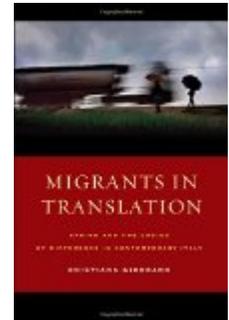


Cristiana Giordano. *Migrants in Translation: Caring and the Logics of Difference in Contemporary Italy.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014. 304 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-520-27665-9.



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Italy is failing at both managing migration fluxes and achieving harmony among the different parts of its ever-changing society. At a political level newcomers are handled as problems that need to be solved and subsequently pigeonholed according to logics of sovereignty. At the level of psychiatric care, they are approached exclusively through the identification of symptoms that ultimately allow institutional hegemonic practices to disregard the trajectories that shape human experiences. *Migrants in Translation: Caring and the Logics of Difference in Contemporary Italy* is an incisive foray into some of these crucial challenges faced by contemporary Italy. Set firmly within medical anthropology but sharing interests and concerns with translation studies as well as sociology of migration, the volume charts new inclusive psychiatric treatments aimed at recent migrants, discussing these treatments as instruments to interpret and even address wider social issues relating to transnational mobility.

The first part guides us through an ethno-psychiatric clinic in Turin where practitioners treat a

group of Nigerian women who suffer from a range of disorders. We see medics who strive to go beyond the traditional structure of psychiatric diagnosing through the understanding of cultural material that originates from the patients' past. This material includes esoteric and ritual practices as well as symbols of religious faith, all of which form a network of reference points that help them make sense of their experiences. Treating spaces as stages that allow specific roles and subjectivities, Giordano shows practitioners engaged in finding what they call "intermediate space," a mediation between preconceived medical techniques and individual ways of expressing suffering. In consonance with Martin Heidegger's view of translation, the moving of words across languages helps to reshape the space in which the movement takes place, so that recounts of magic, human trafficking, and illness can start being comprehended and inform therapy.

The second part pushes the journey through Turin even further by introducing a project aimed at victims of human trafficking called Freedom

Project. It involves social workers, state officials, educators belonging to NGOs, volunteers, doctors, and Catholic nuns. The researcher takes her ethnographic gaze into their meetings at the Immigration Office where the providers discuss the best ways to assist suffering women. She argues that, in spite of the help of ethno-psychiatry, the state seems to reiterate the same reductionist categories that new approaches should aim to avoid. In this part, which alternates theoretical considerations and anthropological observations, the researcher leaves space to her own thoughts and impressions, making the argumentative moves somehow less compelling but nonetheless acutely thought-provoking.

The third section begins with Joy, a Nigerian prostitute reporting her madam to the police and retelling the story of her smuggling into Europe. Her words speak of a tragedy where fear and superstition contribute to her immobility, and get reshaped as they are filtered by cultural mediators and policemen. Translation becomes both necessary and strategic in the prostitutes' path to rehabilitation, for it allows them to shift the visibility of their pasts as well as afford them some form of agency. The subjectivities of the women described by Giordano are enunciated by others exclusively for the state in a way that transforms a dialogue into a monologue. As they talk about rapes and beatings, we see them voicing their suffering and simultaneously getting entangled in constructions of victimhood.

Similar constructions resonate also in the fourth part. In the shelter Casa Effatà former prostitutes "rehearse" their possible future life in the Italian society, experiencing their being translated by their caregivers from lost subjects into ones in need of redemption. The nuns that help these women in actual fact articulate narratives of purification that paradoxically position the foreign woman as a confessor. The conversations, for some reason not reported in the Italian original but only in English, reveal the various positioning

of the women with respect to the nuns, who are seen as morally powerful as well as ambivalent in their behavior.

The final section looks at official reports on the mental condition of a young Albanian woman and puts them in conversation with her life in the ethno-psychiatric space. Her story is one that relates again to the ambivalence of state institutions that try to cure her but at the same time partly deprive her of power. Transgressing the borders of othering practices seems to be the only way to overcome the trap of what Giordano poignantly calls the theater of classifications. For this woman languages other than her own fail to recognize the place of loss from where she speaks, and listening to her difference is one viable alternative trajectory to empowerment.

The volume is based on an extensive ethnography and achieves its aims with dexterity. Most remarkably, Giordano illustrates convincingly some of the ways in which translation can become a tool to acknowledge the incommensurability of difference and/or domesticate it within familiar categories. At times the writing deviates from the line of arguments to engage with wider theoretical issues involving for instance postcoloniality and sexual trafficking, which do not always seem nested well in the ecology of the book. However, both the themes and the analysis the author presents are informative and never superficial, which make this a pleasant reading and a useful piece of research. In many ways it is a pity that the fieldwork was conducted over ten years ago. The themes brought to light by this work speak perfectly to what has happened in Italy in recent years. In May 2013 three men strolling around Milan lost their lives when a mentally ill person originally from Ghana pickaxed them to death. The issues Cristiana Giordano raises so eloquently are possibly even more cogent now.

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