. He was interviewed in his hometown while on vacation. He is forty and has spent half his age in USA. What makes him different is that he is a highly-skilled migrant and a PhD holder in political economy.

⁷ Mohamed is Ahmed's brother. Like him, he is a university graduate. He was interviewed in his village on August 21st, 2015.

tacit. When a person who has been nurtured by one culture is placed in juxtaposition with another, his reaction may be anger, frustration, fright, curiosity, entrancement, repulsion, confusion. If the encounter is occasioned by study of another language, the reaction may be all the stronger because he is faced with two unknowns simultaneously. Such a predicament may be very threatening, and until the threat is removed, language learning may be blocked. (Valdes, 1986, p. vii)

1.2. *The migrants' endeavor to acculturate*⁸:

Saida⁹ is one of those migrants who own to having trouble overcoming the shock undergone by a Moroccan Amazigh denizen who has just accessed a strange landscape. Nonetheless, when she is let down by her sister, who is supposed to give her psychological and financial assistance, she strives hard to learn the Italian language. This excerpt shows that a kin, whose presence out there can be regarded as one of the pull factors behind movement, may not always be reliable:

I assumed that all these worries and fears would come to an end in my sister's house. There, I would be warmly received, take a shower and relax until I found some work to do. Contrary to what I had expected, my sister, who had been living there for ages, had grown callous in the capitalist society. She was no longer the simple-minded affectionate being with whom I used to play hide-and-seek in the garden when we were little children. Her utmost goal in Verona is hankering after money. Her main intention, as a fortune hunter, is to move up the social hierarchy. She has severed her ties with family and friends. In short, she can't hold a candle to some Italian people who commiserated with me both emotionally and financially.

When Saida is coerced into living independently of her sister, the shock that could have been allayed in her sister's abode has grown more intense. What makes matters worse is her inability to convey her messages in Italian. Pidginization¹⁰ is not enough to initiate a conversation with the hosts. She is fully aware that she can't push her status forward beyond that of a tourist¹¹ unless she has picked up Italian.

⁸ The acculturation concept started to come into vogue towards the end of the 19th century when it was used by American social anthropologists. It is mainly concerned with the study of social changes and cross-cultural encounters between individuals and communities with disparate cultural identities.

⁹ She is a thirty-three year old school dropout. I interviewed her in her hometown on August 23rd, 2015.

¹⁰ Pidginization can be appropriately understood as the outcome of language contact where "the communicants" end up speaking a hybrid language that is functional only for day-to-day interaction for business "on the street". This concept is used by Valdes in *Culture Bound* in attempt to account for the early moments that mark language learning in a foreign context. The experience of a novice learner of a foreign language, as he amalgamates his mother tongue with a few words of the target language to communicate, is explained in terms of pidginization.

¹¹ Tourist : the initial stage, in which the target culture is almost totally out of reach; this phase is often thought of as entailing some degree of culture shock. The language spoken

When she starts taking evening classes, she discovers that security is high on the streets of Verona, which makes her reconsider her attitudes towards the Italian society and its citizens. Learning Italian has proved to be one of the efficient remedies to feelings of stress and anxiety according to her testimony:

I used to take evening classes to learn Italian and when the session was over it was usually dark. Walking back home, it never occurred to me to get worried about safety. Security is so ubiquitous in the streets of Verona that nobody dare perpetrate the slightest act of violence. Law is not a set of statements in the constitution; law is performed and its effect is manifest in people's demeanor and private lives.

Lowering the intensity of culture shock has enabled Saida to find work and open her eyes to the world around her. Her understanding of the language of the host population has enhanced interpersonal communication that has previously broken down exacerbating her plight and psychological pain. Nonetheless, cultural dialogue does not necessarily lead to bridging the gap between two disparate cultures. The widow she works for cannot understand why she performs daily prayers and fast in Ramadan. This proves that learning Italian does not entail paving the way for an atmosphere of reciprocal cultural tolerance. Therefore, culture shock and its effects on intercultural contacts are there to stay even if language learning has the potential to take the migrant agent one or two steps beyond the initial rank of a tourist and position him/ her adjacent to that of a citizen. Saida's celebration of overcoming the repercussions of anxious feelings once she has mastered the rudiments of Italian is not underpinned by the predicament she has experienced at the hands of her boss. Part of her description of the latter runs:

Elise is 101 years of age and poor health has such an adverse impact on her state of mind. She is often too moody and short-tempered to bear. There is little room for entertaining religious occasions in her house. I have never celebrated Eid Aladha in Verona simply because the rituals surrounding the feast cannot be experienced out there. The Eid cannot be celebrated alone; it requires an enjoyable family atmosphere which is difficult to relive away from home. This old woman keeps complaining all the time and frequently makes fun of our religious practices. In Ramadan, I can hardly put up with her inconveniences. She is a real nuisance and bore.

Saida's migration account shows her overall satisfaction with life abroad. She repeatedly lauds law enforcement and a prevailing sense of security that is lacking in her hometown. Still, what lies below the surface of her discourse explains that she has always been claimed by a feeling of restlessness and stress as a result of

might be termed “ phrase-bookese.” Learners draw extensively on first language strategies and resources. We can pertinently draw on this phase, especially as a way of interpreting the early experience of the migrant as he grapples with the language of his/her hosts to communicate his/her ideas, defend his/her opinion, raise a point for discussion, have his/her say, make a request, etc. After this phase, the individual who can deal with culture shock is liable to develop into a ‘survivor’, then a migrant but he will seldom attain the status of a citizen, which is the last stage.

her continuous encounter with Elise. When the latter has a stroke and is consequently paralyzed, Saida construes this happening as an act of wrath wrought by providence. This reaction suggests that her consciousness is not as peaceful as she explicitly states. Learning the Italian language is by all means a tool of communication and transmitting Saida's messages, but it has not quite been exploited to understand two different cultures. Elise represents 'authority of delimitation'¹² and her home can be regarded as a 'surface of emergence'¹³ where Saida is defined as a backward woman who is still mired in atavistic beliefs and traditions. For the old widow, praying and fasting are at variance with the requirements of modernity, which is based upon reasoning, logic, rationality, positivism and enlightenment. That's why, spending all daylong without food or anything to drink signifies inflicting a kind of torture upon the self and praying is regarded as a fit of psychopathology according to Elise's 'grids of specification'¹⁴. In this respect, it seems that the cultural distance hypothesis can provide a theoretical conceptualization to the relationship between Saida and her boss. *'This hypothesis predicts that the greater the cultural gap between participants, the more difficulties they will experience'*. (Ward and Bochner, 2001, p: 9)

Saida's struggle under the weight of culture shock, whenever she is at Elise's home, is evident. Nonetheless, the few encounters she enjoys outdoors disrupt the essence of the premise above and show that the host can understand the guest and tolerate his/her mode of thinking. This interviewee thinks high of a handful of Italians who look upon her, after all, as a human being irrespective of her ethno-cultural background. Her first encounter with an Italian old man and the way he treats her when she is in excessive turmoil is recounted in these words:

Besides learning Italian, I owe a great deal to Antonio, an old Italian retiree, whose psychological and financial support helped me find a place in the host society. Antonio, whose job consists in repairing coffee machines, still treats me the way a father would handle his daughter. In this philanthropist,

¹² Those authorities, like medicine in the 19th century, are entrusted with the power and legitimacy to delimit, designate, name and establish madness as an object. This happened in collusion with 'the law and penal law in particular ... the religious authority ... literary and art criticism (which in the nineteenth century treated the work less and less as an object of taste that had to be judged , and more and more as a language that had to be interpreted and which the author's tricks of expression had to be recognized)' (Foucault 41-42).

¹³ These surfaces are conceptualized by Foucault as settings wherein discursive formations are constructed. They are the locations 'in which individual differences, according to the degrees of rationalization, conceptual codes, and types of theory, will be accorded the status of disease, alienation, anomaly, dementia, neurosis or psychosis, degeneration, etc.,'. (ibid 41) These discursive aberrations may emerge in these surfaces, and then be designated and analyzed.

¹⁴ These are the systems according to which 'different 'kinds of madness' are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified, derived from one another as objects of psychiatric discourse' (ibid). By means of these grids the Moroccan migrant has been relegated to a pariah according to the host society's episteme.

I find ethics that are lacking in several Muslims I have encountered both here and there. He is a sort of surrogate father in an environment where my sister has kept me at an arm's length. I think this man would win paradise hands down if he simply uttered 'there is no God but Allah'.

The shock that has lain all the time quiescent in the migrant's psyche subverts the claim adopted in literature that it is a fleeting feeling that fades away as time goes by. What can be concluded on the basis of the tales under scrutiny is the fact that for the majority of individuals the shock is not cured but lies dormant beneath the surface and cultural encounters serve either to ignite or abate it. The contact originated among migrants themselves, very often fellow-ethnics, doesn't always occur amidst a serene and family-like climate. Saida's sister is not hospitable and generous to her because, for her, migrants are destined to live in a world wherein only the fittest shall survive. Likewise, Essadiq¹⁵'s cousin and other compatriots from his area of origin find trouble getting on with him because they are not at home. They relocate to a world bristling with homesickness, or *lghurba* in Arabic, as they are wont to call the country of destination. When asked whether he has met his expectations, Essadiq bursts out into a stream of words trying to account for his predicament:

Even 0.1 percent of my expectations were not realized. After one week with my cousin, who had left for Brescia in 2000 on a work contract and who had been living with a relative predecessor, the warmth of family affinity began to wane. The power our predecessor entertained was attributed to his status as the owner of *contrato di casa* (the contract of the house). Even if we had to pay our share of the rent and more, the owner of the *contrato di casa* had a tendency towards exercising a kind of authority upon us. Though the bond of kinship tied us together, here its effect did not manifest or, more accurately, didn't exist since the owner of the contract tried to flex his muscles all the time.

It would be wrong, then, to believe that power is exercised only by the host upon the green migrant who has not yet gained a foothold in the recipient environment. The new arrivals usually have to count on a family member, relative or ethnic fellow who speaks the same language as they do, and have a similar way of thinking and behaving. Much to their chagrin, they are either rejected as it is Saida's case or subjected to imperious injunctions as it is the case of Essadiq, who starts as an unwelcomed guest in his compatriots' house in the North only to be discarded, at a later stage, to the South of Italy. This event happens when he is taken in by his inhospitable Moroccan guests, who recommend the South as a destination where he can find work and improve his socio-economic status. He says:

They could no longer tolerate that I continue to live with them; they could no more shoulder the burden of feeding me. I had to move as they duped me into leaving for the south where there is a good chance of employment. It is

¹⁵ He was based in Spain when he was interviewed in Morocco on August 26th, 2015. He was thirty years of age.

actually their plot to get rid of me. There I felt as if I were in Morocco. You could see dilapidated landscapes and decrepit buildings; Moroccans were congested in one area.

This extract from Essadiq's tale is tangible proof that authority does not issue only from top to bottom or from a higher to a lower position. Even people pertaining to the same ethno-cultural and socio-economic background can fall back on the signifying economy of inclusion and exclusion because external economic and cultural forces have the power to encroach upon the local life of individuals; these are themselves subject to reification¹⁶ that makes them hollow products of the capitalist system. Hence the vicious circle, which hinges upon the play of power, keeps turning ad infinitum. This being the case, it is quite pertinent to aver that power is ubiquitous, omnipresent and ineluctable. In the era of globalization, information and communication people are teetering on the verge of becoming passive pawns on the chessboard of power relations. This idea is expressed in one of the lectures delivered by Anthony Giddens (1999), who makes clear that we are living in 'a runaway world' and adds that, *'for better or worse , we are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which has its effects deeply felt upon all of us'*.

To solely ascribe any feeling of shock resulting from the process of movement to the migrant's inability to speak the target language and his/her unfamiliarity with the culture is not lent credence by some interviewees. The aforementioned examples show that communicating the language of the receiving society is not enough to quell the tormenting effect of being displaced from one's native homeland.

Essadiq's journey Southward is partly spurred by his encounter with fellow migrants who look upon him as an extra mouth to feed. These migrants seem to share Saida's sister's point of view that living in a capitalist society presupposes self-reliance. Every single person out there is supposed to shift for him/herself. There is little or no room for solidarity in that utilitarian society.

Essadiq's fervor to learn Italian is so ineffable that he finally achieves this objective. But does he get over culture shock now that he can get a grip on the language of his hosts? Does Italian enable him to do the kind of white collar job he has aspired to prior to his departure? Does it help him date an Italian woman he has previously dreamed of living with under the same roof in his native town? Or does a good understanding of the language and part of the target culture merely intensify

¹⁶ Literally the term means to make a thing. From the Marxist perspective this concept refers to a form of alienation in which the individual's consciousness is affected by his perpetual identification with means and fruits of production in such a way that 'the dialectical process of identity is arrested , a psychological closure takes place, which denies individual growth, as well as any meaningful social interaction'. Hence human beings lose their humanity and become fixed properties in the assumption of capital, wholly defined by their purpose and utility in the capitalist drama'.(Barbera, Payne and Raye,2010,p:603)

his anxiety when both the hosts and fellow-ethnics fail to understand him? I think no one can better respond to these queries than Essadiq himself in these terms:

The discrepancy between us and them is wide. The economic and social gap is too huge to bridge. Their appearance is not comparable to ours at all aspects. Their faces give evidence of luxury unlike ours on which misery is palpably writ. We look primitive in front of them. You feel as if they were actors performing on a stage. They don't give the impression that they are real people. When you see a woman behind the steering wheel of a Ferrari and dressed more like an actress than an ordinary being your blood freezes. For them appearance is among priorities. They would say: *che bello fuori bello dentro* (a good appearance makes good people). They can't understand how a 21st century person is dressed in a way similar to those who pertain to ancient times. When they see a man wearing a *djellaba* and a beard, or a woman dressed in a *burqa* or a veil, they relegate them as primitive belonging to a past age and representing a culture that was extinct long time ago. They would denigrate them as *pazzo* (mad). When you eat with your fingers they confine you to the realm of savagery. They fail to understand that the way people eat and dress represent the cultural codes of a society and its people.

In this quote Essadiq evokes a discourse that has so long been regarded as a mainstay of the West's representation of the East. This binary opposition feeds on Manichean¹⁷ allegory and gives way to heightened tensions, be they manifest or latent, between migrants and their hosts. Some of them acknowledge that they are sometimes othered by the locals for one reason or another. Their accounts are occasionally imbued with Orientalist signifying economies, which indicate that the discursive unities and modalities of enunciation that have so long constituted the fundamental aspect of imperial discourse still function and therefore throw into question such concepts as cultural dialogue, syncretism, multiculturalism and hybridized identities. In-depth critical analysis of some migration tales at hand undermine the purport of the claim that *the beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.* (Bhabha, 1994, p: 1) Unfortunately, in the 21st century some of the migrants complain that they are defined according to the usual colonial and Orientalist scale of judgment which is founded on the representational system of binary logic.

¹⁷ Manichianism draws its significance from a separation between matter and spirit. It is thought that the gulf between these two realms will never be bridged. This divide implies an extreme form of polar dichotomies, and it is this to which contemporary postcolonial theory alludes. The notion was widely used by Abdul Jan Mohammed (1983, 1985) who developed Frantz Fanon's conceptualization of the Manichean nature of the asymmetric binary opposition of colonizer and colonized. Jan Mohammed tries to approach manichianism against the backdrop of the lacanian "imaginary" and "symbolic" modes. (Ashcroft, 1998, p: 134)

2. The image of the migrant in his/ her recipient location

2.1. Epistemic dualities and divisions:

As already stated, the cultural-distance hypothesis is built upon the premise that the greater the cultural distance, the more complicated the cross-cultural contact. This idea is raised in the following quote:

A major cause of intercultural problems is the cultural distance between the persons in contact; there has been the temptation to solve the problem by reducing or eradicating the differences that separate the participants (Bochner, 1986), usually by encouraging new settlers to assimilate to their host culture. In practice this has meant abandoning those country-of-origin values and customs that differ significantly from mainstream traditions and behaviors. (Ward and Bochner, 2001, p: 16-17)

Some of the migration accounts, however, reveal that the mobile agent, regardless of his/her political predilections, religious affiliations, level of education, etc., remains more or less faithful to the cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being that have journeyed along with him. There is always a kind of umbilical cord that ties the migrants to the 'origin' and which takes on a variety of forms. Their reluctance to assimilate in the receiving country at the cost of their cultural identity is probably one of the causes of being defined to be unlike their hosts. These aliens, coming from a distant land, bring with them cultural values which are not palatable to some of the locals.

Mokafih¹⁸, an illiterate retired migrant, accounts for his encounters with the French autochthonous in highly positive terms. He still remembers, not without nostalgia, how they would take care of their guests and pardon their mistakes because, according to them, they are poor and they 'don't know what is good and bad'. These ostensibly family-like contacts need to be read contrapuntally¹⁹ so as to unearth the Orientalist rhetoric hidden beneath the surface. Those rhetorical tropes and figures of speech employed by the West to define the East can help fathom out the latent message that lies in the interstices of words. *'The things to look at', Edward Said repeatedly accentuates, 'are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances...'* (Said, 1978, p: 21)

When a French citizen describes a Moroccan migrant in terms above, s/he dehumanizes him/her to the core and accords him/her a status that positions him/her as his exact foil. In plain words, the French are knowledgeable, civilized, law-

¹⁸ He is over sixty of age; once a migrant in France, where he spent the whole of his youth. He was interviewed in his home in his native village on August 28th, 2015.

¹⁹ Contrapuntal reading is a term coined by Edward Said and is meant to lay bare the imperial implications and Orientalist overtones in texts affiliated to the empire. The concept is borrowed from music and serves as a responsive reading that provides a counterpoint to the grand imperial modalities of enunciation and reveals the statements that might otherwise remain hidden. Further reading: (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000).

abiding and the migrants in question are otherwise. This duality recurs here and there in the stories of my respondents. *'One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand'*, Derrida(1971,p:41) writes in reference to the terms of any classical or binary opposition , *'and so in this respect the opposition is never of the order of a neutral difference but always of a violent hierarchy'*. For instance, this excerpt from Tanbihi²⁰'s tale discloses the dizzying dichotomies that connote the superiority of the white man (like Fanon I use the "white man" as a generic term for white civilization):

...the ideals of new liberal democracies the West takes pride in are incompatible with the reactions of the civil society to migrant populations. The core values which underlie the Western political system are liberty and equality. But in Toledo, not all people respect your style of dress or ritual expressions. They usually consider what we do as bizarre and primitive. Their prejudiced outlooks palpably contradict the values on which their "democratic" political systems are founded. Freedom, to me, means I am free to wear whatever I want as long as this doesn't offend the other and adhere to any religion as long as I don't preclude the other from practising his/hers. This is not the case in my host society where our clothes, religious rituals, traditions and customs are subjected to the glances of the Spanish locals and their inquisitive inquiries.

Tanbihi obliquely denounces cultural diversity as a loose concept which does not mirror what takes place in the landscape of Toledo. The cultural codes of the hosts, according to his testimony, occupy an inferior subservient position unlike those of the locals which incarnate modernity and all the aspects associated with it. In the age of information and communication, human encounters are still governed by a horrendously condescending ethos of the dominant group. Edward Said's (1978) contention that the exclusivist totalizing approach to culture is no longer at work in fin de siècle society is undermined by the oral migratory discourses under scrutiny. He maintains:

Gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. Instead we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that new alignments made across borders, types, nations and essences are rapidly coming into view, and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism (xxiv-xxv). *aid is probably making allusion to the postcolonial period and the newly constructed identity of once colonized subjects. The process of decolonization has led to the emergence of a literature in which empire writes back. In effect, the subaltern can make their voice heard by adopting an anti-colonial discourse to subvert the episteme of the imperial culture and perform a decentering that leaves no*

²⁰ A university graduate, who migrated to Spain long time ago. He was interviewed on the 20th of August, 2015 at a coffeehouse in his native village.

privilege to any centrality. Unfortunately, the migrants, I have interviewed, concede that they are the target of the host members' stereotypical references and attitudes, which make us wonder if the contemporary world has triumphed over the politics and rhetoric that have so long characterized the Orientalist discourse. The information obtained from the majority of the migrants is laden with the tautology that derives its significance from asymmetric dualities of 'us' and 'them'. It is true that new concepts such as culture dialogue and multiculturalism have come into being in the realm of humanities but they have not altogether destabilized the underlying principles of Eurocentrism and Americanism. Unfortunately, cultural encounters are not antiseptically quarantined from the workings of hegemony and power.

A lack of praxis, therefore, is still evident when it comes to dealing with such notions as plurality and multiplicity of cultures and their consequent ideals of tolerance and permissiveness. How can this prospect be accomplished when the migrant's cultural distinctiveness is subject to skepticism? How can the distance between two disparate cultures be shortened when the objectifying gaze still gains the upper hand in cultural encounters? How is it possible for two groups to co-exist when the master and slave dialectics still function not only in cultural encounters but in human relations at large? Is it possible to insulate human subjectivity from ideology while a *'defensive, reactive and even paranoid nationalism is... frequently woven in the very fabric of education, where children as well as older students are taught to venerate and celebrate the uniqueness of their culture (usually and invidiously at the expense of others)'*? (Said, 1978, p:xxvi). When Tanbihi runs across what his five-year old daughter jots down in her diary he is claimed by despair and acknowledges that his days in Spain are numbered because he cannot ward off the stinging effect of discrimination, especially on his family. He admits that the start of his child's journal is worded in Spanish: *'Me siento siempre sola notengo amigas; no juegan com-migo'* (I am solitary. I don't have friends to play with). He adds:

When I had read this, I felt as if I had been stabbed by a dagger. My determination to leave Spain was confirmed and when the economic crisis erupted I traveled back home. Here my daughter is filled with joy. She is highly satisfied with her condition as a primary school student. There she was bright and here she is brighter. She could read and copy things in Arabic in three months. She has mastered the Arabic alphabet and can read a short subtitle on TV. I have personally attributed this success to her burning desire to change her situation.

In the same vein, Essadiq acknowledges that discrimination extends even to illicit love affairs. He notes:

As a clandestine labor migrant without a car, money and reputation I was denied affection and love. Even the world of prostitution was discriminated against. To have an affair with a woman from Eastern Europe one had to

pay 50 Euros, an Arab 30 Euros (Moroccan whores were common in Napoli) and a black only 10 Euros . Moroccan laborers would usually pay to have a sexual intercourse with black women because they were the cheapest or because those from Eastern Europe would turn them down on grounds of origin. We were likened to *Zinger* (Italian for Gypsy) who constitute a denigrated minority whose language, cultural practices and race are relegated to the margins of Italian society.

Seemingly, Edward Said's (1978, p:20) reference to hegemony, as delineated by Gramsci, still defines some intercultural contacts that rarely occur between the guest and the host. He argues that:

In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West.

In like manner, Abdelghafour makes allusion to the glance (*le regard* as Foucault uses it) in relation to power and surveillance. He narrates:

Jobless migrants are under the gaze of security forces; for in Spain it is incredible to eat, dress well and order a drink in a bar when a person is known to be unemployed. The jobless are potential thieves and they are put under control. For the Spanish, work is valorized over other life aspects. They associate it with prosperity and welfare.

This reference to migrants under control evokes Michel Foucault's claim that:

Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted "above" society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could probably dream of. In any case, to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible- and in fact ongoing... (cited in During,1998,pp: 222-23)

By implication, it seems that the corollary of encounters, according to Foucault, is the exercising of power by one person, party, or group upon the other. Ahmed also remarks that some of the hosts' gazes are directed towards him:

Sometimes I say to myself, spurred by my philosophical tendencies, 'well, why not transgress the barrier and get closer to them in attempt to focus on what unites us and forget what divides us'; but a mere apathetic gaze from a Spanish walking down the street or boozing in a bar is enough to make you reconsider your humanistic thought and withdraw into yourself again.

This migrant cannot establish a bulwark against the *regard* that issues from those around him because they represent authority and power while he is denigrated, according to his/her interpretation, to a low rung of the social order. The gaze is construed as an implicit message intent on setting up a separation wall between the migrant and the native. It stands for power versus weakness, and



subject versus object. *'The reduction of consciousness to knowledge in fact involves our introducing into consciousness the subject-object dualism which is typical of knowledge.* (Sartre,1976,p: iii) Saida also admits that the locals arouse her suspicion as they rest their eyes on her or interrogate her cultural codes:

Muslim migrants are free to practise their religious obligations; there are mosques where they can pray and listen to the Friday sermon. They have been granted this favour by the state but this doesn't imply that they are safe from the suspicious gaze of some natives. The latter may put into question our religious practices and rites. The sight of a bearded man wearing a short djellaba and a pair of slippers (babouches) arouses their inquisitiveness and sometimes attracts their mocking looks. I have been myself repeatedly enquired about the value of wearing a headscarf in the height of summer. While waiting for my turn at the post office, a nosy Italian once asked: 'why on earth are you covering your head with this cloth in this hot weather?' He added: 'preventing your hair from air is liable to be detrimental to it'. When I explained that our religion has enjoined women to cover their hair in public, he could see no logical reason behind such an injunction. Like several other Italians, he thought of us as primitive creatures mired in atavistic traditions similar to those which they deserted long time ago.

Even Mobarik, who has successfully scraped his way through the process of assimilation and ended up becoming an American citizen, acknowledges the gaze of the other but in a way, somehow different from Saida and Tanbihi's interpretation:

With regard to religious symbols in public space, they are visible. Those wearing burqas (niqab), for instance, may be subject to gazes. You do see them and you do see gazes; but that probably depends on the place. If you take, for example, places that have a logic concentration of Muslims such as Astoria, Orlando, Michigan, etc., it's common to see the Islamic wear. People are generally tolerant to religious difference. It's very rare to see someone walk up to you and say "Hey! Take that hat, skull cap or headscarf off". I've never witnessed that or heard of it. But you do sometimes see stares and I always tend to be circumspect about that because they are not necessarily stares of hate. Sometimes people fear what they don't know. This happens especially with younger kids. My kids do this. Sometimes we walk past a synagogue and when they see orthodox Jews wearing hair curls and engaged in their readings they just keep staring because it's something they are not used to see...

Unlike Tanbihi, who construes the gaze which issues from the host in his direction in Foucauldian terms, Mobarik sees it as a normal reaction when we are confronted with the unknown and the unfamiliar. *'Emigrants from the same location tend to choose the same foreign location. As the number of immigrants increase, the local population may become xenophobic'*. (Gellner,1987p: 26) This again calls our attention to the multiplicity and heterogeneity inherent in individual migrants' experiences. One should be circumspect about looking at these mobile people as herds of clones, a unique cohort, who live and work in similar conditions

and see things from the same perspective. Their outlooks and narratives are as different as their personalities, their jobs, the kind of people they encounter and above all the recipient destination wherein they are located. USA, for instance cannot be put on a par with Spain, nor can a PhD holder and American citizen's experiences be lumped with those of an itinerant labor migrant.

2.2. Structures of references and attitudes:

The stories elicited from the sample of migrants under study are reflective of the relationship between the migrant and the host. No matter how many cultural contacts are circumscribed and confined to the workplace or happen fortuitously in the course of doing something else, they are not devoid of references to the migrant as someone who is defined by his culture to be everything the white man is not. After all, *'to define is ultimately to confine, and to deny growth and change'* (Barbera, Payne and Rae, 2010 p:601) as the advocates of a politics of difference repeatedly aver. This biased reaction, triggered by such intercultural encounters, suggests once again that the East and West have not yet transcended bigotry and gut signifying practices that have been previously revealed to us through the lens of culture and literary criticism.

The power of culture and empire has certainly withered now that the pendulum is swinging towards transnational identities, nomadic subjects, deterritorialization, etc. However, it would be wrong to claim that intersubjectivity²¹, as it is celebrated by Merleau Ponty in *La Phenomenology de la Perception (The Phenomenology of Perception)*, has been realized in our world. One can't presume that socialization, communicative rationality, the public sphere, where an 'ideal speech situation' is liable to emerge, are easily accessible in modern societies as Jurgen Habermas once confirmed. Also, Emanuel Levinas's *'perspective of holiness'* as an act of responsibility for the other informs little or no action in the contemporary world.

At the dawn of the twenty first century some hosts, according to the testimonies of some of my respondents, are still faithful to their totalizing tendencies that all those who come from the other side of the sea are backward and unable to live up to the civilized way of life. The interpersonal communication that happens between some of my interviewees and some of the locals bring to the fore structures of attitudes and references reminiscent of Orientalism as a cultural strength according to Edward Said's definition. "The manifest discourse is, therefore, no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this unsaid is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said"

²¹ Merleau Ponty's *La Phenomenology de la Perception* stresses the pivotal role of creating a world of intersubjectivity wherein understanding happens on a pre-reflexive bodily level. Even if we outgrow this state of infantile communion as we mature, we still have inside us a primordial intersubjective perspective that can be reignited by certain events in our life. When we see somebody bleeding in front of us, we immediately feel inside ourselves how the wound feels for him/ her and when somebody beside us stumbles and is about to fall, we stretch out our hand to prevent them from falling.

(Foucault,1972,p:25). The utterances that issue from the host members usually encompass what Foucault calls the *'half silent murmur of another discourse'*.

Ahmed is expected to be illiterate because he comes from a distant land where people are considered to be beyond the human pale. This attitude is palpably expressed when he argues “that *you may be reading a newspaper in a bar and a Spanish person might venture to ask you with a look of astonishment in his/her eyes: 'Can you read Spanish?' and when you say that you can and that you have a good understanding of two or more languages, his/her surprise simply soars ...*”.

Downgrading the other and branding him/her using all sorts of epithets and adjectives, figures of speech and rhetorical tropes which bear the vestiges of culture and empire demonstrate that the legacy of colonial discourse is still at issue in numerous cultural encounters. The worldview of some hosts, their modes of thinking and patterns of behaving are informed by a superiority complex, which is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of a people whose culture is synonymous with civilization while that of the Other is tantamount to anarchy. A migrant who traces his origins to Morocco is not expected to read a book at the bar simply because he is thought to come from a geographical territory essentially inhabited by a colony of Moors who are still trudging up far behind the civilized man. Though *Black Skin, White Masks* was published long time ago, Frantz Fanon is still reliable in this regard. In the foreword Ziauddin Sardar argues :

What Fanon says about the comics of the 1950s, the magazines are put together by white men for little white men, with their white heroes and evil black villains, works just as effectively in the way disciplines are taught, discourses are promoted, and knowledge is advanced. In all these areas there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly... work their way into one's mind and shape one's view of the world. All these disciplines and discourses are the products of a culture which sees itself hierarchically at the top of the ladder of civilization; they postulate all that the world contains and all that the world has produced and produces, is by and for the white man. This is why it is taken as an a priori given that the white man is the predestined master of this world. (Fanon,1986,p:xvi)

The Eurocentric episteme highlighted in this quote is inextricably related to the products of cultural industry. The colonial subjectivity which still operates in the contemporary world does not occur in a vacuum. It seems the media play a fundamental part in shaping a stereotypical image of the Moorish migrant. The allusion to the impact of media is made in a handful of narratives. Hamid puts it in these terms:

We can talk about adaptation, but not integration. The term Moro was an insult to Moroccans. You could hear it on the street or the farm but not within the precincts of administration. To my humble knowledge, the media played a part in fostering such stereotypical and essentialist representations of Moroccans. The main stream Spanish TV would broadcast biased programs on Morocco such as prostitution, drug abuse, corruption, etc. and the public naively trusted the media.

Hamid's reference to the influence of media in shaping the image of the Moroccan migrant finds support in Nancy Wood and Russell King's contention that often acting as the mouthpiece of political parties or other powerful groups, media discourses have been shown to be immensely influential, in constructing migrants as 'others', and often too as 'criminals' or 'undesirables'. Such a focus on migrant criminality creates stereotypes which are very far from the truth and very hard to shake off (King and Wood, 2001p:2).

Defaming a Moroccan or Algerian migrant as a 'Moro' is a common practice according to some accounts. 'Moro', as a signifier, is a derogatory term used by some of the locals to address the Moroccan migrant who is deemed as their antithesis. He is somebody who works his way from the peripheral hinterland towards the civilized center to search out new opportunities which cannot be found in his homeland. Said Tanbihi's story is revealing in this context:

When a friend of mine celebrated his wedding here and went back to Spain with his wife, his boss disparagingly asked: "How much did you pay for her?" The same remark was raised by my boss following my marriage. The latter once inquired if I took my laptop with me when I left for Morocco and when I said 'yes', he asked how I would get it repaired if it should break down there. I turned on him angrily and noted that I had not expected him - being a BA holder - to be as ignorant as those illiterate compatriots of his. I mockingly added that he could give me any machine to get it repaired in Morocco. To cool me down, he pretended to be joking.

This oral discourse that has been transformed into written symbolic codes - these statements, which are based around a well-defined system of binarism that assigns the white man a lofty position - gain prominence in this quote. The image of the Moor as lascivious and rapist is accentuated by the Spanish boss. The latter cannot also figure out how a Moorish mind, which lacks reasoning and symmetry, could fix a computer. These essentialist attitudes and references, explained once by Edward Said and other scholars of Orientalism, are still at work in the issue of contemporary migration and cultural encounters. In this respect, Abdul JanMohamed states:

Much literature of cultural encounter, instead of being an exploration of the racial Other... affirms its own ethno-centric assumptions; instead of actually depicting the outer limits of 'civilization', it simply codifies and preserves the structures of its own mentality. While the surface of each colonialist text purports to represent specific encounters with specific varieties of the racial Other, the subtext valorizes the superiority of European cultures, of the collective process that has mediated that representation... (cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000 p:120)

What has been detected and studied by JanMohammed in colonial literature is not confined to the written discourse. The oral rendering of the migratory experiences under study contain moments in which the migrant is defined stereotypically - these stereotypes are either manifest or latent- against the backdrop of the locals' civilization. Unfortunately, in all those narratives tackling

this type of contact, we are never told that the native interlocutor dares question the ideals of his/her culture. There is no intention to shift the look towards the self because, as Schopenhauer once said, 'I' is a black spot in the consciousness and therefore the eye can see anything but itself. The cultured self-lays claim to the validity of his/her tendencies and to the falsehood and backwardness of the Moroccan migrant's. In this regard, Said (1978,p:3) tries to show that European culture 'gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self'.

Conclusion

The attempt to mute the migrant is not always successful. Tanbihi, for instance, does not accept his boss to relegate him to the subordinated margins of humanity. He stoically defends himself against his misconceptions trying to dislocate his caprices and structures of feeling leaving him, therefore, at a loss for words.

However, this is not the case with most migrants who are either oblivious of such attitudes or spellbound by the luster of civilization and appearance of their guests. This being the case, they fall prey to an inferiority complex, the salient manifestation of which is the illusion of becoming like them or defining one's culture through the prism of what appears to the migrant to be the civilized standards of the host. And yet, like any disease that happens to infect an individual unexpectedly, this bout of self-deception, once diagnosed, is taken seriously and the migrant strives to summon up courage to seek treatment through adopting spectacular counter-discursive strategies.

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