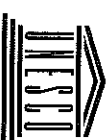


**Migrating Alone:
Unaccompanied and
Separated Children's
Migration to Europe**

Edited by

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Preface and acknowledgements

On a sunny October day in Poitiers (France) in 2006, William Berthomière, Director of the research centre MIGRINTER (Migrations, Espaces et Sociétés, University of Poitiers-CNRS), suggested that I should coordinate the organization of a seminar on my research topic, children migrating alone. Curiously, we were just about to see Michael Winterbottom's film *In This World*, a very fair and realistic description of the migration journey of two young Afghans trying to reach the United Kingdom, shown at MIGRINTER's annual Diver-Cités film festival.

I scarcely imagined that, only a year later, this proposal would have become an international conference with 43 presentations, more than 200 participants from 25 countries and 3 working languages. MIGRINTER and the International Juvenile Justice Observatory (based in Belgium) shared the conference organization with the support of UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector. The event, held in Poitiers on 10 and 11 October 2007, was entitled 'The Migration of Unaccompanied Minors in Europe: the Contexts of Origin, the Migration Routes and the Reception Systems'.

The present publication is one of the outcomes of the conference. All the authors were also contributors to the conference and the book focuses on two of the three main topics discussed. The first part examines how European states deal with the reception and treatment of children migrating or seeking asylum alone; the second part describes the situation experienced by would-be migrant children in their countries of origin and the factors pushing them to their migration adventure. It provides a first response to these fundamental questions with the aim of generating a constructive debate between practitioners, academics and advocates to promote better protection that respects migrant children's rights.

I am particularly grateful to my co-editors Jyothi Kanics and Kristina Touzenis for their valuable work and support during the whole process. I also express my gratitude to all the authors for their insightful contributions and their response and patience in dealing with tight deadlines.

Thank you to all the MIGRINTER team and to all the people who collaborated in the organization of the Poitiers conference. A very particular mention and all my appreciation go to William Berthomière for his help and advice during my stay at MIGRINTER.

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Bash nātaq l-walidin ('to save my parents'):
 personal and social challenges
 of Moroccan unaccompanied children
 in Italy

Francesco Vacchiano

This chapter presents the results of field research carried out in Morocco on the migratory journeys of young migrants, based on conversations with them and their true stories, feelings and experiences. The experience of their journey is also linked to the connection between the representation and daily reality, with the tiredness, suffering, enthusiasm and contradictions related to 'growing up in exile'.

FATHERS AND SONS

In 2000 the original Arabic version of Mohammed Choukri's novel *al-Khubz al-hafi* [For Bread Alone] was published in Morocco. The text had previously appeared in English in 1973, translated by Paul Bowles, and in French in 1980, translated by Tahar Ben Jelloun. The text was banned for a long time in Morocco, officially due to the many 'obscenities' it contained, but the real reason was the description of the social exclusion and violence in which the lowest social classes were kept (a narration that, as any description, is political in itself). Choukri's text constitutes the first part of his autobiography, narrating the difficult years of his childhood and adolescence between Tétouan and Tangier, in a context of poverty and social suffering in which all adults seen condemned to a condition of brutality and violence. The style is basic and terse, representing with great realism the degradation of the adults' role from the possibly formative exemplum to mere violence:

My mother now gave birth to another girl, whom she named Zohra, after the one who had just died. A rat bit her on the hand one night, and she died, too.

1. In this chapter, I use a simplified transcription of Arabic terms, not specifying long vowels or emphatic letters in an attempt to give a broader idea of the text.

My father had a habit of stealing up behind me in the street and seizing my shirt collar. Then with one hand he would twist my arm behind my back, while with the other he would beat me until the blood ran. ... And when his arms and legs were tired from beating and kicking, he would bite my shoulders and arms, pinch my ears, and buffet my face with his fists (Choukri, 1973, pp. 50–51).

The father's authority has lost all trace of power and majesty, all moral justification and all social legitimacy: it has been reduced to pure violence, empty like the blind rage of its expression and 'bare' like a life reduced to mere survival.

Choukri's novel could be inserted in a literary tradition – once defined as 'dismantling literature' (Mdahghri-Alaoui, 1996) – that Moroccan Francophone authors long pursued in many different forms. From the explosion of Driss Charabi's (1954) inaugural *Le passé simple* (see Arab, 2007),² to Rachid Boujétra's (1969) *La réputation*,³ to Abdelhak Senhane's (1983) *Messaouda*, the post-colonial period was characterized by a rich literature focused on the figure of the father, depicted as a domestic tyrant whose social and familial authority is progressively declining. In Charabi, the father is still 'le Seigneur', and the possibility of his symbolic killing is delayed, waiting for a return in which the generational order could be recomposed (and Charabi, after the harsh controversies provoked by his first novel, did so in 1962 with *Succession ouverte* [Heirs to the Past]). In his subsequent writings, the father's power is clearly declining, no longer producing a possible substitute (Hamroudi, 2001), but only indelible wounds hindering the realization of a new monadic self. All along the way, something important was happening in the society.

Narration is so densely intertwined with reality that it is possible to consider it as a form of discourse, in a performative relationship with the objects of its description. Observed over the fifty years of Moroccan independence is a sort of coincidence between the narrative depiction of the declining social role of the father and the progressive erosion of his 'holding' a function in the poorest classes. This process is discussed by the Tunisian psychoanalyst Fethi Benslama (2002), who argued out the 'fall of the father myth' and the 'vertical exile of fathers' in Arab societies.

Following the thread of these suggestions, I attempt to explore the relationship between the 'vertical exile' of fathers and the 'horizontal exile' of children.

2. *Le passé simple* is an emblematic text for various reasons that we cannot go into here. I should simply like to recall the ambiguous relationship of the main character, Driss, with traditional values and imported Enlightenment values. The most effective metaphor for this newly experienced 'familiarity' is represented by *la ligne mince* (the thin line), the recurrent vision of the young rebel, alluding to the thinness of the boundaries within which the new post-colonial subject is forced to find a balance (Pardolfo, 2000).
3. Boujétra is Algerian, but he participated in the same movement of Francophone Maghrebi authors. In fact, *La réputation* deliberately follows the thread of Charabi's novel (Noiray, 1996).

INTERSECTING STORIES ...

Jalil arrived in Italy from Khouribga with a *passseur* (people smuggler) when he was 15. His father had been there for some years, but his 'irregular' circumstances had not allowed him to find a permanent job and an assured salary. For that reason, the family expected Jalil to join his father to boost the family's income. Just after Jalil's arrival, the father decided to leave for Spain, to try to regularize his position. The boy had to stay with some compatriots, selling small objects in the street in informal trading. One day he was stopped by the police and taken to the local social services unit,⁴ where he was offered a place in a specialized unit for minors. There he was able to attend a professional school and finally regularize his position in Italy.⁵ Nevertheless, Jalil continued to be under strong pressure from his father and the *bled*⁶ to become economically productive as soon as possible. This provoked a deep conflict between his personal desires (education and recreational activities) and the family's expectations. This conflict of loyalties, with the resulting anxiety, manifested itself through razor-cuts on his forearms and other such self-inflicted injuries.

After his return from the unsuccessful visit to Spain, Jalil's father went to the social services, explaining his difficulties in taking care of his son, but also accusing the boy of wasting his time and leading a life of pleasure, 'while the family in Morocco starves to death'. When Jalil tried to reply, his father flew into a rage and pronounced a true 'curse', disclaiming his son and calling him a renegade,⁷ and preventing all his relatives from speaking to him. The social worker tried to encourage a reconciliation on several occasions, explaining the programme to the father and requesting his cooperation, but the gap between her proposals and the

4. The Office for Foreign Minors (Ufficio Minori Stranieri) is the specialized unit appointed by the Municipality of Turin for the reception and protection of 'unaccompanied minors'. Welfare intervention is undertaken by social workers, educators and 'cultural mediators'.
5. Law No. 189/02, regulating the status of foreign citizens in Italy, provides for the grant of a residence permit for 'minor age' until the minor comes of age. At 18, this document can be converted into a permit for 'work reasons', but only for those minors who arrived at the age of 15 and who have attended a two-year 'programme of social and civil integration organized by a public or private body' (para. 25). In fact, law 189/02 severely limits the possibility of a lasting insertion for minors, as it excludes the most important group: those aged between 16 and 17. Moreover, the law does not allocate specific funds, leaving it up to municipal administrations to organize the reception (and as a charge to their budgets). It is only since 2007 that (a limited amount of) structural funding has been provided (see Rozi, 2008; Giovannetti, 2008a). A Ministry of Interior memorandum, issued in March 2008, extended the right to a permit for 'work reasons' to all who arrived in Italy as minors, but only for six months. The effects of those changes are still not clear.
6. In Morocco, the term *bled* (from classical Arabic *balad*, 'country', 'region', 'inhabited territory') is one of the most significant expressions of locality. It transmits at the same time the idea of the native country as the place of memory, territory of one's origins and land of identity. *Bled* can be the village of origin or more generally the countryside for the town-dweller, or Morocco for the emigrant. It is the Morocco reconstructed identity where one lives (*bled* or *wild l-bled*, 'son of the *bled*', or simply *bled*). In this sense, the term indicates a 'retorical country' carried out in the ties between human beings and places.
7. The *sakht* (curse) is generally considered a fateful symbolic act to be disclaimed as a child (*msakhtin*) bars one from the family appreciation (*trida*, satisfaction) that is considered essential to earning eternal life after death (on the concept of *trida*, see below).

father's priorities always prevented an agreement. With incredible determination, Jalil did not drop out of the programme, acquired a school certificate and found a job. Only at his coming of age, after seeing his success, did his father make a new approach, but he received a cold welcome from the boy.

Samir was one of those boys generally classed as 'difficult', although he concealed a deep sensitivity behind his 'tough guy' appearance. He had been fatherless for years and arrived from Casablanca to join his brother in Turin when he was 14. Soon afterwards, however, his brother was arrested for drug dealing and Samir was left alone. Crushed by the situation and tormenting himself about the needs of his mother (although she had never explicitly asked for money), Samir started to deal in drugs, sometimes sending money home and personally consuming large quantities of hashish. He was arrested and reported to social services, where he was offered a place in a centre for minors in a rural area. Although accepting the proposal (thanks to the good relationship established with an educator), he had considerable difficulty in tolerating the distance from the urban context and the isolation of his new situation. Numerous disputes arose due to his wish to go to town, to hang out in bars and clubs. These activities were at first occasionally permitted, but gave rise to several dangerous situations: fights, alcohol and drug abuse, even an attempted robbery carried out with friends.

In quiet moments Samir could question these facts, acknowledging his difficulty in showing restraint. He also asked for help to stop using drugs and to understand his rage, and he attended regular sessions at a specialized centre for young people with addiction problems. Samir spoke repeatedly about the weight of a heavy duty – which he saw as *maktub* (destiny); this forced him to live on the margins between risk, illicit activities and perdition. This idea was associated with his present condition, but also with the unusual activity of his mother, who was working as a *shuwafa* (fortune-teller and traditional healer).⁸ When Samir was a child, he participated in the rituals organized at home and went on the *ziyarat* (visits, pilgrimages) to saints' shrines, and now his dreams were full of presences that, in the vocabulary of traditional representations, were giving a shape to his feeling of suffering and ill-fitness.⁹

Malika arrived in Turin after a long trip through various European countries. She had been taken to the social services by some compatriots, who said that they could not take care of her. After some days in a centre for minors, she fell prey to

a convulsive crisis, which in the hospital – as usual in such cases – was ascribed to an epileptic pathology. Talking with her about her story of traumas and conflicts, the different origins of her symptoms quickly became apparent¹⁰ and the most dramatic manifestations disappeared.

Malika came from a lower middle-class family, with both parents working; they lived in a small house in a suburb of Casablanca. She described herself as an exuberant, bright child and narrated the many conflicts with her parents (mainly her father) during early adolescence. One evening, disobeying her parents' prohibition, she joined some friends in a club and accepted a lift from a young acquaintance. The boy made advances, then became more insistent and finally forced her to have sexual intercourse. Malika's family blamed the girl, and her father ordered her to leave the house. After a period at her grandmother's in the countryside, her family paid a *passer* to take her to some compatriots in Europe.

Malika has tried to compensate for her alternate feelings of anger towards adults (now the educators at the host centre) and depression by adopting a striking appearance, running the risk of new and potentially dangerous situations. During one period of her stay at the centre, her deep quest for identity drove her to wear the *hijab*,¹¹ in an attempt to find her place in a public moral system that had expelled her long ago.

A SENSE OF THE MODERN

Moroccan history shows the weight of the social transformations characterizing the country since 1860, when the monarchy was first forced to enter the circuit of international trade and then directly placed under 'protection' by the French 'civilizing'¹² power (Burke, 1976). Many figures could be chosen to represent the appeal and impact of these changes: King Mawlay 'Abd al-'Aziz, who inaugurated the twentieth century with his fascination for all sorts of imported machines (Porch, 1982); the French Resident-General Hubert Lyautey, with his mystic planning of the colonial town (Abu-Lughod, 1980; Rachik, 1995); the renewed and reinvented power of local notables, re-establishing their economic and political supremacy under many flags (Mauret, 1954; Leveau, 1985) – all characters who stand as metaphors for the transformations in the social bond and give a particular shape to so-called 'modernity' in Morocco (Rabinow, 1989).

8. In Morocco, the general attitude towards popular religious practices – and their practitioners – is often ambiguous: even if highly appreciated and attended by large numbers of people, these activities are publicly addressed using the canons of the 'modernist' discourse (in a secular and in a religious meaning), stigmatizing forms and contents as signs of ignorance and as illicit (*haram*) (Geertz, 1968; Bickelman, 1976). In Samir's words, we find the idea that a 'strong' mother (in a mystical sense), even if beloved, can represent a kind of danger for those around her. This allusion also seems related to the death of Samir's father.

9. These presences were often 'impure' animals or dark and abandoned places, which popular tradition sees as inhabited by *jinn*, invisible 'spirits' that share the world with human beings. *Jinn* have the power to seize human bodies as a consequence of transgressions or temptations (Aouatiah, 1993; Boudfenoun, 1999). In Samir's case, they were figures by means of which the

10. Such manifestations are quite common in Moroccan popular contexts, in which fainting and convulsions (called generally *tah*, to fall down) are immediately attributed to the action of a 'spirit' taking possession of the 'ill' body (see note 9). The many-sided nature of falling down is thus related to the semantic field of 'possession' and used to give a physical shape to discomforts and hardships (Taliani and Vacciano, 2006; Pandolfo, 2006; Beneduce, 2002). On the 'category fallacies' in the diagnosis of foreign patients see Kleinman (1982; 1988).

11. The garment covering body and hair, which, especially in contemporary reinterpretations of religious precepts, is recommended in order to express modesty.

12. The *mission civilisatrice* was one of the rhetorical apparatuses used by the French colonial power

Both before and after independence, it was around figures like these that the structural and relational organization of the country took shape: there was widespread migration from the rural to the urban areas, with the migrants occupying the new 'liminal' space of the shanty town (Abu-Lughod, 1980; Rachik, 1995); the masses became involved in a process of 'proletarianization', with employment in demeaning and underpaid areas of the labour market; and the population began to grow, saturating the peripheral spaces of the new marginal townships (Rivet, 2002; Refass, 2004). These social and economic changes were consistent with powerful transformations in cognitive and emotive attitudes: the progressive individualization of goals and strategies, the personalization of responsibilities, the nuclearization of the family (Chakroun, 1996; El Harras, 2004) and the affirmation of the category of 'youth' (*shabiba*), with its specific needs, languages and aspirations. It was in this way that, while the lifestyle changed radically in the new urban space, independence – together with emerging individuality – ratified the urgency of a new promise, represented by the school, as a possible means to social mobility, and by urban life as a sign of new possibilities. The achievement of these possibilities appeared to be a slow process until there was a realization of their unfeasibility and a progressive awareness of the new historical destiny of marginality. It is this transition that Choukri describes, giving his vicissitudes an emblematic significance: as if life in the poorest neighbourhoods could be defined by the experience of the weak and sadistic father and the orphaned and abandoned child.

These reflections are not aimed at condemning Moroccan families with an ineluctable and general verdict: a certain institutional discourse in both Morocco and Europe is inclined to depict families in trouble as inadequate and unable to respond to the needs of their children. It is a well-known process, reproduced in all those discursive practices that transform the poorer classes into dangerous classes and attribute the responsibility of failure to the most fragile in society. What we should like to stress is the deep social matrix of an active process of 'fragilization' of the primary structures, produced through many devices and on a path of wide historical significance.

In this process, new expectations and new hopes are generated, in which 'social immobilization' and 'spatial banishment' from the centres of power and consumption are perceived as an overt betrayal of the promises of modernity. These possibilities are fulfilled, on the contrary, in the images from abroad, transmitted by consumer goods, the media and Moroccan emigrants coming home to visit. The frustration produced by this comparison becomes the reason for a massive investment in an 'elsewhere' loaded with compensatory representations: so expressive of one's 'right to flight' (Mezzadra, 2001) that it is no longer unthinkable to break the class barriers hindering the full achievement of the possibilities sensed in the 'new times'.¹³

The importance of this systematic – and systematized – exclusion is increased by that 'uncomfortable' position that seems to characterize modernity almost everywhere and which Benslama (2002) has described as 'the desire of being other'. The two terms in this definition are, finally, the best reading of the long process that can be witnessed in Morocco, not only from a historical point of view, but also from an emotional and cognitive one. They become the features of a purely 'modern' attitude: the 'desire, legitimate indeed, is the transformation and the improvement of one's condition, the access to social and physical mobility and the availability of consumer goods; the 'other' is that alternative to oneself materializing a world of possibilities to which the only barrier is one's own will.

ELSEWHERE, ONESELF

In some peripheral, especially Berber-speaking, Moroccan areas, older people still remember the passing of 'Monsieur Morand', a sort of collective name that popular memory attributed to French agents travelling around the countryside in search of labour for the homeland industry. The agreement signed in 1963, ratifying the settlement in Casablanca of a branch of the French National Immigration Office (Office National de l'Immigration), constitutes only the most obvious episode in the long vicissitude of Moroccan migration to France (Fadullah, 1994). With their more numerous Algerian colleagues, Moroccan soldiers were in fact employed in the French army during the two world wars and in the Indochina war. Similarly, Franco's army recruited from the Rif the Guardia Mora soldiers employed in the civil war. In the post-war periods and until the 1974 recession, the presence of Moroccan workers in the most important European industries (particularly in France) was a fundamental resource for national production, which needed unskilled labour to function (de Haas, 2005; Berriane, 2005).¹⁴

It was by virtue of this well-established process that migration started to assume greater visibility, intensifying over time as a consequence of the privatization promoted in the 1980s by structural readjustment programmes (Idali, 2002) and the rising unemployment rates of the 1990s. The growing importance of migration was shaped by the comparison between the expectations of well-being and social participation and the limits imposed by a system that reproduced hierarchies of class, age and gender. It is this perceived stillness that produces in youth that intolerable and alienating 'void of existence' foreshadowing the idea of leaving.

anyway from *modern*). From the nineteenth century onwards, it was used to communicate a sense of opposition between what is new and the 'old things', with a degree of evaluation between 'before' and 'after'.

14.

It has been calculated that, under bilateral agreements, more than 300,000 Moroccan workers migrated to France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and, to a lesser extent, Scandinavia, Austria, Switzerland and Spain and Gibraltar between 1962 and 1974 (Salerni, 2003). After greater restrictions on migration possibilities in 1974, the Moroccan community was reduced to around 100,000.

13. Here I use the expression 'new times' to refer to modernity in an etymological sense: the late-Latin term *modernum* was originally used to convey the time expressions 'now', 'at present', 'in the future'.

In Morocco, the term used by many young people to refer to this lack of prospects is *gnat*, from the classical Arabic *ganat*, a verbal form indicating despair and discouragement. On many occasions, however, the concept was explained to me as alluding to spatial and pragmatic features: the concept of 'isolation' (from which the adjective *magnat*, 'isolated', derives) and the common expression *makayn maddir* ('there is nothing to do', with all its possible connotations). In both cases, the allusion is to a despairing segregation, conducive to the blurring of the senses. The ensuing sorrow can be soothed through the consumption of substances, alcohol and hashish, but also, in the most marginal contexts, *shemm* (glue sniffing) and *qarqobi* (anxiolytics and, sometimes, neuroleptics).

The comparison between forced inactivity and the winning images of mobility constitutes the most important limit to self-projection in the lived 'locality' of the places of origin. The image of 'elsewhere' is strongly confirmed by incontrovertible evidence: if, on the one hand, it is evident that only those who study abroad have a true future in the labour market (and well-off families habitually send their younger members to European and North American universities), on the other hand the emigrants' economic success, with its necessary and overflowing ostentation, produces the most noticeable effects (Tahani and Vacchiano, 2006). The visiting emigrants, those 'foreign compatriots' often called with envious contempt *smagria*¹⁵, constitute the most powerful vector of desire, as well as the references on which to encourage hopes of change and success. This is an achievement that, in the most marginal contexts, can be defined mainly by material standards: shoes for those who grew up with only slippers; designer trousers; and – queen of the imaginary – the car.

Seen from the *bled*, 'elsewhere' is the projective place of open possibilities, of the overturning of one's destiny, of the renewal experience produced by a 'cut'. Elsewhere, *fi ghayr makan*, 'the other place', is the place of movement and freedom, where an individual will finally find fulfilment and recognition, but also where a family could find compensation for its history. Its representation is not only geographical (sometimes even its location is uncertain), but above all metaphysical, being defined by multiple and diverse projections of reality and the self. Crossing its threshold is a way to demonstrate, to oneself and others, that one deserves its benefits.

The crossing of the border, whether undertaken in accordance with the family mandate or following a crisis in the domestic holding structure, is always the symbolic passing of a limit (*haada*, in Arabic, means 'limit', 'border', 'frontier' and 'blade', at the same time). Noticeably an initiation passage, it introduces a suspended time in which the identity is transformed, in a synchronic way, in accordance with an impressive social mandate: to return as a winner or not to go back any more.

THE MIGRATION OF MINORS

The migration of minors, especially 'unaccompanied minors', occurs in this general framework, where a cognitive reference context – organizing actions and choices in a balance of cost and benefit – is set up. Moreover, the itinerary has already been drawn up by adults, constituting the real or imaginary reception network to plan a departure (Van der Erf and Heering, 2002). In the migration of minors, however, the weight of family dynamics is inevitably of particular importance. With some significant exceptions, family is – and not only for minors – the most relevant location in which a great many migratory projects are in gestation, if not directly formulated. The family generally mediates the social visibility of leaving, visiting or returning emigrants; produces a set of representations of the surrounding context and elaborates its emotional nuances (according to a feeling of 'relative deprivation' that contributes to the sense of perceived social alienation); and identifies the possible extended transnational ties supporting the migration project.

Furthermore, in some of the cases examined, we could identify in the family a general representation of the minor as a potential productive subject; the promotion of autonomy and responsibility; the conception of individual needs in material terms; the conception of growth as a process of measuring oneself with tests and obstacles; and a generic ambivalent relationship with the normative system, as something to transgress in order to survive (Emppez et al., in press).

Needless to say, we observed some important exceptions, represented by minors without a family or minors leaving without their parents' agreement: in the first case they may have been previously institutionalized (in orphanages or institutions for deviant children), while in the second they may come from families with severe social difficulties, in which they experienced loss, bereavement or neglect (Jiménez Alvarez, 2004). These situations are often typical of the background of many young people living on the street or spending a great part of their day there, either in their towns of origin or around the main ports, where they try to embark for Europe (INAS/UNICEF/Al Khaima Maroc, 2007). In these cases, the impact of social destabilizing factors on the family is even more profound and influential.

In many institutional debates, as well as some analyses of the migration phenomenon, the importance of family in minors' itineraries is often interpreted as a form of parental responsibility for the high-risk travel of their children, strongly stigmatizing the adults. It is only when considering the general framework in which the phenomenon occurs that it is possible to understand the important resource that children might represent for a marginalized family. This condition of 'dispossession', moreover, does not make it easy to repress the desire to flee, which sometimes affects parents and children simultaneously. To these factors, we should add the sincere representation of the departure (of sons and, to a lesser extent, of daughters) as the only occasion for a different future from the perceived static fate.

15. *Smagria* or *smagria* means 'emigrant' in the Moroccan context and it is the opposite term to

cause because failure at school generates the idea of investing personal energy elsewhere; and consequence because the onset of the idea of an alternative affects daily personal commitment.

In 2004 data from the Moroccan Ministry of National Education showed that 800,000 children in the whole country were not attending school. In spite of a labour code prohibiting work under 15 and a law on compulsory education (law 04-00), many children, especially in the rural context, contribute to the family income (*Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, pp. 171–2004). According to the Moroccan Directorate of Statistics (Direction de la Statistique), almost 2 million children did not attend school in the 1999/2000 academic year, either because they never enrolled or because they dropped out. Based on these figures, the overall rate of school attendance was 65.5 per cent at national level, with 73.7 per cent for age 7–12 (one in four out of school) and 49.7 per cent for age 13–15 (one in two) (Lahlou, 2002; Mijares and López García, 2005). Many Moroccan scholars recognize the need for a radical reform of the education system, which does not ensure a good standard of qualifications (Belkouch et al., 2007).

School drop-out is directly connected to the involvement in child labour, in insecure and underpaid conditions, where minors are often exposed to abuse and exploitation: according to the 1994 census, the number of working minors was 356,530, or 5.1 per cent of those employed on a national level, mostly male (65.5 per cent of cases). The number of working children under the age of 10 fell from 14.2 per cent in 1972 to 6.9 per cent in 1994 (59 per cent male; and 81 per cent in rural areas). However, the 1999 Directorate of Statistics report, *Activité, emploi, chômage* [Occupation, Work, Unemployment], highlighted an upturn, with the number of working children rising to 517,800 (45.2 per cent more than in the census): 88 per cent of them were found in rural areas (Lahlou, 2002). According to the Directorate, minors constituted 6.5 per cent of workers in the informal sector (123,741 cases) (Khachani, 2003).

Failure at school and child labour are common experiences for minors migrating alone from Morocco to Italy. Significantly, many of them report how the prospect of leaving the country, operating from an early age, discouraged engagement and family investment in their education. The representations frequently associated with education are marked by scepticism about its actual potential to give access to a profitable future. The idea of a meaningless commitment in the context of origin is reinforced in comparison with the image of emigrants:

Did you see how many unemployed we have in Morocco? A lot of graduates ... They study for years, and their family has to pay for that. For what? My neighbour Hisham ... he was *magarish* [illiterate] and went back with a brand new car ... (Zakaria, 16 years old).

These representations are quite widespread among young people from different social conditions and migratory paths: those who had a family backing the migratory project, and for whom parents paid a large fee to a *passant*, and those

'*riskier*' is the slang expression to allude to clandestine migration (*hijra sirriyya*), and the methods are part of a shared expertise: boys try to hide under a truck – in a small opening near the axle shaft where it is possible to curl up – or to get into a container, or to embark clandestinely on a boat leaving for Europe. Many children and adolescents from the working-class neighbourhoods and shanty towns of Casablanca say that they have left school and now spend the whole day near the merchant port or the trading company that sends goods to Europe by truck.¹⁶ In Tangier it is common to see youths climbing up the wall encircling the harbour, trying to gain access to the embarkation areas so that they can hide on a truck waiting to be loaded or slip onto a ship.¹⁷ Many adolescents, moreover, try to cross the borders of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla through the frontiers of Tarahal and Beni Nsar.

Self-organized attempts constitute the extreme strategy for the poorest, those without any other means. When possible, however, they turn to relatives, neighbours or 'patrons' in order to raise enough money to pay for the journey, which will be repaid to the 'sponsors' on arrival. The organizer can provide several options, with various different fares: the cheapest and riskiest, ranging from €1,500 to €3,000, is paid for crossing the Strait of Gibraltar by sea from the north of Morocco (Al Hoceima and Nador) or to sail from the south-west (Tarfaya) to the Canary Islands. With the addition of the plane fare, it is possible to pass through the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, then embark on a clandestine boat for the Italian island of Lampedusa.¹⁸ A higher outlay corresponds to better treatment: in case of interception and immediate expulsion by the authorities,¹⁹ the second and third attempts are free of charge. The safest and surest way is also the most expensive (€5,000–€6,000) and, for minors, entails the involvement of the family: it consists in appearing, in photographs and forged papers, on the escort's passport

16. In many of these cases, the element of risk blends with the sense of play and challenge, constituting an activity that fills up daily life and gives it a direction. The young people often test one another in mnemonic exercises about departure timetables, the most favourable days and the travel details, showing off their detailed knowledge of the movements of goods and people. The dimension of danger, the accidents, the deaths of friends and acquaintances during their attempts to migrate are all common topics of discussion and comparison (Vacchiano, 2008).

17. In Tangier, a large community of minors (estimated at around 150 children) lives permanently near or inside the port area. They come from different Moroccan regions and tend to stick together according to their origins. For these minors living on the streets, violence, abuse, disease and lack of hygiene are dramatic daily experiences (INAS/UNICEF/Al Kamina Maroc, 2007). Their vicissitudes are examples of migration being motivated by a wish to solve an extreme situation of suffering and breakdown.

18. It is not easy to have an up-to-date picture of the itineraries, which are often rerouted according to border controls and changes in the political climate. Until 2007, for example, the Mediterranean route towards Andalusia seemed to be used less frequently, due to the combined effects of the SIVE (Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior) and the dismantling of some organizations in northern Morocco. Today, Moroccan boats can again be seen disembarking on the Spanish Jamahiriya, the route towards Lampedusa now seems less used by Moroccan migrants.

19. Though the denial of admission is formally prohibited for minors, we gained several young people's testimonies of their being immediately redelivered, by the Spanish and French authorities, to the crew of the boats in which they had sailed. Documented cases are also found in Italy.

as his or her children. The crossing of the border is generally carried out by car or bus, and, as many adolescents remark, 'The result is guaranteed, and you are delivered directly at your destination.'²⁰

In popular Moroccan jargon, irregular migrants are defined as *harraga*: the term derives from the Arabic root 'hrq', associated with the semantic field of 'burning'. The term *harrig* (pl. *harraga*) is an active participle that could be translated as 'the one who burns'. In Morocco the expression, besides being used to refer to illegal migration, often alludes to the infringement of a prohibition or limit (e.g. 'to burn a traffic light' at a junction, but also, metaphorically, borders and limits). The expression, which may be attributed to the act of burning all traces of identity after arrival (a practice common in the past among irregular migrants), has many interesting resonances, not unlike other terms commonly used to classify the passing of the sea: *qta'* (to cut), the already cited '*risker*', and the more neutral '*ubur*'.²¹

ITALIAN ROUTES

As mentioned above, minors arrive in Italy by many different paths, marked by important differences in relation to destination and prospects: some travel with a professional trafficker with forged documents; some are accompanied by an acquaintance and face the clandestine journey by sea; some move in a highly independent way, passing through various places and reaching Italy sometimes by long and tortuous routes.

After their arrival in Italy, minors generally try to reach their adult references (relatives, former neighbours, compatriots, etc.), identified among those who directly promised help or who are thought to be able to provide it. For this reason, even when intercepted almost immediately by social workers – for example, after arrival by sea, where immediate insertion in a reception facility is generally provided – many young people prefer to leave soon, following more autonomous

20. See Arab (2007) for further analysis.

21. The image of fire and burning is a reminder by analogy of the history of Islamic expansion, in which the conqueror prevents the temptation to run away by the symbolic act of burning the ships after landing. This is said of Tariq Ibn Ziyad, the conqueror of Andalusia in the eighth century, but it is also the myth of the conquest of Sicily by the troops of Assad Ibn Al-Furat in 827 (it is useful to remember that the term *fatih*, used in Arabic for 'open', also gives the idea of 'conquest'...). What is interesting here is the link between these images and that peculiar aspect of the migratory experience by which the 'opener' cannot go back unless he returns as a successful 'conqueror'. The idea of the 'cut' is also interesting in relation to the possible analogies with the initiation to life, strongly implied by the migratory itinerary of minors. In their experience, the perspective of the subjective 'risk' – connected with loss, madness and death – constitutes a steady presence. It is also interesting to follow this metaphor in relation to the cuts that many boys make on their skin, in moments of dejection relating to failure and crisis. Significantly, many of them explain this behaviour by the need to 'open' a way out from anguish (Vacchiano, 2008). '*Ubur*' is the classical Arabic term used by the media to refer to the 'passage' and the 'crossing', but it also semantically embraces the idea of the 'transitory' and 'ephemeral' (*dhir*) and what at the same time, constitutes an 'opening' and a 'gap' (*ma'bar*). For a thorough analysis of the complex resonances of 'burning', see Pandolfo (2007).

paths. This is often a rational choice, either because of the lack of a clear public reception project²² or because of the impossibility of achieving regularization when they come of age.²³

For these reasons, the majority of boys (and some girls) move to the big cities of northern Italy, where the presence of Moroccan immigrants is conspicuous. In Turin and Milan – the principal destinations – the number of Moroccan unaccompanied minors at the end of 2007 was 398 and 385 respectively. In Turin, there is a notable presence of minors from Casablanca (70 cases reported in 2007) – mostly from poor areas and shanty towns – followed by young people from the semi-rural province of Khouribga (42 cases); in Milan, minors come mainly from the rural province of Beni Mellal (60 cases reported). The majority of Moroccan minors recorded in Italy in 2007 thus came from Beni Mellal (210), Khouribga (185) and the urban belt of Casablanca (173).²⁴

These data are provided by the Foreign Minors Committee (Comitato Minori Stranieri),²⁵ to which all municipal administrations are required to report contacts with unaccompanied minors. At the end of 2006 Moroccan unaccompanied minors numbered 1,403, that is 21.8 per cent of all unaccompanied minors and the second nationality after Romanians (Giovannetti, 2008a). According to the committee, at the end of 2007 there were 1,492, representing 19.8 per cent of all unaccompanied minors in Italy.

These data are not necessarily complete, as they cannot record the presence of unaccompanied minors in contexts where programmes are not active or the

22. Contradictory strategies have been adopted towards the presence of 'unaccompanied foreign minors', in a climate of conflicting opinions. In 1999 the Foreign Minors Committee (Comitato Minori Stranieri) was set up, initially at the Ministry of Work and Social Solidarity, in order to monitor the phenomenon and coordinate strategies. Direct responsibility for their reception was delegated to the municipal administrations, in the framework of the normal social responses to children in trouble (but without additional funds). Although this could have helped to introduce some normality, the lack of specific funds for reception created a highly differentiated picture: some administrations aimed at good practice, others completely ignored the phenomenon (see also note 5 above). For a thorough analysis of Italian provisions and their effects, see Rozzi (2008) and Giovannetti (2008a). For a comparison with other European countries, see Senovilla Hernández (2007b).

23. According to current legislation (see note 5), many unaccompanied foreign minors, the majority of whom are between 16 and 17, are formally excluded from possible regularization. Here we see the paradoxes of regulations in which the control of migration flows is given more importance than requirements of protection and safeguarding of minors (Bampez et al., in press). In this political framework, the mandate of the Foreign Minors Committee has gradually changed, transforming it into a body charged essentially with the repatriation of minors (Petti, 2004; Senovilla Hernández, 2007a). The 'right to family unity' (articles 9 and 10 of the CRC) is thus less important than concerns over border controls. Although the conditions in the countries of origin prevent most actual repatriations, this indicates an ideological approach to the phenomenon.

24. In a very general way, we can associate the provenance with some specific profiles: minors from urban neighbourhoods generally migrate independently, with tortuous itineraries and particularly dramatic life experiences, while those from rural areas tend to be involved in migratory projects in which the family has directly invested. In similarly general terms, we could say that the latter tend to respond more favourably to insertion programmes, especially if well structured and arranged with the agreement of families in Morocco.

25. See note 22.

possibility of multiple entries should young people give different names in different places. This last factor is indicative of a widespread diffidence among the minors towards social workers, either for fear that they might be reprimanded or accused of involvement in petty crime or because of their desire for a life without constraints.

Life after arrival in the destination country is generally accompanied by a feeling of freedom and personal success, although a sense of responsibility for the family and an awareness of their explicit or implicit expectations gradually emerges. Many adolescents narrate with pride the investiture received while far away from their parents, sometimes expressed by means of a formula of 'satisfaction' (*rida*) full of ritual implications: 'Now you've grown up; we're satisfied with you; now you have to think for yourself; be a man/woman; don't forget where you come from.'²⁶ These words evoke the sense of a family alliance that migration finally confirms, sometimes in a compensatory way. In many cases, however, Moroccan adolescents give a very precise explanation for their migration, stating that they left *bash nātaq l-walidin* (to save the parents). This phrase, besides giving a vivid sense of an intergenerational loyalty oriented from children to parents, shows an awareness of the perceived mission. As 17-year-old 'Omar observed:

Your mother doesn't need to say: 'Send the money' You know from the beginning that they need it. When you call them, and they tell you about their troubles, the loans, the lack of this and that ... you know perfectly well what you have to do ...

These contrasting feelings express the complexity of a reality that differs from what was visible from Morocco: as minors, work is formally illegal²⁷ and in any case is not easy to find; moreover, the adults who promised help are often unable to give protection, as they themselves are in precarious situations. These limited social possibilities clash with the need for quick productivity imposed by the minors' situation and force them into marginal activities: selling small objects on the street, parking cars, washing car windows at road junctions, and so on.

Comparisons with other children, already made before departure, now become more significant in a moral competition for who is the best at making money in critical conditions. The measure of personal value moves progressively from strength of character expressing itself in resistance and moral fibre to an

26. The general sense of these words sounds like a blessing from the parents, a symbolic act still perceived as a confirmation, also from a religious point of view. In particular, the parents' blessing is considered as an important act for the weighing up of one's deeds on the Day of Judgment (see note 7).

27. According to Law 189/02, unaccompanied minors, in contrast to Italians over 16, are not allowed to work regularly. This does not prevent them from finding clandestine jobs, perhaps with a compatriot, although often in conditions of risk and exploitation. Minors on the insertion programmes can attend professional courses and serve an apprenticeship, but they cannot be employed until they come of age and are granted a residence permit for 'work reasons' (if they have the right to do so and with the agreement of the Foreign Minors Committee). The only exception is when a minor obtains a permit for 'family custody' and is in guardianship in a family (of compatriots or of Italians). However, only very few minors obtain custody within a family (7 per cent of minors of all nationalities; see Giovannetti, 2008a).

ability evaluated on a monetary parameter: it is in this way that *flus* (money) becomes the yardstick of achievement.

The possibility of escaping from the tensions of reality is thus expressed in a progressive slide into what is *haram* (illicit), often following the example of a drug dealer. With drug dealing, money flows in easily, but its possession frequently elicits mixed feelings due to its illegal nature (Aaila and Gecele, 2000). On the one hand, there is a sense of power and invulnerability, of the possibility, sometimes felt for the first time, of almost unrestrained consumption and freedom. On the other hand, the quality of life is bad, in the recurring exposure to violence, abuse, danger and the constant fear of the police. Some boys ironically acknowledge that 'the *haram* money has wings', because it is weightless and vanishes as rapidly as it arrived. The boys' pride in their bravery and strength of character – expressed in the vernacular expression *khud l-khulz men jim s-she* (take the bread from the lion's mouth) – blends with the growing sensation of inconclusiveness ('to run without going anywhere') and the pain experienced because of the lack of alternatives.

This mixture of absence of limits and existential suspension gives rise to deep conflict and is often compensated for by the consumption of the same substances that are being sold (including anxiolytics) and alcohol. Under their effect, the minors start to feel anger because of their circumstances, together with a desire to take possession of the surrounding wealth, so close but at the same time impossible to reach.

Moroccan minors constitute the second group of foreigners reported to the Italian police between 2001 and 2004, with 2,024 offences mainly relating to the so-called 'predatory behaviours' – theft and robbery – and to drug peddling. If the percentage of the total number of reports is still low (between 5 per cent and 6 per cent of juveniles reported to the police in the same period were Moroccans), the presence of Moroccan minors in juvenile prisons – the true indicator of their general social condition – is statistically of much greater significance (Dal Lago, 2001; Wacquart, 1999; 2002): the lack of family and social resources of support precludes the alternatives to detention that are available for Italians and for minors of other nationalities. Between 2001 and 2006 the number of Moroccan minors in Italian juvenile prisons varied between seventy-one and fifty-eight a day (almost exclusively male), representing 14 per cent of all minors detained.

In the enclosed penitentiary space, the condition of these young people grows markedly worse. Personal status is often represented by the idea of being *dā'iy* (lost), or being impure and condemned by destiny – *al-makhub* (what is written) – to an illicit life. The imaginary becomes populated by characters and visions representing the status of 'damnation' and 'perdition', first of all the *jinny*²⁸ Aisha Qandisha, the camel-footed woman ravishing the men seduced by her promises and driving them to madness' (Crapanzano, 1973; 1992).

28. The feminine of *jin*, invisible creatures who inhabit the world near to human beings, but represent the negative and the shadow of socialization (see note 9).

The thoughts about family, future and personal condition, combined with the closed cell and, sometimes, abstinence from the usual psychotropes, produce a condition of almost permanent anxiety. To calm this anxiety, the minors repeatedly demand anxiolytics from the medical staff, or resort to self-harm (reported to relieve the feelings of sorrow and regret).

In this way, the 'cut' in the continuity of the experience, inaugurated with the liberating breaking of the social limit, is embodied in a metaphor: self-punishing themes are combined with the desire for freedom and, in the impossibility of articulating a different 'voice',²⁹ with the dull pain provoked by new borders, terribly similar to the old ones.

CONCLUSIONS: ON FAMILY AGAIN

Turin, March 2005

One afternoon in March 2005 I was with some friends in front of the main steps of the University of Turin, when a young Moroccan boy, loaded with objects to sell, came up to me. Nothing strange about that – I'm familiar with the youths, all from the same family, who've covered the area for some time, carrying out their informal trade. That day, however, I was struck by the youth of my interlocutor, doubtless still a child. I dared to ask his age and when he gave me an answer that was clearly untrue (15 years old) I replied with some jokes about his childlike appearance. I was even more surprised, however, when I asked his name and he answered, without any hesitation, 'This [money]':

Through the 'surplus of sense' that characterizes our words, this exchange emblematically highlights a dimension of the experience that is not so different from the one described by Francophone Moroccan post-colonial authors. In their novels, the transmission of *nasab* (lineage, descent, origin, represented in our example by the name) is facing an impasse. These reflections are meant to outline the characters of a 'discourse' and not to describe a form of determinism: certainly, the majority of Moroccan families are able to provide a structured and nurturing environment, but this attitude seems to be situated in a wider horizon of crisis, due essentially to a combination of social change and the delegitimization of the less well-off classes.

When youths tell of their unemployed fathers, who are unable to provide the minimum standards by which dignity is measured today; when mothers relate their lack of arguments to dissuade their children from the idea of leaving; when everybody acknowledges the lack of instruments to filter the image of the neighbour who leaves as *magarish* (illiterate) and returns with a car; when minors emphatically report the desire to redeem the historical fate of their parents, we are touching on the lack of resources, both material and psychological, that a family possesses to manage the power of the legitimate quest for change.

To emphasize these aspects does not mean undervaluing the individual spirit of initiative, the agency expressed by the young people or their challenge to the conditioning normative systems. The migratory project of Moroccan minors constitutes a reversal of the social order experienced as class, age and, in some cases, gender hierarchy. With their movement, they renegotiate the public role, in the attempt to pass from a marginal to a central position (Suárez Navaz, 2006; Jiménez Álvarez, 2007). At the same time, it is impossible to reduce this movement to a simple individual choice. The stories presented here, and those encountered every day, highlight the importance of considering the vicissitudes of the family as a whole. This does not mean considering the family as 'guilty', but neither does it mean ignoring the process of 'parentification' in progress (Bargach, 2008).

While investigating this process, and observing the consequences for young lives, we should like to emphasize a profile that has frequently been ignored – in institutional debates as well as in the press – of two stereotyped opposing images: on the one hand, the minor as a threat to public order, a wandering adventurer, a dangerous 'clandestine'; and on the other hand, the minor as a helpless victim, a passive subject, an object of someone else's practices and discourses.

Beyond these mirror images, it is legitimate to examine the needs that minors express directly. Listening to their stories allows us to recognize the difficulty of growing up and finding one's way alone in a complex and contradictory world: how to face the power of the images of otherness in a world now transformed, and bewildered, by the emerging market? How to respond to the claim for change that, from a condition of systematic disadvantage, the family expresses? How to manage the long-term change? How to reconcile the desire for freedom with the role of an immigrant, living legitimately in the host country as a well-disciplined and submissive worker?

Well-conceived social reception paths show the need for orientation expressed by the adolescents, after their initial reluctance, when it is possible to develop a climate of mutual trust with the social operators. This does not mean that they will not experience sorrow because of all the contradictions they experience, but it encourages negotiation in the choice to postpone autonomy until a future date. To carry out this difficult task, it is necessary to renegotiate with the parents and their objectives, in order to find a different solution from that defined in the 'all or nothing' projections of departure.

This process highlights the centrality of rules, a source of major ambiguity: although rules constitute the basic condition of life in a collective context, immigrants often see them as a constraint, sometimes akin to persecution. In accepting a municipal reception programme, a youth also agrees to exchange independence – contradictory and often painful, but rewarding in many aspects – for the long discipline of training for the labour market, the only possible prospect 'by force of law'.³⁰ This presupposes a form of 'subjection' as the only alternative to the endless circuit between exploitation, self-exploitation and repression.

29. On the concept of 'voice', see particularly Morris (1997).

30. The expression alludes to the reflections of Derrida (1994).

This is not the place for a thorough analysis of this point. Suffice it to recall the reflection on the 'paradox of subjectivation' that Judith Butler (1997, p. 17) reformulates from the work of Michel Foucault: 'Subjection (*assujettissement*) is certainly a power exerted on a subject, but it is also a power assumed by a subject; an assumption which constitutes the same instrument of the becoming of the subject.' In this passage, an appeal is made to the social operator to lean on the productive side of his ambiguous role, the one promoting the appropriation of personal empowerment: if the assumption of the productive role prescribed by the contexts of origin and arrival is really mandatory, it is at least desirable that an ounce of bargaining power could counterbalance procedures that restrict the number of choices.

This is the challenge of a reception that interprets the protection not only as a 're-educational' priority, but as a mutual construction of new possibilities of sociality and life.

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