

Under-age Migrants in Temporary Absence of Supportive Adults

Los Menores Migrantes en Ausencia Temporal de Referentes Adultos

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Abstract

This article begins by setting a frame for understanding the violent effect that the temporary absence of adult support in a host country can have on young a person's mental health. This is based on the author's understanding of the Moroccan social background. In the body of the article it includes a complex discussion based on suggesting that the following components are required: 1) Families need to acquire tools to exercise their economic, social and cultural rights and to finally ensure their inclusion in the community, 2) A new form of fatherhood that goes beyond the traditional boundaries between maternal - paternal competences and skills, 3) Children's needs and rights 4) What happens in disadvantaged families. This discussion suggests that these four basic pillars are necessary to ensure support for migrant minors both for their initial trauma and for their forced exile trauma. Finally I am initially proposing a re-conceptualisation of human beings and their difficulties so that their social, historical and economic context are taken into account, and our therapeutic interventions are rebuilt by reconciling various theories to make them more effective.

Resumen

Este artículo comienza con una introducción que enmarca el efecto violento de la falta de reciprocidad en las fronteras en la salud mental de los jóvenes partiendo de la

comprensión del contexto social marroquí desde una visión compleja capaz de contemplar las interacciones de todos los factores sociales, económicos, históricos y culturales. Sirve esta introducción para enmarcar el análisis de la realidad de los Menores Migrantes en Ausencia Temporal de Referentes Adultos en el país receptor, que compone el cuerpo del artículo. Como puntos centrales para la comprensión se profundiza 1) en la familia y sus funciones dejando claro que la familia requiere la adquisición de instrumentos complejos y apropiados, tanto económicos, como sociales y culturales para asegurar su inclusión dentro de la comunidad; 2) en las ventajas de la parentalidad, como nueva expresión que supera la tradicional división entre competencias maternas y competencias paternas; 3) en las necesidades del menor y en sus derechos y 4) en las familias carenciadas. Hablamos entonces de los menores migrantes, de su trauma inicial y del trauma del exilio forzado, siendo fundamental una intervención orientada a garantizar los cuatro pilares necesarios para el equilibrio. Como propuesta de intervención, se propone cambiar el modo de conceptualizar el ser humano y sus dificultades y reconstruir unas terapias capaces de reconciliar varias teorías.

Je me sens branché sur le patrimoine, planétaire, animé par la religion de ce qui relie, le rejet de ce que rejette, une solidarité infinie. *I feel connected through a global heritage, enlivened by a religion that rejects the rejection of an infinite solidarity* (Morin, 2008).

Pour vivre, nous avons besoin d'optimisme: c'est un fait. Mais l'optimisme ne consiste pas à se cacher la réalité. Il consiste à se regarder le monde avec lucidité pour y voir des possibles se dessiner et pour les raisons d'agir et d'espérer. *To live, we need optimism: it is a fact. But optimism cannot hide reality. It is important to clearly see the possibilities for the world giving reasons to act and to hope* (Bourgeois, 1999).

Introduction

In order to make sense of the complexity of all the factors at play in this situation, not only does the social context of Morocco need to be understood but also many economic, historical and cultural factors. The history of Morocco, especially of the colonial period with its great fractures, still needs repairing. Also, Morocco's geopolitical location makes it prone to both internal and external immigration. People movements occur simultaneously both nationally and transnationally.

In addition to the migration of people from Africa to Europe, for whom Morocco is an obligatory step along the way, there are other migrations from the North to the South that are barely recognised or described. I am not referring in this case to investors, which is the result of the present neoliberal context and linked to the processes of dislocation of production, but to other

migrations constituted mainly by two different groups. First there is the group of young people who work with the non-governmental international associations (NGOs) that come to Morocco with programmes designed in the North to prevent clandestine migration, and/or to persuade those who intend migrating to desist from their migratory intentions. Retired Europeans, especially men, represent the second group. They have two principal motivations; one is economic because their salary (or pension) is not sufficient for them to live in Europe and the other is to look for a relationship as an alternative to isolation and loneliness.

For both of these groups Morocco offers opportunities. For young people, the idea of migrating starts from a series of possibilities such as work and social guarantees, without the demand to learn the language of the host country or to give up the *morés* of their native lands. In addition there are a number of advantages for this group, including stimulating curiosity and economic, social and intellectual promotion. For retirees they can count on the promise of a better quality of life thanks to the increased purchasing power of their pension. There is also something even more important, that is to have a new relationship. For instance, if they convert to Islam they can have a young wife and a new 'adopted' family. In this respect, it happens many times that these people consider their decisions under the protection of the values of Islam... the same Islam that is stigmatized in the West!

One may ask at this point, why is this information pertinent? I believe that it is relevant for a number of reasons. With such a complex social context, I could tempt you to think that Morocco, just 14 kilometres from Europe, is a model of cultural diversity and an excellent laboratory offering all kinds of possibilities to investigate this wealth of interactions. Unfortunately that is not the case. We live in a fragmented society divided by invisible frontiers. There is a pseudo-cohabitation, which I call 'folkloric' with interactions that reproduce the characteristic domination of the 'North' of the 'South' at every level and stage. It does not need to be said that those people coming from the North from the beginning enjoy greater advantages than those from the South. This is independent of the context. While some people can move through frontiers in both directions, others cannot do that or can only do so after overcoming many obstacles. 'People from the South' encounter impossible barriers and a lack of understanding even from those from the 'North' who come to 'help' and ask the young people, "Why do you want to leave?"

There are other 'invisible frontiers' that separate the different groups in Moroccan society. These are reinforced by the social myth of 'Moroccan hospitality' that 'resonates' with family myths of hospitality so much that it has become a constitutive value of our society. To question this myth is consid-

ered national disloyalty. In this sense, Neuberger indicates in his magnificent work, *le mythe familial* or the family myth, (1995) that these nationalistic sentiments are reinforced by representations from the family.

This said, the fact of maintaining groups together can be the result of a fragile social context with redundant and superficial interpersonal interactions that are folkloric in character. A pathetic example of this fragmentation can be seen in the so-called ‘intercultural’ encounters whether they take place in the country of origin or in the migrant’s new host country. It is very difficult to avoid the ‘hierarchical trap’ that exists between cultures. In fact, one can frequently observe that the person coming from the South, whether migrant or not, gets the task of ‘exhibiting’ their culture as a response to the questioning member of the representative of the Northern dominant ‘culture’. It is clear that hospitality among people and countries, constitutes a human value, as long as certain minimal conditions assure the viability of such hospitality provided that:

1. Interpersonal relations are based on equality and the reciprocity.
2. Mutual recognition exists that demonstrates a commitment to the relationship.
3. There is a capacity to choose each other freely and to have the ability for ‘meta-communication’ about the relationship, with the objective of meeting the needs of both parties.

My clinical practice has enabled me to witness how the lack of reciprocity in these intercultural frontiers violently marks the mental health of youth, whether they are candidates or not for the migration. These young people tend to perceive the rule of limited mobility as applied to them as unjust and violent. They find it difficult to understand why some people have the right to come and go freely while they cannot even leave. These prohibitions are sent from Europe through often-hidden messages within ‘programmes of help’ have a devastating effect on the mental health of these youngsters. Most of all these prohibitions reduce their self-esteem. It is difficult for anybody to confront the fact that you not wanted outside your own country even when they have never set eyes on you. In addition this prohibition is long term and perhaps definitive.

Considering the character of exclusion from a young age, it is easy to suppose the repercussions on the emotional development of these youngsters, deprived of the right to fantasize, dream and imagine themselves with a backpack following different idols, singers, football players...etc. This is in direct contrast to their European counterparts who are encouraged to discover the world and have their mobility incentivised by the possibility of future economic gain.

The Family, its Functions and Competence

The family system is the first human group in which the youngster exercises their basic human rights. These can be summarized as follows:

1. To live satisfying the child's biological and psychological needs.
2. To provide a place to take in and understand the group's specific norms and the progressive innovation of these rules.
3. To build up an identity in its double, complex, pragmatic and ontological dimension and that of the child's personal promotion.¹
4. To feel protected, to learn how to protect oneself and protect their natural and social resources.
5. To receive an education that may establish a balance between affection and tolerance to frustration.
6. To learn to balance autonomy and dependence as well as to learn to integrate differences.

The acquisition of these basic rights guarantees proper integration within the family and the community and reinforces the links with the social milieu. Nevertheless, to obtain these possibilities, the family needs to develop complex and appropriate cultural, social and/or economic tools to facilitate not only its inclusion in the community but to favourably interact with the social macro-system as well.

Family Competence

Most families given favourable social contexts are competent-enough but it is important to clarify what is needed from the mother and what can be expected from the father, otherwise rigid cultural divisions may have dire consequences. It is important that the parental couple are able to share these competences so that the usual division between maternal and paternal competences may be overcome. Unless they are shared, this division will do nothing

¹ Two inseparable facets form identity. One comprehends the set of values of the world in which we live. The other promotes our own individual values. The first facet is that of basic identity in which the child captures the social code of the social group to which the child belongs (learning the language, etc...) aiming to be recognised by their group. This identity is a defence against psychosis since by being a social entity and by integrating the rules set by the group, the child belongs to this group: the pragmatic identity. Ontological identity is the process by which the person innovates and interacts with these rules. The person is not only a passive being that receives rules but rather acts within the group to reach a place of being able to contribute to changing the group. These processes make us see that culture and identity are not fixed processes but that cultural innovation is also possible. It is an interactive process within a social context.

but create an unbalanced distribution of responsibilities that mainly falls on women. For this reason, I shall refer to ‘parentality’ as a new expression that is becoming more common today. This expression has several advantages:

1. Parentality is the expression and consequence of a democratic culture. To speak about parenthood allows us to refer to subsystems and go beyond ‘myths’ created around particular persons such as the myths created around the mother figure that strengthened unbalanced distribution. By thinking in this manner we can expect both mother and father to be involved in the process of keeping company with the youngsters.
2. Parentality defines interdependence and complementarity between both genders. The parental axis offers us interdependence within the family structure, access to family resources and its own evolution.
3. This vision offers us as therapists an opening as it frees us from a symmetrical confrontation with clients and guarantees us more rigour in our interventions. There are perspectives usually taken as therapeutic that actually trap us in a symmetrical confrontation with those requiring our intervention. This means that therapists, instead of widening their vision in order to include more participants, limit their actions to get ‘obedience’ from the client. When there is resistance on the part of the client the authoritarian tone increases. Instead of establishing a ‘helping subsystem’ in a context of cooperation, a system of symmetry is established that does not guarantee a functional resolution.

Now, to continue with developing the functional competences of the parental axis, what does a family need to know in order to function well?

1. To be able to maintain parental roles to preserve parental authority so that it may be capable of the adequate management with institutional relations such as school, leisure spaces, parental associations and so on in order that sufficient social relations are maintained order to avoid social isolation.
2. To understand education as a way of transmitting affect, love and tolerance of frustration. To educate is also be a guide to one’s own children through an adapting process of the parent’s expectations in relation to the age of their children. In this way requirements can be fixed and respect for them negotiated.
3. To be able to face conflicts, react in an adequate way, discuss for hours and if necessary, seek help.

This set of competences constitutes the necessary accompanying process.

The Minor's Rights and Needs

When we project ourselves into our lives, we never fall into emptiness. We embody ourselves as a link in the family and human chain. We become part of a past, present and future history as we wander through each phase of life and acquire rights and have specific needs. As to a minor's rights, these are universal but I would like to stress their specificity.

1. The right to biological, psychological and social protection.
2. The right to autonomy, understood as the acquisition of criteria as to choose their own relations of dependence.
3. The right to be heard.

It is important that a minor's needs are linked to the necessity for them to create a reliable autobiographical story through:

1. The acknowledgement of heterosexual sexual reproduction and the emotional and cognitive education given to a youngster by both people we call parents. Sometimes gender roles and parental roles do not correspond. These two roles are not the same but relate to the different cultures. The minor should know whom they are in order to build their own autobiographic story.
2. The genders offer a distinction between the identity of man and woman. A minor is born physically and psychologically in symbiosis with a woman and it is the man that will separate both parts of that symbiosis. That process makes more complicated the nature of that link, allowing the process of individuation.
3. Being things as they have been presented, we have as a need of the minor, the cognitive development and the banning of incest, since the adults living with him have the responsibility of facilitating his/her bodily and psychological individuation.

Deprived Families

Deprived families are those that have suffered multiple privations for a long time and do not have what is needed to ensure social belonging in their social context. These can be financial, social, psychological or cultural. In short they have been deprived of the right to be included.

These 'lacks' inevitably mean that these families present a blend of relationship problems that include the struggle for daily survival and emotional and psychological disorganisation. It means that any social agent is unable to distinguish whether a concrete situation is the result of the family's adaptation

to suffering is a social reality or a reflection of an intrapsychic phenomenon. Social agents often become frustrated, despairing and exhausted. We can say that they have experienced what we may call ‘contagion’. It so happens that interventions become redundant and boring mostly because we forget that these families have been able to survive by themselves and have even adopted codes opposed to those of the culture that excludes them. It happens too that these families often experience social agents as enemies.

In summary and without generalizing, we can say that these families live under the most difficult circumstances. Feeling inferior and dependent, they do not participate in the community. They also feel much anger. Indeed, these deprived families express the reciprocal failure of developing stable constructive relations without possible compromise between themselves and society. They each declare themselves enemies. The family becomes convinced that society tries to finish them off, while society often declares that these families are useless and should not be alive.

Minors migrating in the receiving country without related adults

We are dealing with minors coming from contexts of social risk, from chronically deprived families that have been unable to develop parenting skills. Without any authority and qualifications recognised in the social structure they belong to, these families experience a distortion in their function and ranking and so the children undergo a perverse process of ‘parentification’. They become the ‘parents’ in order to save the failed parental system and start a long and complex process in an effort to help their family at the expense of their own growth often missing out specific pre-adolescent and adolescent developmental tasks. They move on, driven by ‘democracy’ and ‘rights of minors’ values. Three factors precipitate the premature decision to migrate. First is the paradox of the distance from Europe. The reality is that while Spain is only 14 miles from Morocco obtaining an entry visa is very difficult. Second, the massive arrival of international agents to ‘prevent the migration of minors’ and third is the time factor, do it while you can, so it is important to depart before reaching adulthood.

Migrant minors reach Europe with an initial emotional injury as a result of the privations experienced within the family and the limitations associated to the absence of a social and family services system in the new country. The trauma of forced exile will be on top of other earlier traumas. Following the initial of period of euphoria as a result of having achieved the migration and being confirmed as a leader of their family, the minor is soon haunted by fears

and the wish to go back. The fear is triggered by the realization that they are not wanted and the sense that they are being blamed for the host country's dysfunctions, the early self-esteem evaporates.

To these two traumas, from family and forced exile, trauma associated with the bureaucratic reception process from police departments, the attorney general office, medical evaluations to determine age, reception centers, etc. needs to be added having to cope with a long list of criticisms from those expected to 'take care of him' that will stigmatize his family for allowing him to leave. We need to consider that to maintain his equilibrium the youth needs his family support. In this case it is rather weak and the family is unable to provide him with needed support and guidance.

As a consequence four pillars are needed to establish some equilibrium.

1. Family space such as the minor's family is unable to absorb the excess anxiety, or to contain it or provide with guidance, nor to teach him the new languages of the digital era. As a consequence the family needs to be helped to learn needed competencies recognizing that they are families living in risky contexts.
2. School system is important because it allows the interaction with peer groups led by shared adults. As a member of the group the minor will experience that he is a minor, at least for a brief period.
3. Social space representing being part of a new society in the common space, being visible and normalized even when he may be transferred next day.
4. Intimate space, which is a delicate dimension that requires a specific intervention aimed at repairing old wounds, searching for points of resilience and reactivating positive memories. Empathic support is needed to bring points of resilience into focus to be reinforced by a supportive context. The points of resilience are like footprints of stars still shining in his memory.

There is a presupposition that once they are admitted at a reception centre, the young people will be taken through different venues, living in the centre, attending a normal school, having access to social spaces, participating in recreation activities and psychotherapeutic follow-ups. Sadly, once in the receiving country such movements and spaces become reduced, everything happens at the centre with no alternatives.

Finally, the worst trauma suffered by these minors is based on a painful paradox. While possessing rights and receiving protection, they are rendered invisible because they are illegal migrants with an 'alienating visibility' and are objects of control. All the symptoms presented by these minors are mostly related to this paradox and not so much to the culture.

Intervention with Minors in the absence of adult family relative in host country

Michel Crozier (1964) proposes as a sine qua non condition that real and significant change is only achieved when there is a common agreement in the social network on behalf of the recipient's self interest to change. That is, the intervener needs to change their perception of the other, since it is important to change how the human being and his difficulties are conceptualised either by changing one's behaviour or by changing the way we operate. It is necessary to change how we see the other, the way of being is conceptualized and the resistance to changes. As a plan we can propose:

1. Having a strong faith in the capacity of human to overcome adversity and this applies to migrant minors too, a long with the real vocation we have chosen.
2. Guiding ourselves on the principle of complexity, which besides allowing the inclusion of the many contexts at play, enables the reintroduction of participants, despite their barriers, cognitive limitations, ideologies, etc... and allows consideration of the internal climate of teams and of time as a factor.
3. Collecting and analysing data, ongoing training and supervision, leading to the creation of transnational networks such as the Association Alkhaima in Tangier, Morocco, where they have managed to connect families into international networks. This approach avoids paternalistic interventions that camouflage prejudice and promotes the maintenance of family bonds while building a therapeutic system.
4. Encouraging participative interventions that avoid paternalistic interventions that often camouflage rejection.
5. As much as possible, avoid making negative value judgments about the minor's family. Even better, encourage a close alliance to facilitate maintaining a stable therapeutic system.

These pre-formulations reflect my intention to create a discussion among professionals from different orientations so that we could try to deconstruct and rebuild therapies that would integrate various theories. No one theory is able to encompass such complex phenomenon.

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