

TRANSFORMING DOUBLE ABSENCE INTO DOUBLE PRESENCE. YOUNG MIGRANTS' RESISTANCE TO SUBORDINATION: A CASE STUDY IN BARCELONA POZZO DI GOTTO AND MILAZZO (SICILY)

*Transformando a dupla ausência em dupla presença.
A resistência dos jovens migrantes à subordinação: um estudo de caso em
Barcelona Pozzo di Gotto e Milazzo (Sicília)*

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Abstract

On the basis of the empirical findings of some ethnographic research, and drawing on Sayad's concept of “double absence”, which is regarded as a pivotal key for the interpretation of the transnational nature of migrations, this paper heuristically introduces and discusses an alternative view. In fact, it aims to analytically reconstruct the practices put in place by young sub-Saharan migrants, including marriage, work and housing, instantiated both in their native and host countries, as a possible manifestation of their constant efforts to counter the alienating effects of “double absence”, by transforming it into “double presence”. The case-study forms part of an academic research programme which started in 2021 and is still ongoing; the ethnographic observations were carried out in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto and Milazzo (Messina/Sicily) and include 45 qualitative interviews that were conducted from a longitudinal perspective.

Keywords: transnational migrations; Abdelmalek Sayad; double absence; counter-conducts; double presence.

Resumo

Com base nos resultados empíricos de algumas pesquisas etnográficas e utilizando o conceito de “dupla ausência” de Sayad, que é considerado uma chave fundamental para a interpretação da natureza transnacional das migrações, este artigo apresenta e discute heurísticamente uma visão alternativa. De fato, ele visa reconstruir analiticamente as práticas adotadas por jovens migrantes da África Subsaariana, incluindo casamento, trabalho e habitação, instanciadas tanto em seus países de origem quanto nos países de acolhimento, como uma possível manifestação de seus esforços constantes para combater os efeitos alienantes da “dupla ausência”, transformando-a em “dupla presença”. O estudo de caso faz parte de um programa de pesquisa acadêmica iniciado em 2021 e ainda em andamento; as observações etnográficas foram realizadas em Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto e Milazzo (Messina/Sicília) e incluem 45 entrevistas qualitativas conduzidas de uma perspectiva longitudinal.

Palavras-chave: migrações transnacionais; Abdelmalek Sayad; dupla ausência; contra-condutas; dupla presença.

Theory and Concept

In a historical period marked for the last three decades by policies aimed at halting migration, in which young people wishing to emigrate to Europe from Africa or Asia cannot simply use a visa and plane ticket, but are forced to undergo danger, torture and humiliation of all kinds, Abdelmalek Sayad's concept of double absence remains an indispensable key for the critical analysis of migration in the contemporary world (Sayad, 2002). Indeed, it highlights the constitutive relationship between the two fields of migration, between the host country and the country of origin, as evidenced in the migrants' life plans and mobility trajectories. Sayad claims that immigrants are forced to endure the ambivalent condition of no longer being recognized as members of their native social milieu which they are deemed to have abandoned in order to carry out their future life plans, while also having little or no success in being fully recognised as citizens and members of the host society, in which they experience forms of exclusion and discrimination. Our experiences in the fieldwork partially reflect this picture, as the young immigrants we observed and interviewed make every effort to escape this alienating condition by strategically experimenting with resistance practices which allow them to reinforce their "presence" in both the host country and the country of origin, as we will show in our case study. In fact, the young migrants included in this research, the majority of whom arrived in Sicily from Sub-Saharan countries, experience a double absence in their risky crossing of securitized borders between countries, in their difficult entry into the precarious and exploitative world of work in the country of immigration, in the way they manage their relationships with relatives in the country of origin, and the new relational networks they create in the host country. Within this ambivalent context, they engage in "counter-conducts", doing their best to manifest their dual presence in both countries by sending home remittances to their families, by getting married, by striving for fair treatment in the workplace and by providing purposeful means for accomplishing this. In what follows, we will set out the theoretical and methodological framework of this paper, along with the main findings from our ethnographic fieldwork.

As Bourdieu and Wacquant¹ wrote:

Sayad shows how the migrant is *atopos*, a curious hybrid without a place, actually "displaced" in the double sense of incongruent and inopportune, trapped in that hybrid sector of social space in an intermediate position between social being and non-being. Neither citizen nor foreigner, neither on the side of the Same nor on the side of the Other, the immigrant exists only by default in the community of origin and by excess in the host society, periodically generating recrimination and resentment in both. Out of place in the two social systems that define his non-existence, the migrant, through the inexorable social harassment and mental embarrassment he causes, forces us to reconsider the question of the legitimate foundations of citizenship and the relationship between citizen, state and nation from top to bottom. (Palidda, 2002, XI)

The migrant's transient condition thus generates a contradiction which is transferred from the spatial order to the temporal, resulting in an impossible ubiquity. The emigrant's fate is to be both present and absent, while the immigrant's paradox is that he is not totally present where he is, which means he is partially absent. Being "at fault in the community of origin and in excess in the host society" can be interpreted as a conviction with no chance of an appeal, a definitive sentence to be served in a sort of perennial limbo, by an immigrant caught between illusion and suffering. It is impossible to deny the vein of pessimism running through all Sayad's work on the

¹ An excerpt from an article by Bourdieu and Wacquant "The Organic Ethnologist of Algerian Migration", from 2000 published in the journal *Ethnography* and used by Palidda in the introduction to the Italian version of "La double absence".

life of the emigrant and the immigrant, in which he dwells in particular on the sick and suffering body; but we can partly lift the dark veil that has settled on his work over time, by underlining the anticipatory aspects in his work (he was a pupil of Bourdieu's) with regard to the autonomy of migration. "Autonomy of migration means that migrations are not resolved under the gaze of the State, but go beyond it, embodying new ways of understanding, recognizing and defining the spatial mobility of human beings" (Avallone, 2018, p. 11).

This is yet another key concept in Sayad's critical approach and has become an essential reference point in the critical sociology of migration, with several other scholars elaborating on his enlightening work. In fact, anticipating many other scholars, Sayad noted the migrants' persistent attempts to escape State thought, emphasizing how, by escaping nationalism and state order, they take on a political role, challenging both the emigration and immigration countries.

We think in terms of labels and classifications, 'structuring structures' produced by nation-states that naturalize (political) borders and (social) boundaries. Naturalizing distinctions entrench hierarchies between those who are rightly and legitimately here and those who, one way or another, have disrupted the national order by crossing borders, settling in and claiming rights against a state that is not originally theirs. Against the cognitive and social background of 'state thought', immigration appears as 'tainted with the idea of being at "fault", with the idea of anomaly and anomie. The immigrant presence is always marked by its incompleteness: it is an at-fault presence that is in itself guilty'. (Boudou, 2021, p. 7)

As migrants are considered incongruous, inappropriate and potentially dangerous, their "management" is delegated to the police and the ministries in charge of internal security, but in spite of the construction of new walls and new borders, and despite the fact that increasingly refined and expensive technologies are being used to identify and repel them to third countries, the "impostors" refuse to give up the "game", either on the Balkan front (Human Rights Watch, 2023) or during the "harga" across the Central Mediterranean (Vacchiano, 2021).

Despite various attempts by States to use physical and symbolic force to prevent the permanent settlement of all those who are not wealthy enough to afford the necessary visas, more and more men and women are exposing the artificiality of borders naturalized by the structuring discourses of Nation-States (Mezzadra, 2015). The migrants, therefore, who the nation-states regard as a worrying challenge to public order because they create porous borders and live between two countries, continue to play a political role (Raimondi, 2016, p. 15). If we see migration as a total social fact, that is, if it extends beyond the mere economic and work components to include all aspects of life, Sayad's analysis becomes an ever-topical and undeniable intuition, much like the mirror function itself (Saada, 2000; Solano, 2012). In fact, between countries of emigration and immigration, what we can see above all, are power relations with a strong colonial flavor, in continuity with the past: "Migration can be seen in continuity with colonization, and therefore the relationships between the host society and the migrants incorporate the perspectives and symbolic attributions, the political hierarchies and relations of production that were typical of the long colonial experience" (Avallone, Torre, 2013).

In an overall view of the epistemology of migration, Sayad's contribution takes a migrant-centric rather than a state-ethnocentric approach, with all that this entails:

The State-ethnocentric approach pays attention exclusively to "objective" factors, without acknowledging the options, and above all, the network of social and family relationships, feelings, expectations, and individual desires that can enable and influence the spatial mobility of individuals. And in those theories where some of these elements are present,

for example in transnationalism (Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1992), these are intrinsically linked to economics, and especially to the State. (Avallone, Molinero Gerbeau, 2021, p. 18)

Transnationalism has been defined as the various links and interactions that connect people or institutions across national borders (Vertovec 1999). Immigrants become trans-migrants as a result of their transnational activities, which enable them to maintain, build, and reinforce multiple links with their countries of origin (Glick *et al.*, 1992). According to Glick & Fouron 1999 and Pries (1999) migrants today live in transnational social fields. More radically, a de-territorialized world has been described, in which the nation-state's power to control population mobility and other forms of circulation has gradually become weaker. The rearticulation of the concept through practices demonstrates that "for migrants, being part of a transnational social field means, for example, taking on the roles and obligations attributable both to the group of origin (which may reside in the migratory context or be in the native country) and to the groups of choice in the host society". According to Riccio (2009), transnationality is more than just a system of family and religious networks that can open up national borders, but also a set of relational practices.

In this framework, what has emerged from the fieldwork that we carried out and that we intend to illustrate here, is the migrants' agency in enacting counter-conducts both within and beyond the "dispositif" of the migration field and the constitutive effects of double absence (Bourdieu, 1985; Foucault, 2005). Our analytical aim is to create a coherent interpretative key in order to assess the adaptive and strategic practices put in place by the young immigrants observed in the fieldwork, and their tentative and creative "methods" to avert double absence by constructing a double presence. In what follows we will describe the fieldwork and the research methodology, and illustrate their performative practices in countering their destiny of double absence by transforming it into presence, namely, by sending remittances to their families of origin, by building their own homes, and by struggling for the recognition of their rights as workers, as we will explain in greater detail below.

Fieldwork and Methodology

The ethnographic research experience was designed with full awareness of the prospect of immersion in the research field, with a clear stance as a researcher/activist, and without having to forgo the potentially transformative functions that may ensue (Firouzi Tabar, 2021).

According to sociological theory, an ethnographic method is a long-term practice of participant observation, and the central methodological question is the difficulty of access to the field, something which is continually remarked on and debated (Harrington, 2003).

"The ethnographic dimension (...), which can be regarded as a meeting between researchers and actors is propitious, and facilitates the breaking of barriers and the reduction of distances" (Anderlini, Filippi, Giliberti, 2022), but due to the delicacy and complexity of the work, it is important for the researchers to exercise reflexivity, and make their positioning known both while relating to the actors in the field and when writing and constructing the research (Colombo, 2001; Cardano, 2014).

While the semi-structured interviews with the labourers took place in their rented accommodation, reception facilities and in some cases even bars and public parks, the moments of sharing in their daily lives took place not only in their shared accommodation but also in public offices such as police stations, police headquarters, employment centers, municipal offices or health registry offices and other similar places, since it was decided to use situations of bureaucratic-

legal support as opportunities for participant observation. Other privileged places were and will continue to be the workplace, primarily the nursery businesses, especially those where there was an established acquaintance with employers.

The biographies of young migrant workers - particularly those of sub-Saharan origin - employed as labourers in the floricultural district of the province of Messina, which were collected from February 2021 to the present, using in-depth interviews and constant participant observation (Semi, 2010; Cardano, 2011), as part of the research grant “Migrations, generations, citizenship and labour market in the globalized Mediterranean”, have revealed forms of resistance (Scott, 1989; Stierl, 2019) implemented to counter “State Thought” (Domenech, 2020), which reduces these people to functional bodies for the economic processes of exploitation and extraction of value (Dines, Rigo, 2015).

In the case of this ethnographic research, which began in 2021 and is still ongoing, access to the field was facilitated by working in the reception system. In this way, there was already an established acquaintance with several of the young migrants at the research centre, and also with other actors, which favoured further social relationships essential to carrying out ethnographic work in the field.

Our interviewee panel consisted largely of young sub-Saharan workers who arrived in Sicily in 2015 from Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, and Ghana. We carried out our interviews primarily in 2021, but also between 2022 and 2023, and during that time, we conducted 27 in-depth interviews, as well as 3 interviews with young Bangladeshi people, and 2 with Moroccan workers who had arrived in the same area ten years earlier. Furthermore, we conducted 15 interviews with local entrepreneurs and administrators, trade union and patronage organisation officials, police officials, activists, and also those involved in social projects aimed at countering worker exploitation in agriculture, and staff working in immigrant reception centres. Between June and July 2023, we re-interviewed four of the young sub-Saharan immigrants who had returned to their country of origin for the first time. Numerous stories about the return and the relationship with the families were collected in the ethnographic fieldwork. The theoretical sampling was carried out by identifying interviewees among the young immigrants, drawing on one of the author’s experiences in young immigrant reception facilities and on the networks of relationships developed during the fieldwork. The selected sample is part of a population of sub-Saharan immigrants working in the socio-economic district studied, which increased from 29 agricultural labourers in 2018 to 127 in 2023, according to official INPS data. Our sample is entirely made up of male immigrants, primarily from villages and rural areas, with a low educational background, although there are some exceptions.

Critical agency through remittances and family projects

In terms of a future in Italy (or in other European countries), what emerges from the fieldwork is that the Sub-Saharan migrants’ double glance towards the country of emigration and towards the country of immigration is not simply one of resignation to a destiny of double absence, which still characterizes their condition, but rather the manifestation of their constant efforts to transform it into a double presence, nurturing their aspirations for a different future. In fact, many of the life stories that emerged in the interviews and the regular meetings with the young sub-Saharan migrants testify to the daily commitment to sending remittances to relatives who remain in the country of origin, and above all to the aspiration of creating a new family by marrying a girl from their native country, but with the prospect of a subsequent reunion in Italy.

As Sayad pointed out, freedom of identity and belonging is unlikely to be granted both in the States of departure and in those of arrival, which is why the migrants' subjectivity and ability to choose become the privileged field in which to explore contexts, spaces and practices of emancipation/liberation (Avallone, 2018).

To further elaborate on this point, the dimension of absence, both in the country of origin and in the country of arrival, already emerges in the first phase of the migratory trajectory, when feelings of despondency and inadequacy towards family members and the original community appear, aggravated by the difficulty of guaranteeing the promised help and repayment of any debt incurred, and then, in the strong perception of rejection by the host society, which is reluctant to accept them formally and culturally.

However, compared to the migrants studied by Sayad, the young sub-Saharanans who migrated to Sicily, and are involved in our ethnographic research, differ on one important point, that they do not harbour any illusion of return (except in marginal cases). The collective "lie" fuelled by the complicity of the emigration and immigration countries (Boubeker, 2013, p. 107) concerning current human mobility is difficult to feed and spread successfully, even if there are attempts to renew it in some assisted return policies. K., S. and F. are three young men from Mali who arrived in Italy in 2016 after 3 years of traumatic experiences in Algeria and, more particularly in Libya (several months confined in concentration camps, amidst deprivation and violence) and who would have been able to continue within the reception service by moving from the community to the SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) structure for adults in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, but preferred to take the path towards independence immediately. These three young migrants were much more sensitive to the risks of being stuck in a suspended situation than other migrants (Fontanari, 2017; Pitzalis, 2022). Arriving in Sicily in 2016, they spent a year in a first reception facility (K. and S. in Trapani and F. with his brother in Caltagirone) and then in June 2017 were placed in a second reception facility for UFM (unaccompanied foreign minors) in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto. K., S. and F. found themselves having to wait many months to obtain a residence permit after the completion of the administrative procedure at the Police Station in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto because of delays related to the internal organization of the Messina Police Headquarters. After five months of waiting, they decided to practice a form of non-violent protest by not going to school and refusing to participate in other community activities. The protest lasted three months, until they finally got their residence permits. K. initially undertook a secondary movement to Spain where, thanks to a fellow villager, he managed to work, albeit irregularly and without the possibility of acquiring a Spanish residence permit. This was the reason why he returned to Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto after a year, where he could count on the support of some of the friends who had remained. After obtaining his driving license, he gradually entered a nursery business, alternating this work with picking citrus fruit and catering work.

F. (who arrived in Italy with a younger brother), has, from the beginning, alternated between periods of work in catering, citrus harvesting and working for the same company as K. After a period of irregular work, he initially obtained a 51-day contract and finally his current 101-day contract, assiduously requested from the outset. After leaving the reception circuit, S. immediately started working in a nearby tourist center which included accommodation, and subsequently undertook community service activities, eventually finding another job in catering. Currently, he does two jobs: working in a nursery in the morning and in a restaurant in the afternoon/evening. For a period, S. shared a house with the other two Malians and then rented an apartment with some young people from Senegal and Gambia.

“Taking” a wife

The three young migrants managed to return to their country of origin for the first time between 2022 and 2023. The first return is usually highly significant as it marks the beginning of a new phase in which it is possible to enter and leave the country without having to violate borders. Acquiring the legal requisites for moving between the country of emigration and that of immigration is an unequivocal sign of a successful migration path (Degli Uberti, Riccio, 2017).

Often, this first return home is marked by access to the “marriage market”, culminating in an engagement or an actual wedding, as also occurred in their case. “Taking” a wife marks a decisive turning point in any migration history. In fact, as Della Puppa explains for young Bangladeshis (2014) and Cordova for young Tunisians (2022), their masculinity does not allow them to remain celibate for long, unless they want to risk arousing concern and disappointment within their families, and also the disapproval of their peers, despite the fact that economic and work difficulties are a common experience and can certainly justify the postponement of marriage.

The wedding, however, is rarely followed by the immediate transfer of the wife to Italy, but there is usually a period of “long-distance” relations, due to the precarious bureaucratic-legal and economic situation.

To fully understand the meaning of “long-distance relationship” it is useful to refer to A., also Malian, who arrived in Italy in 2014. Although he is Malian, at the time of his departure for Italy A. was living in Gambia, due to problems regarding poverty and safety in northern Mali. After a period of institutional reception in Italy, he also attempted a secondary movement to Germany, which is the main destination from Southern Europe (Bouali, 2018), but had to return to Italy after only a few years for reasons related to his legal status. He currently works in a nursery in the Milazzo area with a 101-day contract.

A. returned to Africa in 2019 and again in 2022: the first return allowed him to marry a young Gambian woman and to conceive his first daughter, and during the second return his wife became pregnant with their second child. All recent remittances have been addressed to his wife in order to support his growing family. Of course, A. intends to reunite his transnational family in Italy as soon as legal and economic conditions allow.

For migrants, being part of a transnational social field means, for example, taking on the roles and obligations attributable to the group of origin (which may either reside in the migratory context or be in the native country), and also those of the groups of choice in the host society. It also means being able to draw on a series of material, affective and symbolic resources with reference to all the places included in the field. (Bertolani, Rinaldini, Tognetti Bordogna, 2012, p. 71)

C. is a laborer for a nursery business, and has also been in Italy since 2016, although he returned to his village in Gambia a few months ago to visit his two sisters who live with their grandmother and his uncle’s family, but more particularly, to be with his girlfriend and formalize their engagement. His plan is to get married and bring her to Italy as soon as he manages to obtain the 10-year residence document, find a suitable home and negotiate with his employer the possibility of moving from a 101-day contract to a 151- day contract, so that he can prove he is able to keep a wife in Italy (Della Puppa, 2018, p. 3). In the meantime, he will continue to send remittances to his grandmother in order to help with his sisters’ studies, as they are still at school.

E., who is of Gambian origin (arriving in Italy in 2016), is well-known in the local sub-Saharan diaspora for his passion for music and has self-produced numerous video clips and music

recordings. At the end of September 2023, he delegated one of his younger brothers to organize his wedding to the girl he had been engaged to for some time in Gambia, in the city of Serrakunda. Despite his absence, the lavish wedding took place in the presence of all his family members, his friends and his wife's friends, confirming his commitment to her for life. The event sanctioned his future role and saw him as the first of his peers to rent an apartment, where he currently lives alone, but which he is furnishing for his future family. All this took place in full harmony with the group of Gambians and Senegalese with whom he shared an apartment in the same building and whom he regularly invites to celebrate religious anniversaries or simple convivial moments. Like his Gambian and Senegalese friends with whom he shared part of his migratory experience, E. strives to combine his secular passions (such as music) with religious precepts, and together they participate in the most important religious rites at the mosque in Barcelona Pozzo di Gotto, which is located in the city centre².

E. has been able to accomplish his aspiration of renting his own home due to the increased security he gained by changing from a seasonal labourer in nurseries to a job with a permanent contract. Having your own home is a significant achievement that has an impact on your reputation in your diasporic community. There is little doubt that the opportunity to take care of and personalize your own home and re-signify the spaces (with a room currently being used as a recording studio) has a huge effect on the quality of life (Fravega, 2022, p. 176).

For the migrant, the indivisible link between work and housing has already been highlighted by Sayad in an interview:

The migrant's condition reveals the relationship between work and housing in an extreme way, makes them evident. (...) Along with a job, it is necessary to give him a roof, a dwelling, housing, because he does not bring this heritage to his new residence, he left everything in his country. This is the specificity of the immigrant worker, it contains much of the history of immigration. (Neiburg-Sayad, 2013, p. 56)

The commitment to housing solutions does not only concern the place of immigration, since the immigrant is always an emigrant who views housing as one of the most important investments, along with the remittances sent to family members in the country of origin. In a meeting at the home of the young Malian S. in Barcelona on July 3, 2023, we were told how his return to his home country was not only an opportunity to marry but also to see the house that his father had been able to renovate and enlarge in his village of origin, thanks to his remittances. He proudly showed me the photos of the house in Bouloulimake but also told me that with the parents' remittances they had also been able to enlarge the small family farm and purchase additional animals.

But his commitments are not limited to the house in Bouloulimake: he also has another property under construction in the capital Bamako, for which he showed me images of the foundations. The reason for his commitment to building a house in Bamako is motivated by his wife's desire to remain in the capital where her family have always lived due to her father's military career, despite the fact that her mother was originally from the same village as S. Until the moment of reunion with S. in Italy, his wife intends to continue living in the capital with her mother and older brother, who has been the head of the family since her father died in 2013. However, at

² The Islamic cultural center of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, founded by Moroccans and Tunisians who have been present in the area for more than thirty years, is now also regularly frequented by the sub-Saharan in the area and has a history similar to that of Messina (Cordova, 2023). The contributions of a donor from Qatar made it possible to purchase a small structure in the city center, but as often happens in these cases, the operation led to conflict and real divisions, leading part of the community to continue using a small rented basement garage in a suburban neighborhood as a place of prayer.

certain times of the year she will return to the village to live with S.'s parents in accordance with the local custom, which stipulates that daughters-in-law should spend periods of time with their mothers-in-law so they can help raise the children.

Helping family: an absolute moral imperative

While this link with the family emerges from the qualitative survey, and is confirmed by the available quantitative data, showing a conspicuous and constant growth in the remittances sent home by migrants from sub-Saharan countries in recent years, it should not be over-generalized, because there are other stories which testify to cases in which young migrants have broken with the country of origin and where relationships with family members had already deteriorated at the time of departure. The Bank of Italy data for the province of Messina (table 1), and in particular regarding the nationalities present in the districts of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto and Milazzo, reveal a rising trend in remittances sent to countries such as Nigeria, Senegal and especially Gambia and Mali, where they have almost tripled.

Table 1 - Remittances from foreign workers in the Messina area in millions of euros (Bank of Italy data <https://www.bancaditalia.it/statistiche/tematiche/rapporti-estero/rimesse-immigrati/>)

States	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Albania	0,452	0,44	0,437	0,474	0,47	0,402	0,434	0,491	0,467	0,477	0,555	0,48	0,448
Marocco	1,496	1,254	1,335	1,471	1,574	1,622	1,682	1,730	1,725	2,148	2,709	2,584	2,484
Romania	9,215	8,412	8,731	8,882	8,494	7,355	6,447	5,930	4,982	5,206	4,557	3,721	3,209
Tunisia	0,441	0,363	0,401	0,445	0,458	0,396	0,383	0,441	0,488	0,519	0,730	0,773	0,953
Bangladesh	0,438	0,533	0,832	0,982	1,163	1,457	1,683	1,945	2,221	1,779	2,996	3,491	3,133
Mali	0,003	0,005	0,005	0,014	0,039	0,058	0,072	0,102	0,126	0,186	0,283	0,362	0,269
Nigeria	0,066	0,085	0,088	0,146	0,161	0,115	0,164	0,282	0,221	0,224	0,204	0,290	0,260
Senegal	0,375	0,388	0,441	0,447	0,470	0,475	0,549	0,642	0,692	0,624	0,864	0,899	0,737
Gambia	0,003	0,003	0,006	0,020	0,030	0,051	0,095	0,126	0,172	0,259	0,409	0,453	0,432

In interviews and conversations with the young migrants at the centre of the case study, it has been difficult to clarify the amount of money sent home as remittances, but based on the information received, it is probably close to 7% of their monthly income, which is consistent with data that emerged from a survey on a representative sample of 1,200 non-OECD foreign citizens residing in Italy conducted in 2021 (CeSPI, Deloitte, 2021).

The idea of helping family members in Africa is for many an absolute moral imperative, especially when there is considerable conflict with the family and no true familial mandate behind the migratory path. Despite the fact that many of the young African migrants who arrive in Europe have faced violent mistreatment in Libyan concentration camps and risked their lives during the Mediterranean crossing without receiving any help from their families (either to pay the ransom demanded by their torturers in Libya or to pay for the crossing), but once they start working in Italy they feel it is their duty to send economic aid to their countries of origin (Carling, 2014). The aid is clearly consistent with the relationships maintained, and according to their stories, if the parents are separated, the remittances are sent to the mother, sisters and younger siblings.

Forms of racialization and discrimination

The determination to be more than mere work bodies and to reject positions of subordination and total submission unites young sub-Saharanans transversally, even when it comes to opposing the color line that exists in many businesses and which frequently pushes them to the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy.

Here the problem with being black is that you always work in the countryside. There are so many Africans who went to school, who know so many things. But when they come here, they have to work in the countryside. Here, for a black man to find a job that is not the countryside is not easy. When we go to work, we do hard work but they don't pay us for how hard the work is. If Italians, Albanians or Romanians come to work, they are paid well. (T., who arrived from Sierra Leone in 2017, lives and works in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, interview dated 10/05/2021)

Their demands for wage and contract adjustments usually stem from the perception that they receive different and unfair treatment in comparison to workers of other nationalities, who are more respected and rewarded by the companies.

The ethnographic research carried out has allowed us to understand that claims and grievances, fights and unions disputes are mainly rooted within the diasporic and ethnically based communities working in the agricultural sector studied, and take place in specific local nurseries rather than in the broader economic sector, often by activating dynamics of diasporic cohesion and in open or concealed conflict with other groups of foreign workers who are already well-established in the local workplace.

The presence of trade unions for horticultural workers would reduce the mistrust and conflict between the many national groups that have historically met the sector's labour demand. These groups frequently compete with one another and the newly arrived sub-Saharanans are often subjected to forms of racialization and discrimination by the other workers who arrived before them, in order to maintain the balance of organization and work hours, as well as the existing wage and contractual levels.

Bureaucratic tools and the management of double absence to represent presence

For young sub-Saharanans, being truly present in the territory means rejecting unworthy forms of work, humiliating positions of subordination or real forms of racial hierarchy, while committing themselves to establishing a rewarding future, one that also includes affections and a "good life". The migratory trajectory at the heart of this research into sub-Saharanans who arrived in Italy between 2015 and 2018 is in a very interesting phase - as with the Tunisians and Moroccans before them - when real settlement occurs. The prerequisites for settling in this strip of land in Sicily, are a stable job with a regular contract (even though it may only be partially true in terms of the hours and days worked), a long-term residence permit (possibly a ten-year residence card), and a certified rental house that meets all the necessary standards for reuniting with their wives.

As far as work is concerned, and based on what has emerged from the experiences of other migrants who have been settled for some time (e.g. Tunisians, Moroccans, Albanians, Romanians) in the Barcellona-Milazzo area, migrants - if regularized in horticultural businesses, even with fixed-term contracts (according to INPS, only 10% of all contracts are open-ended contracts) - manage, albeit with difficulty, to live a dignified life, especially if their wives are also employed, as is usually the case with Romanians and Albanians. Further job placement opportunities are also offered in the construction and other related sectors, although there are often delays in the

payment of wages. On the other hand, catering – which in some cases guarantees a second income as it is weekend work – remains a strongly seasonal sector, especially for the duration of the summer in the nearby Aeolian Islands.

As far as documents are concerned, most of the sub-Saharaners who arrived as unaccompanied minors or asylum seekers endeavour to obtain a ten-year residence card, which they can apply for 5 years after receiving their first residence permit. The young Malians also aspire to obtaining a residence card and over the years, even though they have repeatedly resubmitted asylum requests, and despite previous denials and appeal rejections, manage to secure subsidiary protection, making them eligible for a five-year residence permit. Some of the young Malians whose migration history has been narrated here, applied for a residence card even before the expiry of their 5-year residence permit, but have not been able to obtain an appointment to start the procedure as they still hold a valid residence permit. This desire to speed up the procedure to obtain a residence permit is justified by their aspiration for an ordinary passport (not just the travel document that is granted to refugees or subsidiary holders) to enable them to travel freely to their country of origin. In fact, the Malians who are holders of subsidiary protection return to their homeland in the same way as sub-Saharan Africans, but they fly to a neighbouring state and then travel to Mali by other means, thus managing to avoid any legal problems related to receiving a Malian stamp on their travel documents. The desire for a double presence in the homeland and in the host country is also manifested through documents that authorise movements between the country of origin and the country of adoption.

Conclusions

In our concluding remarks, it is worth highlighting the ambivalence of the constant attempts of the young migrants we studied to manifest their “double presence” in both their native and host nations. These “counter-conducts” actually take place within the complex and articulated field they are forced to experience, which contextually reproduces both physical and moral exclusion in the host country while also making management of the relationships with families left at home more challenging. Earning a living, starting a family, building a house, forces young migrants to confront the various forms of their agency and subjectivities. Within this framework, is it heuristically worthwhile to question how supporting their families and their communities of origin affects the presence of migrants in terms of migratory culture? If helping families and local communities means that family members and community members can avoid risking their lives to travel to Europe, it is also true that the old slogan “Barca mba Barzakh”, or “Barcelona or death”, is really difficult to eradicate from the imagination of the Senegalese and sub-Saharaners in general. This slogan originated several decades ago, when Barcelona, Spain was seen as the “El Dorado” for many Senegalese, the dream that would help them escape poverty. Even today, and despite the fact that migration routes have changed, young people from sub-Saharan Africa tend only to see the positive aspects of the experiences of those who have migrated to Europe and ignore the well-known risks the journey entails. If, therefore, a large number of family members and friends are able to reap the benefits of migration, the desire to take risks will continue to grow, especially for the most disadvantaged. In fact, the story of emigrants who periodically return to their home country or who share their experiences on social media feeds the social imagination of a Europe full of opportunities for those who know how to be enterprising. As a result, the presence of emigrants in their country of origin, as evidenced by the generous remittances they send home, and their periodic returns, is not only a fundamental factor in supporting family-community networks and

the local economy, but it also serves as constant reminder of the existence of a highly appealing elsewhere, even if it is constantly changing.

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