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DO WE NEED BELONGING? A PLEA FOR MIXITY

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1. Intermarriages: otherness is not only in intimacy

In the crises currently affecting European countries, bi-national unions are “total social facts” that represent an excellent opportunity to understand to what extent, in the micro-sociological frames of personal and family histories, the meso and macro-sociological dimensions –can reshape belonging. These dimensions are comprised of restrictive migration regimes, externalization of EU borders, administrative practices, “governmental xenophobia” and “anti-establishment xenophobia”¹ (Valluy 2010), systemic and “everyday racism” (Essed 1991), right wings parties’ proposals etc. including, but also going beyond transnationalism, intermarriages put *otherness* into intimacy, mixing forms of new affiliation. This is the result of specific historical interactions with the socio-institutional environment.

Migration policies and administrative practices concerning intermarriages have been questioning the notion of otherness for quite some time- both from the perspective of the legal protection (or lack thereof) of family and of individual rights². Nevertheless, it has not been until recently that the implementation of these policies and the media visibility of this topic started drawing new social boundaries.

Over the last decades several decisions of closure of European borders (i.e.: the halt of workforce migration in 1974, the creation of the Schengen area in 1990/1995) generated clear differences in legal status³ between the ‘established’ and the ‘outsiders’ (Elias & Scotson 1997). These, in turn, fostered new, unstable boundaries which are less visible, but not less violent (i.e.: target identity checks of Black and Arab men, differential treatment for recruitment on the base of name or surname, etc.) (Fassin 2010: 5). Both borders and boundaries change over the time, affecting individuals’ everyday lives and

¹ Xenophobia is not only socially rooted, but it can be perpetuated in government institutions or administrations. The officials often either deny or limit access to services to TCNs or undocumented migrants claiming that they are defending national security or order, or they make derogatory statements about those non-nationals. Governmental xenophobia has its own history, characteristics and forms of expression. Furthermore, we can talk of an “anti-establishment xenophobia” (*xénophobie contestataire*) of the right wing parties that Europe has been rediscovering for some years now (Cf. Valluy, 2010: 175).

² Before 1990, in Europe, family laws were highly gendered unequal regarding access/loss of citizenship and transmission of nationality. In Italy until 1975 a woman would lose her Italian citizenship if she married a foreigner. On a similar note, a Belgian mother could not transmit her nationality to her children up until 1984, if the father was not a Belgian national. The same criteria was applied in Italy until 1983. For the Netherlands and France *see* de Hart 2013 and Varro 2003.

³ Thus difference in accessing rights. *See* Groenendijk, 2006.

intimacies, as well as their belonging or perception of belonging. This paper sets out as a plea for *mixity*, as suggested by the French sociolinguist Gabrielle Varro (2003). Varro invites to rethink and overcome the notion of “origins”, a term still widely spread in migration studies and political analysis, which risks perpetrating the stigma of *otherness* among migrants and their descendants, even among those who have already become citizens. The term *mixity* (*‘mixité’*), instead, better depicts the history of societies and migrations by taking a comprehensive approach which takes into account the individual biographical contribution to social change.

2. Marrying out and questioning European citizens’ feeling of belonging

In his book *Eurostars and Eurocities* (2008) Adrian Favell drew an insightful picture of ‘free movers’ in Europe and, observing the increase of cross-national romantic relationships, he concluded by thanking Ettore Recchi for his suggestion of a possible title of the book’s sequel, *Children of the revolution*. The combination of a facilitated mobility with the rights conferred by EU citizenship is especially evident in the largest cities’ (EUCROSS 2014: 87) and such mobility in turn increasingly fosters encounters/connections with non-nationals and the emergence of a population with a multinational background that could embody the European ‘unity in diversity’ motto⁴.

But among the more than 500 million people living in the EU, a political-legal status quo creates inequalities related to the legal status of EU citizens, semi-citizens, quasi-citizens and undocumented migrants⁵. Thus, the situation of those couples formed by a European and a Third Country National (TCN) is very different from that of the couples described by Favell. By ‘Europeans’ I mean persons living permanently in Europe either as 1) native Europeans born from European parents, or 2) born from long-term, naturalized immigrants, or 3) migrants who have acquired a EU nationality and plan to stay in Europe and have their children ‘be(come) European’. A TCN has to undergo a

⁴ See the ERC project ‘EUMARR’ directed by Juan Diez Medrano, a sociological analysis of mixed European couples in Spain, Belgium and Switzerland.

⁵ Undocumented migrants are those who entered Europe without visa or overstayed after their visa expired. Observing the changes in European migration regimes from a socio-historical perspective, we might question whether these undocumented migrants were “irregular/illegal” or whether they were “irregularized” / “illegalized” by the laws and the system in place. This author agrees with the use of this expression considering the « variable degradations of precarious situation experienced by migrants » (Goldring and Landolt 2013) and the lack of recognition of a shared past of the two sides of the Mediterranean. See Bauder 2013 & Samer 2004.

series of administrative practices in order to remain in Europe (i.e.: obtain and renew his/her residence permit, etc.). Depending upon their sex, age, social class, “color”, *these* couples disturb the normalized socio-institutional order created by the politics of belonging (Yuval Davis 2011), which is tightly connected to the notion of security. To put it simply, politics instill a social preference for *the* national⁶, or rather for *some* nationals, and thus family migration policies contribute to the selection of who a suitable citizen is and what a suitable family in Europe looks like.

In this specific intermarriage configuration, one issue regards whether *both* members of a bi-national couple undergo a common experience of *migration*. For the TCN spouse who is coming from abroad the experience of migration is an obvious matter of fact. But is it not also true that the EU citizen spouse *also* experiences subjectively some process of “intimate migration” through sharing the life with an immigrant? I argue that by marrying a TCN, the EU citizen undertakes a “migration process of contact” (Odasso 2013 & 2014). He/she not only begins experiencing another culture, but by being in contact in the intimacy and in the public spheres with a foreigner he/she also experiences the meaning of the ‘how does it feel to’ be a foreigner in Europe in very concrete ways, both at the societal and at the institutional level. These men and women act and live in a changing discursive space in which the media constantly portrays the politicization of international news presenting *otherness* and conjugal *mixity* (*mixité conjugale*) as a problem, reminding us of Goffman’s *tribal stigma*: nationality, race and religion. This stigma has a peculiarity: it can be transmitted from one generation to the next. This characteristic, or as Goffman put it “information that reveal a power expressed in some particular settings of interaction” is intertwined with gender, social capital, education and economic status. The “tribal stigma” thus becomes, or can become, an operative tool to investigate differential treatment towards bi-national and mixed couples and families (Odasso, 2014a) in the public sphere both in terms of social perception and in gaining access to permanent residence and/ or citizenship, which is linked to the discretionary power of the administrations in charge. Nowadays, it is mainly in these institutional frames that the selection towards TCNs targets also the EU citizen. The requirements for getting married, for instance, are equally imposed on the national citizens as on the TCNs, and the inquiries to detect sham marriages involve both partners. The interactive notion proposed by Goffman allows us to consider the EU

⁶ To quote the title of Fatou Diome’s novel “La Préférence Nationale” (Paris: Presence Africaine , 2001).

partner as an “initiate” (Goffman 1975: 41-42) who, by being in contact with stigmatized individuals – in these cases, his/her TCN partner – runs the risk of seeing the stigma being extended to her/him as well. Alice, one of my respondents, told me:

“I’m French, [*ironic laugh and deep sigh*] I’ve never been particularly proud of it but for some time now. I have been ashamed of it [...] I grew up with this idea of France, *liberté égalité fraternité*, the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme* and so on ... I toppled, because I have already seen racism before against my friends when I was young and then I discovered that France is also pro-slavery and Nazi and so maybe France is not so perfect, then the colonialism, but then, at that moment, it was against me.”

Alice and Murad got married in Morocco, but the two remained completely stuck in the administrative bureaucratic system that found their marriage suspicious. The couple was confronted by multiple and divergent legislations, had to face officers’ invasive and aggressive behavior, several police enquiries, complex bureaucracy and unpredictable waiting times to get their marriage fully recognized. Even after the wedding was recognized as legitimate, Murad had to overcome legal obstacles in order to obtain a visa and a stable residence permit. This involved (involves) Alice having to go with Murad to the Prefecture for each permit renewal and providing documentation that attests their ongoing common life (i.e.: electricity bills addressed to both, and tax statements).

Alice and Murad’s story, as those of many other cross-national unions, allows us to observe and, to some extent, to reverse classical forms of belonging, deconstructing a number of categories (both legal and sociological) that are too often taken for granted in migration studies. As Karl Marx wrote, categories are social and historical products. Categorization is therefore a tricky issue for social scientists, who need to take into account these nuances in order to avoid reproducing fixed or discursive forms of stigmatization.

3. Taboo, clichés and nuances: can I say “Arab”?

Since 2009, I have been studying the constraints that bi-national and mixed couples⁷ are

⁷This study is addressed to heterosexual unions (marriages, civil partnership and legal cohabitation). But, here, it seems interesting to note that homosexual marriages are not recognized in Italy while they are recognized in Belgium since 2003, and in France since May 2013. On the base of a bilateral agreement between Morocco and France of 10/08/1981, Morocco is not included in this legislation. Some sentences

confronted with in order to get married, both from an administrative and from a social perspective (my expertise lies in France and Italy, especially in the Veneto and Alsace regions). However, beyond the obstacles that mixed couples face previously to getting married, I am currently much more interested in what happens to bi-national families *after* the celebration of marriage: that is, during the period in which they try to establish a family life together up *until when* they obtain EU citizenship. From a methodological point of view, this still involves conducting fieldwork in the three cities of Brussels, Strasbourg and Turin, where I had collected data for my previous research. The underlying rationale is that a comparative study is the best way to observe how couples are affected by different national historical realities. My approach is interdisciplinary, cutting across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, political science, history, law and linguistics in order to overcome the limits of parceled knowledge.

Having specialized in the Arab region, I have always concentrated on bi-national couples in which one of the partners defines himself/herself as “Arab”. In Europe and beyond, the imaginaries that the denomination “Arab” suggests are the products of an open debate. Such debate has to do with a transmission of history that, as Gramsci put it, is “written by the winner” and thus forgets the histories of common people (e.g.: colonized, migrants, etc.). Conversely, by using a bottom-up perspective it is possible to understand to what extent the West and the East are observing and experiencing each other. Thus, in my research, the focus is voluntarily set on a specific population (“Arab”), but in using this expression – unfortunately exploited in common language by the media, politicians and everyday people alike – “there is not the slightest attempt to essentialize an identity”. Rather, my aim has always been to understand what “being Arab” means in family practices beyond any stigmatization. As a matter of fact, “the verb “to be” defines a presence in the world, an everyday individual and collective experience; a number of common and distinctive features constituting what is called Arabism, but which – like any experience – is contrary to the laws written in stone” (Mardam-Bey et Sanbar 2007: 11).

By subscribing to the idea that each racial and ethnic categorization is based on a preconceived idea of nature, but that it is the racism itself that creates the “race” – as Collette Guillamin wrote – , this choice leads to studying individuals who often

have been challenging the law, namely one case of the Grenoble Court and the one published at the end of January 2015 by the Court of Cassation of Chambéry. For more details about this specific topic, *see* Manuela Salcedo Robledo.

considered as a monolithic group (the Arabs) in order to show their several different characteristics, as well as their various forms of *agency*.

What I observed was that once bi-national families were formed, new unattended affiliations were built over time through particular “status changes” (Glaser & Strauss 1971) that marked partners’ identities and roles⁸ along a path of identity reorganization and negotiation. When they resettled, the migrant partners (both the geographic migrants and the “migrants of contact”) had to redefine their personal identities and roles according to the new environment’s rules and laws. They learnt how to live in the presence (or the absence) of supportive networks, how to fulfill the “integration invitation” (Sayad 1994) that comes from the institutions, and how to deal with multiple transnational spaces (that in an era of global mobility are more, or might be more, than simply the respective nationalities of the two partners). These stages affected, of course, the content of the family’s ways of communication and socialization. Even if mothers and fathers aim to pass on a solid frame for preserving family memory in a coherent manner, their efforts’ outcomes are not always homogeneous. Children of bi-national couples are, more than others, used to an everyday exercise of questioning belonging.

To grasp the complexity of this phenomenon, methodologically, I started on a real “road of knowledge” (Burawoy 1998: 5) using multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1997) combining analysis of statistics and qualitative methods, namely *récits de vie*⁹, participant observation and observant participation (Tedlock, 1991)¹⁰ with bi-national family members, their social surroundings and with Civil Society organizations defending bi-national families and migrants’ rights, state agents and policemen. These methodological tools permit to develop the method of “biographical migration policies’ evaluation”¹¹ as proposed by Ursula Aptizsch, Maria Kontos and Lena Inowlocki.

⁸ These changes vary considerably depending on the initial migratory project, the historical period, and of course social class, age, gender and nationality.

⁹ A crossed analysis of family members’ biographies and the members of their social-institutional surrounding enabled me to access a wider “fragment of socio-historical reality” (Bertaux 2010).

¹⁰ This implies a shift from participant observation (*observation participante*) to an observing participation (*participation observante*) where participation has top priority, becoming a deeper form of observation. The fact of being “inside” the field and experiencing its dynamics become the core of the research.

¹¹ In practical terms, the two spouses (and other actors) are interviewed separately, where they are posed questions about their biographical experience and are invited to evaluate the effects of administrative practices concerning migration policies on the their family lives.

As a matter of fact, looking at the family histories' I was surprised by how many partners and their children had been affected – and possibly disturbed – by social regard, laws and events taking place at the local, national and international level and which alter their sense of belonging.

4. Conflation and stigmatization: migrants, foreigners, Arabs, Muslims

Migration has long been a hot political topic exploited by political groups, both left and right, during electoral campaigns. Nowadays, however, it seems to have become the litmus test for the weaknesses of the European fortress, as events in Lampedusa and elsewhere suggest. In a political climate marked by economic and financial crises, a general loss of faith in politicians, and the aftermath of turbulent changes and on-going civil wars in former dictatorial regimes in the Arab world, new forms of populisms and of extremisms are increasingly visible. Stemming from a criticism to European values and from the rejection of *some* migrants, this hostility is becoming increasingly vocal, to the point of questioning migrants' fundamental rights (their 'right to have rights'). Certain migrants are perceived not only as 'foreign' because of their country of origin (from which the administrative restrictions to legally access national territories ensues) but also because of their gender, religion, culture, ethnicity and race that all appear to draw a "color line" that creates a division between citizens and 'denizens': the racial problem is indeed a social problem (Fassin 2006). If the family constitutes the foundational social core dimension, as legal texts and institutional practices still seem to suggest, its control (more than its protection) is essential to the control of societies.

Therefore, in public discourses migration for family reasons (or just for love) has become an issue that mixes national paternalism¹² with the construction of differences (Delphy 2011; Bonjour *et al.* 2011). While migration driven by caretaking jobs, highly qualified skilled migration or seasonal migration are generally welcomed as "selected" by European states, migrants who come to join their partner or decide to start a family - thus becoming 'settlers'- have conversely be portrayed as a form of migration "inflicted" upon Europe¹³. Since bi-national marriages or family reunifications (which is the terminology officially used in the legal systems of most countries) are one of the

¹² According to sociologist Mary Jackman, paternalism is a "strong ideological frame" that offers efficient instruments for unequal inter-group social relations control (Jackman 1994: 9-10).

¹³ The expressions "selected" and "suffered migration" have been used in the debate on migration in France since 2003. *See.* Odasso and Salcedo 2014; Rodier and Therray 2008.

first stated reasons of entry for migrants coming into Europe¹⁴, this issue, which has socially and administratively been present for a long time, has nowadays been moved to the top of the agenda in quite a few member states. Part of the concern is that, as the members of these families are assumed to have “hyphenated identities” (Yuval-Davis *et al.* 2005: 522) with multiple national and ethnic memberships, they are perceived as a threat to the national social cohesion and to the internal interests of European countries that are attempting to respond to social and economic insecurity with new forms of protectionism. Recent laws on family unions – which were enacted in 2003-2006 in France; in Belgium in 2006, 2009, and then revised in 2013, in Italy in 2009 – are not casual in their timing, and they reinforce borders and boundaries (both real and imaginary) that divide not only geographical territories, but also social actors in charge of the “dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Crowely in Favell 1999). The implementation of family migration policies has created a new discourse (i.e.: *mariage blanc*, *mariage gris*¹⁵) hidden under the fight against fraud and forced marriages in the EU¹⁶. This preoccupation, in turn, has led to the formation of an ‘ad hoc’ migration

¹⁴ “In 2012, in Italy family migration represented 119,745 people in Italy; 118,568 people in Spain, 190,879 people the United Kingdom and 75,926 people in Germany. In France, the most represented nationalities are, in order, Algerians (17,991), Moroccans (13 113) and Tunisians (8517): “[...] Residence permits awarded to spouses of French citizens have been the most numerous in 2013 (48,267 permits = 53% out of the total of the permits given for family reasons). In France, 38,439 permits have been given to spouses of French citizens, 77,2 % out of the total of this category of permit. This proportion represents an ominous trend directly correlated to the rate of bi-national marriages” (French Government, 2014: 32).

¹⁵ In the so-called ‘marriage gris’, one partner “was tricked” by his/her foreign partner who wanted to marry him/her just in order to have the change to come and stay in France or in Belgium. The ‘white marriage’ is defined instead as a contract between individuals who have made an open agreement, often involving the exchange of a sum of money. When love and feelings are involved (even more so in the case of separations) the boundaries between nationalities are intertwined with agency and intention, personal attitudes, and perceptions and behaviors that become culturalized. *See* Salcedo Robledo, 2011.

¹⁶ In September 2014, for instance, the European Commission produced a handbook to help EU Member States fight abuse of EU citizens’ right to free movement and tackle marriages of convenience (26 Sept. 2014). To quote Martine Reicherts, EU’s Justice Commissioner: “The right to free movement is a fundamental right, at the heart of EU citizenship. It is non-negotiable (...) Member States need to be well equipped to intervene when marriage is misused to facilitate irregular immigration. Following a call for action by Member States, the European Commission is giving concrete operational guidance to enable national authorities to prevent such abuse. Local authorities are on the frontline when it comes to implementing free movement rules and making them work.”

industry that revolves around this special issue (state agents, officers, policemen, specialized lawyers, ONGs' employees and militants, etc.). Within the Belgian police force, for instance, one can observe the proliferation of the so-called "Cellules white marriage/Cellules research" (fr. *Cellules mariage blanc/La Recherche*), which were created to keep an eye on suspicious couples, before and after the marriage.

The strategies developed by bi-national couples in order to stay together vary, of course, depending on the country of residence and personal history, and they lead to different and often unexpected consequences¹⁷, which is what makes a comparison of the different national situations interesting. As it happens, the countries studied have different migration histories (both in terms of emigration and immigration), and different histories as colonizing countries, which affects the patterns of migrant communities installed.

While the 1990s represented an intermediate preparatory period, during which marriage migration started becoming sensitive¹⁸, it was yet not so difficult for the partners to marry and to access some rights-- even if they could be rejected by their social milieu. After 2000, instead, the migration laws and their daily implementation have become tougher¹⁹. The same unions that were previously described as an indicator of the foreign population's integration are now regarded with suspicion. The member of the couple who is a EU citizen is seen and treated as a collaborator in sham marriages, or simply as a national identity's traitor (Ferran 2009). Each member state tends to protect its own national interest: thus France has arranged for an annual control for binational couples who live together to be carried out over four years, Belgium has implemented strict economic requirements and crosses 'information controls' across and between the foreign office, the municipalities and social security, while Italy simply turns a blind eye (or two) to the issue (*cf.* Maskens 2013).

A legislative and a street level bureaucracy perspective are just the tip of the iceberg of a wider confusion concerning the politics of belonging in Europe, worldwide inequality

¹⁷ As is, for example, the acceptance of family violence in order to maintain the residence permit (linked to the family reunification sponsor).

¹⁸ Cf. French law n. 93-1027, known as "Pasqua's law", which has created a category of un-regularized yet un-deportable TCN spouses.

¹⁹ See Helena Wray, Agnes Agoston and Jocelyn Hutton (2014). 'A Family Resemblance? The Regulation of Marriage Migration in Europe. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 16: 209-247 and Anne-Marie D'Aoust (2012), Les couples mixtes sous haute surveillance, *Plein Droit*, (95): 15-18.

related to mobility, access to resources (or lack thereof) and an unacknowledged political responsibility in dealing with social insecurity on a deeper level. The regulation of family migration sounds in many ways as a new form of post-colonial exploitation through a new modality of borders' closure²⁰. Moreover, even though cultural diversity and the respect of human rights are legally established principles that can be found in virtually every EU document, these same principles are unfortunately not frequently to be found in practice, given that Arabs are often conflated with Muslims even by state agents and policemen.

After 1989, following the Gulf wars and, especially, with the new era of *fitna* started with September 11th 2001, a more stigmatizing debate on the Arab – and at times Muslim – presence in Europe (with all the mistaken assimilations) began affecting the binational couples in which one of the partners self-identifies or is identified as Arab. The couples formed by a declared Muslim partner seem affected by a particularly harsh treatment²¹. The conflation, in the political and media gaze, of Arabs and Muslims, coupled with the lack of recognition of different interpretations of Islam, was mentioned repeatedly in the conversations I had with the couples and the interviews carried out with them. This atmosphere heavily shaped the ways in which these couples were viewed in both their country of residence and often also in their country of origin. What I found was that there is a very strong link between the migration from Arab countries, the migration-security nexus (Faist, 2004) and a “racialization” that leads to a generalised fear of Islam. This fear can sometimes turn in islamophobia, increasingly so since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Madrid, and the events of Charlie Hebdo, spilling over in on-going debates about headscarf and mosques. This form of religious intolerance calls, in reality, for a deeper “reanalysis of the political fundamentals of the nations and of the racial matrix of the state” (Amiriaux 2014). Thus, if the foreigner is “a public enemy, a criminal, suspected of lack of loyalty and that take the job of the nationals” (Noiriel 2007: 159), the foreign Arab Muslim, even the well-integrated one,

²⁰ In the 1970s work migration was halted, but family reunification allowed. Nowadays, work migration is attentively selected and family reunification restricted, and often effectively blocked for some economical weak categories.

²¹ The partner's country's law interferes in mixed couple's life as well. Considering that the Civil code of almost all Arab countries is based on *sharia*, the recognition of their marriage (in order to plan a transnational life in Europe or abroad) implies some legal actions (i.e.: religious conversion for men, presence of Muslim witnesses, court legalization, etc.).

is considered as a possible “sleeper” that unexpectedly can commit dangerous acts (Gullestad 2006: 278).

A sum of direct and indirect stigma based on nationality, “race” and religion affects these binational families. Love and success in their family life thus becomes a difficult challenge.

5. You are or you come from

The weight of “being an Arab foreigner” is still a stigma, even for those who settled in Europe a long time ago. Some concrete examples might help to better understand how the politics of belonging and social insecurity have been constructed via the political and media discourses in search of a scapegoat, and how these discourses affect the sense of belonging of members of bi-national couples and their children. For instance, Ashraf, married with Patricia since 1993, reported: *“they said to me: “Listen! You, you are Moroccan and even if you obtain the French nationality you will always remain a Moroccan!”*. Ashraf has dual citizenship and has been working and living with his wife and two children in Strasbourg since the mid-1980s. It is evident that there is an important (and widening) gap between subjective and perceived social identity. This raises the questions: is a migrant a foreigner forever? When will he/she be included in the national community?

In Italy, the racialized and gendered stigmatization of migrants, coupled with the lack of historical memory of a past of Italian emigration has led to narratives which conflate country of origin, social class and professional categories. The Neapolitan expression *“vu cumprà”* (English translation: “do you want to buy”) embodies the cliché of the pitchman who used to sell products on the street (or house by house) and has marked the history and social imaginary of Moroccans in Italy (Gallissot *et al.* 2000: 147). The denomination still remains widely used as a verbal derogatory label aimed at north-African migrants, without the slightest preoccupation for the nuances of each life’s history. Silvia, an Italian citizen who has been in a relationship with Mohammed since 2007 (the couple got married in 2009), stated:

“When I said that I had met a Moroccan Muslim guy, you can imagine the reactions! All my friends had some stories to tell about someone they know who has been with a Moroccan or a Muslim and has been treated badly [...] I remember a terrible joke of a “friend”! She sent me a text message saying ‘I am going on holiday near Rimini, maybe I will meet your boyfriend on

the beach selling towels.’ I was shocked!”

Mohammed, an engineer, has two university degrees and works for a company in Milan. The couple plans to move to Morocco to open a business there due to the difficult economic situation in Italy. Silvia affirms that she is ashamed to call herself Italian. These two extracts exemplify just some of the degrading social regards which bi-national couples have to cope with on a daily basis²². The need for recognition and knowledge passes via interpersonal contacts. This is very well embodied by the proliferation of expressions such as “you are not like them!” that some children of bi-national couples report hearing about themselves. “Them”, the Arabs and the Muslims, are criticized in the discourses the children hear in their entourage, but “you”, the children of bi-national parents (Arab and European) are not included in the group of the ‘aliens’ due to the relational proximity. This (‘benevolent’ exceptional regard which separates the known individual from the stigmatized group) tends to be true even when the children themselves are very concerned and feel in a “in-between” space made up of two or multiple belongings. But neither for those who are born and raised in the same country nor for their parents is the distinction always so neat. They are not completely national, nor are they completely migrants: they suffered a migration and a choice of ‘marrying out’. Their identity cards might justify/ attest one or dual-nationality status, but dealing with systemic racism remains difficult.

“Noureddine, Sylvain is my second name, but I am Noureddine. My family name is very Alsatian, but... at school it was never easy, half of my class where descendants of both Arab migrants parents, so, during the primary school and the college, the integration was difficult with the “Blancs” (whites), and then at the high school with the Arabs... as I was the white Arab. I am not the cliché of an Arab!”

These children’s *parole* (words) reveal the numerous fractures of European societies and their internal boundaries. Even if naming the race is a taboo, we need to understand that the effects of racial boundaries’ construction still exists. On the one hand culture has replaced race, but on the other hand, class regained terrain in structuring social inclusion in the nation, especially from a legal perspective. In short, it is sufficient to fulfill the requirement of economic integration in order to renew one’s residence permit

²² The origin of such behaviors, on the other hand, would deserve a whole separate study and reflection regarding the dissemination of misleading information and ignorance.

and obtain citizenship. As Leeds, married to Ahmed since 2011, told me:

“After the marriage, in 2012, my husband wanted to turn his student permit into a family one. They refused our demand, even if I own my flat and I was proving enough income, because I am not permanently employed (*contrat CDI*). I called the Foreigner Office, terrible and impolite answer! [...] Then, a friend of my dad that works there told us ‘we have to reach some quota and so... they applied even more strictly the law on income for family reunification’s dossiers’. [...] It’s inhuman, even more because the conditions are put on me that I am Belgian. And more, my husband was working!”

Selection on the base of income is just one of the ways to choose who belongs to the nation. But in the case of bi-national couples this affects the sense of belonging of the EU citizens as well. Legislative reforms increased the controls on bi-national couples under the justification of detecting sham and forced marriages and social security frauds, targeting even more those marriages that involve a EU citizens of migrant second generations, or having acquired an EU nationality (not from birth), that decides to marry someone of his/her country of origin or the one of his/her parents. French and Belgian politicians portray these marriages as a breach in migration policy and as a risk of “identitarian closure” of local migrant communities. A relevant example is the Belgian Parliament document that justified legislative modifications aimed at limiting family reunification. The document was based on the concerns that “most of these reunifications are solicited by Belgian citizens, born in Belgium from immigrant parents, or having acquired Belgian nationality²³”. Some associations appealed against the family reunification reform of 8 July 2011, and asked the court to remove some of the requirements, but the Belgian Constitutional Court ruled on 26 September 2013 that “the circumstances justify the pertinence of the differential treatments present in the law in order to control this specific kind of migration flows, as the legislator have decided²⁴”. The Court did not provide explanations on the main points raised by the associations (discrimination between Belgians and European citizens and economical resources). This is a good example of the institutional construction of ethnicity, from which frontline officers’ attitudes follow suit. For instance, Marina, a policewoman that works in a ‘Cellule White Marriage’ in Brussels, commented:

²³ Parliamentary paper, Belgian Parliament House, 2010-2011, DOC 53-0443/018, p.166.

²⁴ Arrêt de la Cour constitutionnelle n° 121 du 26/09/2013: 17.

“We are not allowed to do any public statistics about the origins; but look at the blackboard there. We write the list of the couples we need to control. The names and surnames, just Arabs, mainly Moroccans, some Turks and a few Blacks. So you have your answer. I don’t care about these bi-national marriage, but I am protecting my country, well the country that host my parents that came from Spain and where I was born, from fraud or abuse on the social services and welfare aids!”

Never the history of colonization or workforce agreements between Belgium and Morocco or Turkey is presented as a possible cause for long-term settlement of migrants of some nationalities that have contributed to the construction of the nation.

In Italy, the situation is slightly different: there are almost no controls; but the discourse is the same. A Prefecture’s agent affirmed:

“they ask for Italian nationality quickly, they obtain it in three or four years. Quite easily, even if the requirements are more since 2009, two years of marriage without separation until the decision is taken. But they do not care about Italian nationality, they just want to go abroad. The Italian nationality is a tool to be in Europe.”

As researchers, we find ourselves in the position to overcome this dialectic of “us” and “them”. We have the choice of going beyond comparing the meaning of the politics of belonging for “us”, the EU free movers described by Favell, and the politics of belonging imposed to “them” in institutional and social terms. In intermarriages, “us” and “them” are mixed and reversed in several ways, depending upon the social setting (i.e. administrations, friends, etc.) encountered by the couples and their children. Intersectionality can help to nuance the outcomes of ethnic attribution, but it seems not to be enough. The problem seems to be the analysis under the perspective of belonging that often “ethnicizes” individuals and situations that *per se* are not perceived as ethnic by the actors.

6. Do we really need to belong: communities and *mixity*

Given the tricky interaction between the unexpected effects of the politics of belonging (considered both in their implementation and mediatization), how can a researcher really write about changes in belonging without using quotation marks that the politically correct speech suggests? As H elene Bartheleu affirms, each time a quotation mark is used it means that “we assume a correspondence between culture and ethnicity, even if the use is done to avoid all essentialization. Ethnicity will be understood in a negative way ‘racial’, or ‘cultural’ if under a culturalist approach” (2007: 16-17).

Starting from the fact that modernity is characterized by the relativization of the forms of belonging, the communitarian principle still maintains an explicative potential in contemporary social relations. Human beings, as subjects with multiple socio-professional and personal positions, are in fact members of different communities – not only ethnic ones – and they partake to a number of individual and collective identifications (gender, nationality, class, age, etc.).

Belonging remains a subjectively experienced feeling which is very linked to personal experiences, memories and places. Once confronted with changes in status and life histories, however, individual belongings are affected by those national politics of belonging that have to do with the institutional actors in charge of implementing these politics in practice. Secondly, the media echo of the justification for those politics of belonging generates frictions between the established population and new comers. Europe defends difference and diversity, since social homogeneity and purity reminds us of dark times in history. But, at the same time, the EU is unable to overcome its own static fear of ethnic communitarianism and tends to underscore the modern ‘neutralist’ sense of citizenship, meaning assimilation and the abstraction of all differences.

According to Habermas, individuals are the products of the traditions in which they find themselves, of the groups to which they belong, and of the social processes in which they end up (the outcome of agreements of mutual and inter-understanding, communicative act.). Institutions and politics thus represent the core potential for facilitating interactions between groups through a politics of recognition, since to promote ‘social neutrality’ to address differences is an utopia.

There is an important difference between the traditional community’s sense of belonging and the modern forms of (emotional) affiliations. The porous boundaries of belonging permits, at least potentially, to generate forms of ‘profane’ citizenship that overcome the affiliation assumed by the politics of belonging. Thus, intermarriages suggest that both nationals and ‘denizens’ are “not only able to adapt, but to re-invent themselves” as Maurice Godelier (2007) wrote about human beings in general. In order to reach their aim (professional, economical, familial, juridical, etc.) people reshape their affiliations in an on-going process that erases the sense of belonging as origin, as attachment or as static identification. Rather, what we observe is the presence of a plurality of references which are deployed to resist (sometimes through collective action, i.e.: associations of bi-national couples ‘*Amoureux au Ban Public*’) to the existing institutional and social constraints.

We need to take these new forms of citizenship into consideration. Intermarriages suggest that no politics of belonging (and surely not restrictive ones) can work without taking *mixity* into account, and not simply from an ethical point of view (Savidan 2005) but also as a political tool that can help to contrast the “*destins verrouillés*” of some social groups and to rethink efficient global political action.

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