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Mobility and *Parole*

Introduction

My initial experience regarding the migrations has taught me one thing above all: that it is almost impossible to fix the migratory movement in stability and systematize it. There is too much polyphony in its voice. Its processes are hardly predictable. In the study of migration you must get involved deeply, or, in a metaphorical Italian expression, "you must get your hands dirty" which means to let those involved speak for themselves. It is in this sense that I have conceived and utilized narration – both autobiographical and non – in my field work.

I believe that above all it is the expression of subjectivity. The latter has proven productive in the study of the migratory phenomenon on different levels. In the first place it allows us to achieve knowledge of it as it really is, as it is made up of the coming together and intersection of particular paths, which are unique. Secondly on a more epistemological level, it questions the very concept itself of mobility: the narrative acts as a stimulus for scientific research to concentrate on the perception that individuals have of migration¹, rather than on what it "scientifically speaking" is. Authors have always dedicated slight attention to this aspect: the concept of the subjective perception of the migratory phenomenon.

By analysing on different levels some narratives regarding migration, which make up the corpus of my thesis, I will try to show the theoretic and pragmatic value of narration, conceived as the voice of subjectivity in the study of migration. These are merely some initial considerations of a work of research, analysis and interpretation which is still in its initial phases.

Some initial precisions

The data to which I will be referring has been collected in the context of my doctoral thesis, on which I have been working since 2008. It concerns qualitative research into the linguistic practices

¹ Not only their own migration, but also that of others.

of migrants of Senegalese origin: migrants who, at the moment of my survey, were living in Italy and others who had returned - more or less definitively – to stay in Senegal. The main scope of the research is to describe particular migration realities, by means of the analysis of linguistic practices and imaginaries concerning migration, which is then transferred through language (language ideology). To this scope, the data of my thesis has been made up of the *parole* of the individuals, who were the object of my observations, and their interlocutors. The French term *parole*, which literally means speech, refers to the *individual* act of speech. With *parole* I will herewith be referring not only to the (spontaneous) speech of the individuals of my research, but also to the story of their migratory experience. In both cases I am particularly interested both in the linguistic usages (linguistic variations) and (linguistic and cultural) imaginaries related to migration.

However I am not just referring to my thesis. I am also referring to the project MiPriMo (“la Migration Prise aux Mots”) financed by the French ANR (Agence National de la Recherche), in which I am participating. The research aims at providing studies of the migratory phenomenon in different countries of West-Central Africa (Senegal, Mali, Cape Verde), by means of the collection and multidisciplinary analysis of narrative of various genres² connected to the theme of migration, through both an anthropological and sociolinguistics approach. Although the project has not yet produced any data³, it makes up a theoretical and methodological point of departure for my thoughts on the value of narration in migration.

Narrative and self

Often migratory studies tend to attribute the mobility phenomenon as being due to economic factors. Individuals, because of difficulties in making a living, decide (even if very unwillingly) to abandon their homeland in order to search for economic means, which are necessary to better their existence. Hence, the idea - that is often taken for granted - is that migration follows tracks that move from South to North. The corollaries of this concept are provided, for example, by Malkki (1992) in his critical analysis of implicit ideologies which are an intrinsic part of migratory themes⁴. Even though it is undeniable that migration also means this, and the fact that economic factors are important in considering its causes and processes, it is however my belief that the panorama is

² Occasional biographical and autobiographical stories, but also artistic works of various kinds, both written and oral: photography, literature, music.

³ MiPriMo’s official start was January 2011; for this reason data is unfortunately not yet available, as field work has only just recently started.

⁴ For an extensive review, refer to Malkki 1992.

much more complex. Each time individuals reinterpret in their own way their decision to leave and their experience of mobility, intersecting it with their own history, wishes, facts of experience with which it is dotted. Recalling Foucault's words, one can say that migration is a process of *subjectification* (French: *subjectivation*) by means of which the individual elaborates his migratory experience⁵.

In the narrative individual instances – which have been part of the individual's life history and experience – are intersected with collective ones - with which the single person is confronted and which contribute to make sense to his experience – in a linguistic performance through which they are elaborated. This elaboration most certainly derives from the person's reflections, from the individual's life pattern and emotional experience, but it also answers to the requirements and features of *parole* act (or narrative act) itself. The narrative in fact is simultaneously born out of experience and give shape to experience. It is this aspect of subjectification of the migration process which gives us the possibility of questioning and reconsidering mobility itself. Considering it through the detail can offer also suggestions on a epistemological level. In practical terms, in my opinion, it is a question of letting others speak (the migrants) and not speaking in their place: it is only starting from that *parole* that one should try and give interpretations.

In order to enter into the specific reality to which I will refer, the question is to see how the migrants put their⁶ experience of mobility into words and turn it into a story. Experiences, events in a broad sense, but also reflections, judgements and balances are all part of the narration. In other words, the story allows us to get to know what the migration phenomenon is by means of a creative act, in which the subject represents himself in the context of a narrative thread, which follows its own fundamental logic: the logic of his own personal experience and his own subjective positioning in a common idea of mobility. What is interesting, therefore, is not just what is narrated, but also how. In fact if the contents allow us to get to know a man's particular path in life, to contextualize the words and reflections of storyteller by putting them into relation with his life history, then the formal aspects of the narrative also supply us with important information. By formal aspects I mean both linguistic and stylistic elements. The former include lexical aspects, linguistic variation and indexical elements of various types. I consider stylistic aspects those relating to the structure of the story: plot, elements on which the storyteller may focus, (more or less conscious) purposes of

⁵ The elaboration which is more or less conscious. In my conception of autobiographical narrative as unconscious elaboration (too) by an individual, even the psychoanalytic aspect would give a profitable contribution to the interpretation of the stories, for example in considering them as "*subjectification* of the history of the person involved" (Lacan in Recalcati 2010: p. 63).

⁶ It is not just their own, as we shall see, since the stories also regard general considerations on migration.

storytelling, pauses or omissions in narration. All these aspects are not elements which are related to the formal realisation of a story, which is an end in itself: they are carriers of a symbolic meanings which in turn reveal a social logic. It is thus, that, by means of the narrative, we can acknowledge the social logic implied in the processes of mobility and how the storyteller relates to them. It is evident that all this is impossible without knowing the conversational context, as well as the broader historic, social, political context in which the narrative is situated, and with which it intersects.

Before passing to the corpus in itself, it is necessary for me to specify what I intend as a narrative. In the course of my field work, as explained above, my observation consisted in recording the “spontaneous”⁷ speech of the migrants, during which there was no explicit solicited on my part: the answer provided by them were not induced or forced. At the end of the period of observation, for each one, I collected the story of their migratory experience, which I had explicitly asked for and for which a more structured setting was created⁸. It is to these stories that I will refer to, stories which were solicited, although as much free as possible⁹. I will however also take into consideration other material. I have thought it useful to take into consideration those instances that Frédéric François defines “moments narratifs” (narrative *moments*)¹⁰. This notion refers to those moments, for example during a conversation, in which the speaker interrupts the conversational exchange to introduce a narrative: the speaker thus becomes narrator in the time-space of that interruption. These narrative digressions can have different functions: argumentative, playful, to attract the attention of the speaker etc. This notion allows us to consider narratives, not only those that are induced and are aprioristically¹¹ structured as such, but also those which are not, and which dot the conversations. The evidencing and the consideration of narrative moments has revealed to be particularly profitable, not only because the conversations recorded are rich in digressions of this type, but also because they present particular interesting features due to their sporadic nature and to the fact that they were not explicitly induced. During my observation in fact, almost all the people

⁷ I use speech marks because it is very difficult to define what is “spontaneous” if, as I believe, it is inconceivable that one can speak of “objective” or “natural.” I could translate “spontaneous” with “unsolicited”.

⁸ We had agreed upon the time of the story-telling, but not only. I tried to work it out that only the narrator and myself were present, preferably in a context where he felt at ease (often in his own home), so that the narrator would feel as free as possible to face the topics he wanted to face in the way he preferred.

⁹ Although I asked each of them to tell me their about their migratory experience, I tried let them have total freedom of choice as far as the contents, timing were concerned and interrupted their story-telling as little as possible.

¹⁰ It is difficult to restrict just to one precise point of reference the use the author makes of the concept cf. , for instance, François 2004.

¹¹ As is the case of the stories regarding migratory life histories which I recorded for each single person in my research.

involved played the role of “ambassadors of Senegal” due to their privileged position of *entre-deux*¹² (Hazard 2007). As such, their purpose seemed to be that of “showing me what migration is” or in any case “telling me about Senegal” from the more knowledgeable point of view of he “who has also known the Western world (or Italy)”¹³. To reinforce this point of view of theirs, was the fact that the person to whom they were telling the story to (myself) was herself someone that already knew something about Senegal and migration, other than just being interested. It is from this viewpoint (but not only) that I have interpreted many of these narrative moments. Time and time again these seemed useful to my interlocutor, for example when interpreting the context in which we were, or an affirmation, or an attitude that was emerging, in order to “mediate” between myself and the others, as well as to express his point of view and to hint at my supposed “judgement of (Western) values”. The notion of narrative moment also allowed me to take into consideration the *parole* of those who, although they do not live the experience of mobility personally, have expressed their point of view on the question, for example a person who takes part in the process of mobility through the departure of a relative, or some close person, or simply the point of view of the person who has stayed behind. This is evidence, which also proves useful in deepening one’s knowledge of the complexity of the migratory phenomenon and which is part of that “discursive circularity”¹⁴ through which imaginaries move on and are transformed, together with individuals.

Give mobility the word

As expressed above, one aspect that has been a little neglected by the authors who have dealt with migration, is the perception that individuals have of mobility. It is my opinion that this perspective would allow us to partially free the migration issue from mere economic factors. The narratives of

¹² The position “between Senegal and Italy”. The impression that I have had in my field research is that thanks to their position as migrants in Italy, they could become “spokesmen for Senegal” – being Senegalese - from the privileged position of those who have knowledge of the expectations and the “presuppositions” of their partner in dialogue (myself, being Italian). This perspective of theirs was furthermore enhanced by the fact that when I explained to them the reasons for my presence I told them of my interest for migration and migrants through the evidence collected and the observation of the migrants themselves.

¹³ I use speech marks because these are my interpretations following the recording, which as they are brief, might tend to excessively stylize the speakers.

¹⁴ “Discursive circularity” if on the one hand it refers to the notion of Canut’s *discours circulants* (2007; 2008), which is inspired by Bakhtin’s “dialogisme”, on the other it also implies Tarrus’ *territoires circulatoires* (2002), but also to the concept of migrations as “circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space” which Marcus puts forward in his argumentation on the necessity of a multi sited approach to the issue (Marcus 1995: p.96).

the migrants help to reveal the deep motivations, or the elements that make up the choice of leaving: they are those which intersect their story.

One aspect of the narratives of the migrants that impressed me from the start, is their beginning. As I have previously explained in fact, at the moment of recording their tale, I tried to be as vague as possible regarding my interests; the given instructions were limited to “tell me about your migratory experience”, so as to direct their story as little as possible. From the very start of my field observation in fact, I was very interested in finding out what started the story its. I do not mean a moment or a place or an event or whatever else could be considered, but all these aspects put together. The reading and analysis of the stories subsequently proved that the beginning is interesting not only in itself, but because it often directs the entire narrative.

It is not that I believe that, from the beginning, it is possible to predict the development; I would rather affirm that it makes up the first, often founding choice of the creative act of the storytelling. If in fact the autobiographical narrative consists in a simplification of experience, that is to say that a version, which each time becomes more positive, becomes incomprehensible, is re-adjusted, fragmented or discontinuous, as far as what could be defined as “the reality” is concerned – a reality which is instead unintelligible – its beginning makes up the first step in its appropriation – or rather in its re-elaboration – on the part of the speaker. It is furthermore interesting to place one’s attention on the fact that the tale of mobility experience does not necessarily begin with an extraordinary act (buying an airway ticket, getting a visa, landing in a foreign country, being illuminated at the departure), but is tied to events, to aspects of the individual’s history, which do not necessary go back to the idea of mobility. In the light of these considerations, I would herewith like to take into consideration three tales which make up my corpus and to briefly try to analyse their structure, starting from their beginning and in continuous interaction with the story of the speaker. This is not merely a formal exercise, but a first, preliminary, analytical phase; its modest objective is to sketch that which I consider to be the theoretical and pragmatic use of the biographical narratives in studies relating to the migratory phenomenon.

The three examples present some interesting suggestions, both in highlighting the polyphony which I mentioned right from the introduction – the variety of life paths, reasons, elements, which are inscribed in individual experiences of mobility – and also because the present features in turn are useful for establishing new theoretical premises. The stories to which I am referring are those of Awa, Baba e Lao. Awa arrived in Italy three years ago when she joined up with her husband; with him she lives in the suburbs of Milan. Baba has been living in Milan for 11 years and is the manager of a vegetarian bar near the Duomo; he is the president of a Senegalese association. Lao is

married to Eleonora, an Italian girl and was living in Turin at the time of the survey: he is a musician by profession. The stories were recorded in Italian.

Let's start by observing how they begin.

Ex.1

G: questo è quello che io volevo chiederti di fare... se mi racconti un po' ma come viene a te... se mi racconti come hai deciso di venire in Italia come hai fatto come è successo... se mi racconti un po' la storia del tuo arrivo in Italia dal Senegal... parti da dove vuoi tu... da quando...

A: da quando è venuta qua?

G: da quando hai deciso di venire perché raccontami quello che vuoi tu! perché tutto è interessante

A tutto è interessante. Quando ho deciso di venire qua perché prima c'era mio marito dopo non ci vediamo. Quando è arrivato lui io ho detto "io voglio andare in Italia vicino a te" lui mi ha detto "ma in Italia è dura perché c'è lavoro c'è qualcosa da fare non è che tu non è che hai pensato che è così come in Senegal che sei a casa ti mandano i soldi fai tutto quello che vuoi" io ho detto "mi piace però mi piace vedere un'altra parte mi piace vedere proprio"...

(Awa, Milano, 1 febbraio 2010)

G: this is what I wanted to ask you to do... if you can tell me a little just as it comes to you....tell me how you decided to come to Italy how you managed to how it happened... if you tell me a little a little about the story of your arrival in Italy from Senegal... start from wherever you like... from when...

A: from when she came here?

G: from when you decided to come because tell me what you like! Because everything is interesting

A: everything is interesting. When I decided to come here because before there was my husband then we cannot meet. When he arrived I told him "I wanna go to Italy close to you" he said to me "but in Italy it is hard because there is job there is something to do don't you have you ever thought that it is as in Senegal where you are at home they send you money you do everything you want" I said "But I like it I like to see another part I really like to see" ...

(Awa, Milan, 1st February 2010)

The story starts with no reference to time or space. Awa starts from the moment in which her husband returns to Senegal, after a stay in Italy and Awa tells him of her desire to follow him to Italy. Her reason seems to that of wishing *to see*¹⁵ and to know. Awa's story is characterized by a sense of disappointment and remorse for the fact of having left behind the network of social relations, which tied her to her village: above all she expresses a strong grudge against her husband, who took the decision of forcing her to leave. In the following extract the narrator emphasizes these aspects:

Ex.2

G: ma lui quand'è che è partito per l'Italia?

A: lui è partito novantanove quatre-vingt-douze. quatre-vingt-douze che è arrivato qua in Italia

G: novantadue

A: ecco novantadue quando lui è arrivato qua noi non siamo sposati

¹⁵ The verb "see" – "I want to see with my own eyes" – which could be translated simplistically with a desire to discover, is often present in the evidence I have collected. The image of eyes that see is often associated to the idea of experiencing personally that reality which has been imagined, which is nurtured by the images seen on television and by the stories of the returning migrants. This aspect can be interpreted taking as a starting point the reflections of Appadurai on the role of imagination in the migratory context ("imagination in social life"), see Appadurai (1991).

G: *ah ochei*

A: *arrivato quatre-vingt-dix-sept è sposato con me*

G: *è venuto giù in Senegal è ti ha sposato*

A: *sì ha sposato me poi se n'è venuto mi sembra che anno... non mi ricordo più (?) è rimasto con me un po' di tempo sei mesi così se n'è tornato ancora qua in Italia e mi lasciava da sola sono in cinta da sola e ho partorito una bambina da sola cresco da sola fino che aveva come si chiama un anno e un mese*

G: *tutto da sola?*

A: *sì tutto da sola con mia cognata perché vivevo con la famiglia di mio marito [a Dakar] però quando lui è tornato per vedere la bambina io gli ho detto "voglio andare lì per vederlo [l'Italia]" però lui non mi ha detto profondo profondo che quando è venuto qua [in Italia] lui non è stato bene ha trovato un lavoro fisso magari per mantenermi qua. Però lui mi ha detto solo che "non è quello che hai pensato tu" però io non ha non è che deve ragionare [non presto attenzione a] quello che dice lui [...]perché voglio venire voglio vedere voglio conoscere un altro paese così solo così che piacevo [è solo questo che mi interessava] però non pensavo come [che] qua in Italia bisogna lavorare [devono lavorare] anche donne non pensavo che devi brigare lavorare per aiutare mio marito per andare vincere di farli di fare vita [per guadagnarsi da vivere]. E io dicevo "voglio venire" lui diceva "sì se vuoi se vuoi lo faccio un ricongiungimento familiare" e lui è andato io non ho non ha ancora detto niente di venire io gliel'ho detto solo una volta basta [...]sì però mi sembra che è lui che decide che io venuta [venissi] da lui perché io non ho mai detto neanche non lo spingo neanche di farmi venire qua in Italia...*

(Awa, Milano, 1 febbraio 2010)

G: *but when was it that he left for Italy?*

A: *he left ninety-nine quatre-vingt-douze [ninety-two], quatre-vingt-douze [ninety-two] that he arrived here in Italy*

G: *ninety-two*

A: *ok ninety-two when he arrived here we were not married*

G: *oh, ok*

A: *quatre-vingt-dix-sept [ninety-seven] arrived he married me*

G: *he came down to Senegal and he married you*

A: *yes he married me the he came back in the year it seems... I can't remember (?) he stayed with me for a while six months so then he came back again to Italy and he left me on my own I am pregnant on my own and I had a baby girl on my own grow on my own until she was how do you say one year and a half*

G: *everything on your own?*

A: *yes everything on my own with my sister-in-law because... I lived with my husband's family [in Dakar] but when he returned to see the child I told him "I wanna go there to see it [Italy]" but he told me deeply deeply that as he came here [in Italy] he was not doing fine he found a stable job maybe too maintain me here. But he told me only that "it is not how you thought" but I don't have he doesn't have to reason [I do not pay attention to] what he says [...] because I wanna come I want to see I want to know another country only in this way I liked it [this is the only thing I was interested in] but I didn't think as [that] here in Italy you need to work [have to work] also women I didn't think you have to work hard to work to help my husband to go to win to let him make his life [to make a living]. And I said "I want to come" he said "yes if you want if you want I make a family rejoining" and he's gone I don't he hasn't said anything yet to come I have told him only once that's enough [...] yeah but it seems to me he is the one who decides I had [to come] to him because I never ever said I never even force him to let me come here in Italy...*

(Awa, Milan, 1st February 2010)

In Awa's extract, the reiteration of reported discourse immediately springs to one's eye, as does the use she makes of it. Rather than reported discourse, Authier-Revuz suggests the definition RDA: "répresentation du discours autre" (representation of someone else's speech [Authier-Revuz 2004]). This notion, as I will prove, is particularly useful in this example. Awa's story in fact seems to unfold on two opposing levels: there seems to be a "structural" level, so to say, which develops throughout the story-telling, in which Awa reflections are pervaded by a sense of disappointment, in a sort of negative balance of her Italian experience of which her husband seems to be the cause. I will call this the "level of reflection." This level is fragmented and is in opposition to a second level, upon which Awa places the significant moments of her departure and above all her decision to leave. This second level develops by means of the close sequencing of the reported discourses of

which she and her husband are the protagonists. By means of direct discourse, Awa seems to dramatise the moments which preceded her departure. The exchanges between the couple – which each time are introduced by the autonymic “say”, thus marking their respective positions (“I said,” “he said”) – are in opposition to the level of reflection, because they also seem to say the opposite to the ideas, which are developed in the latter. From what Awa says, it is her desire to leave (*to see*), which she often repeats and her husband’s warnings and discouragement that emerge. To return to our French author, the reported discourses seem to give voice not just to her husband – who is not physically present at the time of Awa’s story-telling¹⁶ – but also to the desire Awa had to leave and *to get to know another country*, Italy. They are truly “*représentation du discours autre*”. From a closer analysis, Awa’s reported discourses are a “*dédoublement du dire*” (“splitting in two” [Authier-Revuz, 1995]) – that is to say, they double the level of reflection the whole story – by fragmenting it and putting themselves in opposition. The use Awa makes of the deictics of place highlight this opposition and marks the alternation of her positioning throughout the story. The narrator refers to the Italian context with “here” during her reflection – reflection which springs from her experience in Italy – while she uses *there* and *go there* in the dramatization of the moments preceding her departure. Awa’s whole extract seems to be characterized by the opposition of moments, points of view and different characters of the plot – the husband, “the Awa” who wanted to leave and “the Awa” that never really wanted to – elements that are marked by the close sequence of the “buts”. The contraposition is from time to time the warnings of the husband and the (persistence) of Awa’s desire (in the first extract *I like it I like to see* and in the second *I don't have he doesn't have to reason*), almost her beliefs before and after her arrival in Italy (*but I didn't think as [that] here in Italy you need to work*) and above all between herself and her husband, at fault for having hidden certain truths from her (*but he told me deeply deeply...; But he told me only...; but it seems to me he is the one who decides I had [to come]...*)

The example clearly shows how subjectivity emerges through narration and generates “a multiplicity of partial selves” (Ochs, 1996: 22).

Baba’s autobiography is characterized by an idea of a “dream” – this is the exact term he often uses and which dots his story – which represents, as a whole, the individual dream and “wish” shared by a generation.

¹⁶ The absence of her husband at the moment of the story-telling and my position as a young Italian woman and not just as interviewer, certainly play important roles in Awa’s narrative choices. It is certainly impossible to foresee how she would have structured her discourse, if her husband had been present, or if I had been a man, but it is most evident that these contextual aspects are important in interpreting her story.

Ex. 3

G: Senti l'idea è questa che mi racconti come vuoi tu me lo vuoi raccontare coi segni me lo racconti come vuoi tu... come abbiamo sempre fatto! (...) a me piacerebbe sapere com'è partito tutto questo. Quando perché sei partito com'è andata

B: bene. Quando perché. Beh. Diciamo che non c'è un momento preciso in cui io mi sono detto parto! Diciamo che è stato tutto un processo. Come? Cioè noi vivevamo una vita tranquilla, giù. La terra dove sei nato, dove sei cresciuto le cose che tutti fanno con i propri coetanei, connazionali, amici. [...] Posso dire che cominciai a pensare a un viaggio quando furono venuti in Africa una squadra francese che si chiamava Aix en Provence [...] Comunque da quella volta lì, quella partita iniziarono i sogni di andare in Europa...

(Baba, Milano, 6 gennaio 2010)

G: Listen the idea is this that you tell me as you want to tell me with signs tell me as you want to... as we have always done! [...] I would like to know how all this started. When why you left how it went

B: Ok. When why. Well let's say that there is no exact moment when I said to me gotta go! We can say that it was all a process. How? I mean we led a quite life, down there. The land where you were born, where you grew up the things all people do with people of the same age, their fellow countrymen, friends [...] I can say that I started thinking about a journey as a French team called Aix en Provence came to Africa [...] In any case from that time on, from that match my dreams to go to Europe started...

(Baba, Milan, 6th January 2010)

The individual and collective souls of Baba, which he expresses respectively through the use of the deictic “I” on the one hand and “we” or impersonal “you” on the other, are alternated throughout his story. His story in fact develops in a continuous comparison between the condition of boys of his age in his area (Camberene) or in his country (Senegal) and his personal wish of emancipation. It is no coincidence that the real moment of his departure – the moment in which Baba effectively puts his wish into practice – coincides with the death of his father (he who *does not believe in those dreams*).

Ex. 4

... poi morì mio papà quando morì mio papà allora decisi che nessun ostacolo cioè non c'erano più ostacoli che era il momento...

(Baba, Milano, 6 gennaio 2010)

... then my father passed away as my father died I decided that no more obstacles I mean there were no more obstacles it was the right time...

(Baba, Milan, 6th January 2010)

The dream for Baba each time assumes different connotations¹⁷: it is a dream to become a footballer in France, to go to Saudi Arabia to continue his Arab studies, Europe imagined by what he has seen on television, Italy known through the wealth exhibited by the returning migrants, or the simple fact of leaving (*at a certain point the important thing was to leave*). Throughout his narration, dreams alternate, return, are transformed, change their position in the hierarchy. Baba's example, further to introducing us to transgenerational dynamics implied in the process of mobility, allows us to

¹⁷ It is no coincidence that it is used in the plural.

question that north-south route which is often considered a presupposition when speaking of migration. Further to Saudi Arabia, Baba has planned to go to Gambia, *in the Arab countries*. His arrival, first in France and successively in Italy, is purely casual and simply derives from the succession of events.

Lao's beginning is different from the two we have just seen, because it highlights an aspect which I have previously hinted at, that of the story as performing act for the subject.

Ex 5

G: a me interesserebbe che tu mi raccontassi da quando sei partito... quando vuoi tu cominci da dove vuoi tu da quello che secondo te è stato il momento importante e mi racconti quello che ti senti di raccontare. Libero

L: Sennò dobbiamo dire le cose che sono magari più interessanti non lo so... allora dico come se sono in serata o come se sto suonando: allora buona sera o buongiorno dico a tutti i tempi così chi le sente quando è mattina o (?)@ [...] allora mio nome è Fode cognome è Kouyate però soprannome è Lao

G: ah è il soprannome?

L: Lao è il soprannome certo. Perché? Secondo me quando io dico soprannome tu devi dire "perché?"

G: perché è soprannome?

Lao: ecco

(Lao 22, Torino, febbraio 2010)

G: I would like you to tell me about when you left... when you want start from where you want from what you think was the important moment and tell me what you feel to tell. Free

L: otherwise we must tell the things that perhaps are more interesting I don't know...so I speak as if I'm at an evening or if I were playing: so good night or good morning I say to everybody who hear them when is morning or (?)@ [...] so my name is Fode surname is Kouyate but nickname is Lao

G: ah is it your nickname?

L: Lao is my nickname for sure. What's the problem? I think that when I say nickname you have to say "why?"

G: why is it a nickname?

L: that's it

(Lao, Turin, 22nd February 2010)

The story is a creative performance of *parole* in which the subject play a role through which he interprets himself and his life history, adapting it to the context of enunciation. Lao decides to start by interpreting the part of the musician, of the *modern griot*, as he has more than once defined himself: he pretends he is in one of his *evenings* (the concerts), during which he plays the kora, in which he gives the public brief shots of Africa. He becomes the agent of the narrative act on the conversational scene, by turning upside down the roles of command between myself and him: no longer informer or interviewer, but griot and the public – until he himself asks the questions (*I think that when I say nickname you have to say "why?"*). The fact of beginning his narrative with his name and with his family seems to reflect an idea of migration that starts with his birth, with the idea of a “gift” of nature, that of “being griot” – which means both musician and minstrel¹⁸ – which

¹⁸ Lao says in fact that he got the gift of music, the ability to play the kora from his parents who were family griot.

fatally urged him to travel¹⁹. The starting point, beginning with the family name (*Kouyate*), is not however just this. The evocative value of the surname, symbol of a long-standing family tradition of griot, allows him to create the setting of his tale and justify its moves, to attain the sense of his entire narrative performance in a codified, symbolic language. Through this “meta-performative” start, he transforms the interview into a griot’s performance. This is a process of *entextualisation*, by which the narrator reinterprets a performance of *parole* – that of the African griot – with all its corollaries, but in a different context. He reinterprets it and revisits the contents, the enunciative modalities, the roles of the participants, so as to adapt them to a new context. Lao’s performance is not just a formal creative act: the whole of Lao’s storytelling is centred on the character of the modern griot, who during *the adventure* of the journey – first across central West Africa and then Europe – *has studied and has grown with an open mind towards the world and diversity*. This is how Lao describes this in another extract of his tale:

Ex. 6

... poi sono andato in Guinea poi Guinea Guinée Bissau tutto quanto poi sono venuto in Senegal ritorno in Senegal poi [...] poi ritorno in Senegal ero in collaborazione con tutti i musicisti un'altra mixed di cultura che ho preso in Guinée con il Senegal hai capito sviluppo di Lao poi Lao viaggia va in Europa Lao poi fa sua propria band fa un gruppo per andare in tourné in Europa coi suoi musicisti proprio [...] ho deciso di studiare studiare la vita la musica le persone perché ho avuto tantissime esperienze nell'avventura quindi secondo me devo studiare devo conoscere ancora il mondo devo ancora aprirmi ancora di più perché è così [...] capirai non si finisce! [non si finisce mai di conoscere, imparare, crescere]

(Lao, Torino, 22 febbraio 2010)

... then I went to Guinea then Guinea Guinea-Bissau all this then I came to Senegal return to Senegal then [...] then return to Senegal I was together with all the musicians another cultural melting pot which I got in Guinea-Bissau with Senegal have you understood Lao's development then Lao travels goes to Europe Lao then forms his own band forms a group to do a tour in Europe with his musicians really [...] I decided to study study life music people because I had a lot of experience of adventures so I think I must study I still have to know the world I still have to open myself still more because that's how it is [...] you know it never ends! [you never finish to know, to learn, to grow]

(Lao, Turin, 22nd February 2010)

The use of the third person is a continuation of the interpretation that Lao gives of himself. He describes his displacements and the sequencing of events, which make up his experience, as if he were seeing them imprinted in photosequence, the phases of which are marked by the succession of places that he has seen during the journey, without an exact order in time and space. His narration places Lao on a line that seems to go in one direction, that of personal growth as a griot, using the image of a minstrel that has adapted to his time (in fact *modern*).

¹⁹ Lao often mentions *fortune* and *life* as the absolute owners of man’s existence.

Lao turns the terms that make up those “sedentarist metaphysics” referred to by Malkki (1992) upside down, into what could be referred to as the “mobility metaphysics”: migration brings extra value, a *battle* that is *enriching*, which *makes one grow*.

Conclusions

These are only some short orientating examples of the method with which I am analysing the biographical narratives that I have collected, intersecting them with the histories of the storytellers. Rather than focusing on storytelling as an elicitation method, I would prefer to concentrate on the possible types of considerations stemming from the narratives of the migrants. Using their *parole* as starting point – from the formal choices regarding content and performance – it is possible to effect considerations on a larger scale. In fact the interpretations and considerations that I have drawn would not have been possible aprioristically, without fieldwork. The months of observation, conversations, the personal getting to know of the three migrants, intersected with readings, studies of the Senegalese migratory context (social, political, historical) have given consistency to the considerations, which would otherwise have been mere impressions. In this movement which, paraphrasing Johnstone’s words, “stems from the individual and then is directed towards the outside” (Johnstone 2001: p.176) lies the approach that I have herewith proposed.

In narrating his own migration, the storyteller puts forth his experience in a creative act; analysis of this performance can tell us, each time, what migration is and what its processes are. Besides the variety of life paths, in fact, the narratives tell us of the social dynamics implied in mobility processes and of the transformations which they bring about. Thus, they can bring new suggestions to the study of migration and to the concept of the phenomenon itself.

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