

Mobility, materiality and modernity: global expectations as determinants in Morocco and Tunisia

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DEMIG, Oxford, 23-25 Sept 2014

Questions:

Which kind of expectations / aspirations / hopes feed the desire to move?

What are the subjective /moral underpinnings of contemporary migration desire?

Two main contexts of inspiration / analysis:

1. my work as a psychologist in an outpatient clinic for the mental health of the immigrants in Northern Italy from 1996 to 2010;
2. my ethnographic research in Morocco since 2001 and in Tunisia from 2010 onwards.

Methodology:

1. Clinical interviews and in-depth analysis of life-stories as emerge in a clinical setting;
2. Multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork (language learning, participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structural interviews) in areas of origin (urban neighbourhoods and villages) and destination in Italy and Spain.

Framework:

Social transformation perspective, but from a subjective point of view: how the structural changes of the so-called “globalization” affect ways of seeing and feeling space, relations and personal objectives and, ultimately, end up encouraging mobility in some groups.



Historical conditions
that hinder the access
to local resources of
social reproduction
and, most important,
social promotion

Such resources
become “emblematic”
of what may be
considered as a
“decent” life

A “moral” relative deprivation?

I decided to leave when I saw my compatriots coming back to spend their holidays here. They had cars, were well dressed, with branded shoes and beautiful stuff. Can you imagine? My neighbour is *maqārish* [illiterate] and after only three years in Italy he comes back like this...

I told to myself: “Simo, imagine what *you* can do!”

(Mohammed, Turin 2006).

- “*mzeyyer*”: shrunk, squeezed
- “*maqnaṭ*” : isolated
- “*ḥogra*”: humiliation
- “*makāyn mayddār*”: there is nothing to do
- “*faragh*” : void
- “*malāl*” : boredom
- “*gels mryeh*” : ‘lying down’

I saw the emigrants coming back on vacation... One of them built a house in front of mine. It was nice. It was *modern!* (*'kānt 'aṣryya!*) I thought “I want a palace like this!”

(Rashīd, Turin, 2007).

Modernity:

“a native category shared by an enormously eterogeneous population of natives”

(Ferguson, 2006, 177).

An “*economy of unfulfilled desires*”:

“goods that are known, that may sometimes be seen, that one wants to enjoy, but to which one will never have access”

(Mbembe 2000, 41).

Abjection:

“the combinaiton of an acute awareness of a privileged ‘first-class’ world, together with an increasing social and economic disconnection from it”.

(Ferguson 2002, 559).

I just wanted “*ash-shurūt dyal ‘aysh*” (‘the basics of life’): in order to buy a house, a car, keeping my cell phone recharged... A quiet life, *bikher*, *à l’aise* (‘good’, ‘in peace’)... To allow my brothers to study, attend courses, having a computer and internet at home. Our father is a metalworker in a factory, with a salary which is barely enough to keep alive his eight children. I was looking for a solution and I thought: I’ll go and sacrifice myself for the family”

(Salīm, Temara, 2006).

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UNA BANCA

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قلب واحد
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PRÊT
À PORTER
CHAUSSES

There is nothing in Tunisia. When you find a job it is for some months and you are hardly paid. You go from a café to another, this is the program. There are many problems... How can you marry without a job? To have a house, a family, a car... *the things of today*. And if you have a job, it is just to eat: not a good cloth, not a car, shoes, a telephone... like here in Europe

(Youssef, Milan, 2011).

“Individuals draw on shared resources to construct and embellish their own and collective fantasies”

(Moore, 2011, 23).

In a single generation, I had seen Kuranko youth [Sierra Leone] turn away from the ancestral order of things and from the dutiful perpetration of custom, setting their sights on an uncertain future in some far-flung place and invoking, as migrants do everywhere, the logic of sacrifice”

(Jackson 2008, 60).

I decided to go back to Tunis last year. In Italy there is no job and life has turned difficult. But look: this is my Italian passport and I am free to go whenever I want. You know how many people would be eager of this here my friend?

(Khalid, Tunis in 2014).

“The ability and legal right to travel becomes one of the criteria by which class is defined and class privilege upheld”

(Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013)

Conclusions:

In a typical “labour frontier”, expectations are often related to the possibility of accessing the “global middle class” status, often defined through the idea of “modernity” and experienced as a form of moral achievement (“material citizenship”).

Movement becomes a value in itself (a form of social power) and an instrument of differentiation and self-stylization.

Circulating is as important as settling (role of mobility in the contemporary world).