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**REALIST
BIOGRAPHY
AND**

**EUROPEAN
POLICY**

***An Innovative
Approach
to European
Policy Studies***

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Realist Biography and European Policy

An Innovative Approach
to European Policy Studies

edited by

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4. Biographical Costs of Transnational Mobility in the European Space

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Introduction

There are some paradoxes connected with the processes of transnational mobility in Europe. On the one hand, they are actively promoted by the European bodies according to the logic of open European opportunity structure and, on the other hand, they lead to high biographical costs, which often may be underestimated. There are various types of biographical conditions leading to the decision of moving abroad; it could be the search for self-development and self-expression, transcending the ascribed gender roles, professional advancement, escaping financial difficulties or traumatic family situations, desire to live with a partner coming from a different country and many others. Seizing the opportunity to leave a problematic context of life may lead to biographical metamorphosis, where individuals encounter and explore something essentially new in their social world and their biographical identity (Schütze, 2008a: 23). Bringing the change, however, metamorphosis is also a potential limbo situation, where the old worldview and the feeling of self are lost and the new ones have not been developed yet. Having analysed over two hundred¹ of autobiographical narrative interviews with people living transnational lives and using now the illustration of three different cases, we want to show how crucial it is, while analysing European transnational mobility, to take into account the subjective processes of reflexivity and biographical work in order to understand what happens with individuals when they move in geographical, cultural and social space. The three cases by no means exhaust all the varieties of transnational life courses but they

¹ In the Euroidentities Project we have collected and analysed 230 autobiographical narrative interviews within the following sensitized groups: Transnational Workers, Educationally Mobile, Farmers, Civil Society Organizations, Cultural Contacts and Intimate Relationships. The elements of transnationalism were present in all these groups with the exception of Farmers. Working on this chapter we focused mainly on the 60 interviews conducted in UK and Italy. The three cases presented here are young women of Italian origin sharing the cultural background (including tightly prescribed gender roles and family obligations) but at the same time differing in terms of type and amount of possessed resources and dominant mode of reflexivity.

are emblematic and contrastive examples showing the role of qualitatively and quantitatively distinct resources for becoming active or inactive agents in the process of transnational mobility. The answer to the question of what people make out of the European opportunity structure should also contribute to the development of more comprehensive and better tailored European social policy.

Building on the tradition of critical realism (Archer, Bhaskar et al., 1998) we analyse transnational mobility in the European social space as the interplay of structural conditions, shaped among others by the European free movement policy, and actions stemming from intentions and biographical projects of human subjects. Mobility may be a factor enforcing or hindering the biographical process of becoming an active agent, which is directly connected with the dominant type of reflexivity practised. Following Archer, we understand reflexivity as an intrinsic property of human beings. It is the exercise of mental ability shared by all people to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and vice versa (Archer, 2007: 4). It is “the mental activity which, in private, leads to self-knowledge: about what to do, what to think and what to say” (Archer, 2003: 26). It is reflexivity which makes active agents who are able to exercise some governance in their lives; who develop and define their ultimate concerns, elaborate projects and attempt to accomplish them in order to advance or protect what they care about most (Archer, 2007: 7). Reflexivity practiced through internal conversation does tasks for people that “could not be accomplished in any other way” (Archer, 2012: 14). On the grounds of biographical research this inner activity is referred to as biographical work – ongoing reconsidering of one’s life, one’s inner states and one’s overall personal identity (cf. Schütze, 2008a: 6). It is this type of work which is done by autobiographical recollection and reflection about alternative interpretations of one’s life course. These are self-critical attempts of understanding one’s own misconceptions of oneself and self-erected impediments as well as the impediments imposed by others and by structural conditions. Biographical work also involves imagining future courses of action that support the overall biographical identity (Schütze, 2008a: 6). Biographical work, constituted by conversation with significant others and oneself, goes hand in hand with reflexivity and internal conversation as defined by Archer (2003; 2007).

Biographical costs of transnational mobility

Presenting the three cases below, we will demonstrate that the intensity of biographical work done in situations of transnationalisation is directly related to the biographical costs involved. The less biographical work is practised, the higher are the social, occupational and biographical costs of mobility. We may mention here emotional costs, like the suffering connected with separation, problems

with adaptation and loosening of emotional bonds, as well as professional costs, where it is discovered that the opportunities at home country have been lost, and the prospects abroad are not as promising as they seemed to be. There is also the phenomenon of marginality (Park, 1928) involved, where belonging both to the place of origin and the place of residence becomes problematic, accompanied by the overall feeling of 'being a foreigner everywhere' and the process of becoming a stranger (Simmel, 1908), an eternal wanderer.

In the three scenarios of transnational mobility, which are by no means exhaustive, we will show how mobility becomes the main structuring principle of one's biography with the pendulum movement of leaving and coming back only to leave again. On the surface, there may be an appearance of the autonomous type of reflexivity as people make an effort to present themselves as self-directed individuals. In fact, however, their life is not developed to any design as they are mainly directed by their emotional needs they are not fully aware of. In such cases, the destination is not really important. Anywhere is good enough as long as it brings the illusion that by moving they change their lives, solve their problems and get a chance to be happier (cf. De Botton, 2002). We will also demonstrate how especially high are the biographical costs of mobility in the case of fractured reflexives (Archer, 2003), being completely unable to formulate any biographical projects and consistent scheme of action. Restraining themselves from taking decisions does not mean that people do not suffer the consequences of the decisions taken by others or the consequences of structural conditioning.

The desire to move abroad is often a part of an escaping strategy (Spanò et al., 2011). Individuals feel forced to leave certain family dynamics, where strictly prescribed gender roles, unequal treatment of siblings, addictions, health problems, conflicts leading to separation and divorce result in a trajectory of suffering. Feeling torn apart and trying to avoid taking sides in family conflicts, people leave. The decision to move abroad is potentially a biographical turning point and indeed, in many cases, it brings the conditions for biographical metamorphoses. It is thus surprising that this crucial decision may be experienced by some people as no change at all. This is Rita's case, presented below, who says that her life "is always the same"; devoid of plans, dreams and aspirations, no matter where she happens to live. This resembles the case of fractured reflexivity, as described by Archer (2003; 2007), where people are unable to conclude upon a certain course of action; they go around in circles, which only serves to augment their disorientation and distress. Fractured reflexives are passive agents in a sense that they are "people whose subjectivity makes no difference to the play of objective circumstances upon them" (Archer, 2003: 299). Their internal conversation performs no mediatory role and permits no intentional relationship between self and society (Archer, 2003: 300). Being 'passive' does not mean 'cease acting', which in a social world is

hardly possible. It rather means deprivation of any interior control and exposition to the vicissitudes of the external environment (Archer, 2003: 301). The relationship between self and society is marked by disorientation. Fractured reflexives are disoriented about their concerns and about the ways to realise them. Thus, instead of leading to purposeful courses of action, their self-talk is primarily expressive. The main concentration is on the proximate and the short term. They develop an attitude of “taking things as they come”.

The European opportunity structure has the potential of exerting a powerful influence on individuals, who actively interpret and make use of the possibilities provided. It has been observed (Spanò et al., 2011), however, that the possibility of developing a transnational life and the unfolding of an individual action scheme depends on previous experiences and their reflexive elaboration on the one hand, and on the other, on the set of resources, both material and immaterial, at one’s disposal. The biographical outcome of mobility depends precisely on the combination of these elements.

Three scenarios of transnational mobility

1. Cinzia, a pendulum movement in search of belonging

Cinzia is a 29 year old woman from a middle class Neapolitan family with a brother slightly younger than her. Her biographical pathway is characterised by an evident trend towards transnational mobility that is in fact presented, right from the start of the interview, almost like an innate characteristic:

“My desire to leave, to travel, to know new cultures, is something that anyway is really inside me.”

Following her narrative it becomes clear that behind her desire for movement there is a difficult family history, which must have been a source of dissatisfaction/discomfort if not of actual suffering. Of course what has been crucial is the competition/jealousy with her brother, who is presented as a person in need of care, because of his fragile character:

“He is... the opposite of me in these things let’s say, he has never moved away from home, he has always you know been here at home, a much calmer person, in fact sometimes my mum says the character that my brother has precisely the character I should have because she says it’s not possible that he... Perhaps now yes, now

he has grown up, now he works so also he you know he is grown up but some years ago he was anyway you know the shy one and she used to say, ‘but is it possible that you have the character your sister is supposed to have?’.”

We have to take into account that Cinzia’s family history is also influenced by cultural models typical of the Southern Italian context, where the greater attention is given to male children, usually not only the object of a great investment – both in economic terms and in terms of expectations – but also greater ‘care’, especially on the part of the mother, because they are deemed little suited to carrying out the functions of daily life. Forced to cope with this unequal gender model Cinzia reacts by structuring her identity through just pointing upon the characteristics positively valued in her milieu. Risk, courage and independence, that usually represent the distinctive features of masculinity, become for Cinzia the test of her presence in the world, but above all, of her ‘value’ in the eyes of the family, the distinguishing mark which gives her visibility and recognition. Indeed, just coming of age and leaving secondary school, Cinzia decided to go to live for a period of time in London. From an emotional point of view, this decision can be seen as a ‘challenge’ to her parents. We can hypothesize that it wasn’t permission to leave that Cinzia was expecting but an objection, which would have shown her the affection and attachment of her parents towards her. It is worth noting that Cinzia has never understood the big contradiction between the care shown from her parents when they prevented her from enrolling the art lyceum because of the too ‘open’ mentality of this school, and the extreme easiness with which they allowed her to leave.

“OK, I’ll do languages and in fact I do languages however, then at eighteen they let me leave, they accepted this thing, perhaps I don’t know they thought that during the five years ((*smile*)) I might change my mind and on the other hand, I remember perfectly how I started the fifth year of senior school you know I was thinking a little about the best way to get away.”

Cinzia’s desire to leave was directly related to the disappointment with her family environment. She was a potential communicative reflexive but she lacked interlocutors in her native context. She longed for acceptance and belonging, and since that need could not be satisfied either at home or in her peer group, she wanted to search for it elsewhere. Her decision to leave was also a certain kind of test that Cinzia’s parents failed. Their ‘yes’ has given rise to a feeling of abandonment which later has shaped the perverse mechanism of departure-return which characterizes Cinzia’s life and that so far has not come to a stop.

Her tendency to leave, in fact, is clearly linked to the difficulty she has in finding a congruous position inside the family. Indeed, once returned home she started to work as an entertainer in holiday resorts: a new way she found to stay away from home. Cinzia's moving doesn't appear driven by professional reasons (to go away towards something) but by the need to leave (to go away from). The encounter with a young Dutch man at the tourist resort where she worked constitutes the opportunity to reinforce her 'coming and going strategy'; in fact, the decision to follow him to the Netherlands represents a new 'good reason' to go away, as she herself says:

“And there I meet my reason for staying four years in Holland, because I spent four years in Holland ((*smile*)), in reality, OK, I met this boy and in the end I decided – I hadn't known him long – I said I'm leaving for Holland”.

Though Cinzia attributes her desire to move to her sense of independence, analysing her autobiographical story more in-depth it appears evident that what is more decisive in the developing of her pathway is the need of 'belonging' to a community, if not of an actual 'adoption'. We can find traces of this not only in the events of Cinzia's life – marked by repeated departures and returns aiming at finding her place – but also in her narrative. Recalling the first time abroad, that is to say the period when she lived in London, she says, for example:

“Abroad all the people who are not from that nation become your family. It is something really nice.”

Her need to find a family becomes even clearer in the excerpt which describes her relationship with her Dutch boyfriend's family, which quickly became for her a substitute for her own family.

“With the family with whom I stayed for three years I was treated better than a daughter because anyway he just had a brother so for them, for his mum and dad I was the daughter they'd never had, welcomed into the home immediately.”

The prevalence of the emotional issues in the case of Cinzia is confirmed by the fact that, independently from having a good permanent job in a major airline company in the Netherlands, at a certain point she decides to return to Italy because of two events both occurred in the sphere of affects: the breakup of the sentimental relationship with the Dutch partner and the death of her father. Her return home, however, wouldn't last long. Once again Cinzia cannot find

her place in the family; so, after a while, she chooses to work on cruise ships, therefore putting into action again a pattern based on distancing from home. Also at the end of this work experience she will faithfully reproduce the same pattern, firstly going back to live for a period in Holland, where she hopes in vain to reconstruct the past familial climate; and later moving for a short period to a small town in Ireland, where unfortunately again she cannot feel that sense of belonging to a group she aspired to. In the end, although at the time of the interview Cinzia would seem to be in a stable phase, considering that she has been living in Naples for one year working as a shipping agent with a permanent contract, there are clues of potential new journeys:

“And so well who knows when the next experience will be? Because as I say it’s something that I still have inside, a thing that maybe I’ve always done (...) this is a thing that I’ve always had inside me and then anyway it was confirmed by the fact that you start the first experiences, if you like it.... There’s nothing you can do about it ((*smiling*)).”

It is clear that at a certain point mobility became the structuring principle of Cinzia’s biography. By creating a spatial distance, mobility represents for her the means to explain her painful sense of non-belonging to anywhere, as appears from her own words:

“I realise every now and then that I have become a vagabond without destination ((*smile*)) (...) when you have experiences, especially such long ones, they are wonderful but horrible at the same time because you no longer feel at home anywhere; it’s a continual wandering in the end ((*smile*)).”

Cinzia’s biography may be an example of impeded communicative reflexivity. Not being able to find caring interlocutors in her native context, she leaves only to come back again in hope to find acceptance and love. When it is not possible, she leaves once more, for a different place, where she finds for a while a type of family she had longed for. As soon as the new arrangement turns out to be too fragile to be maintained over time, she leaves yet again, searching for a way to satisfy her need to belong. The costs of her ‘coming and going strategy’ clearly appear at two different levels: the emotional-relational level and the professional level. Concerning the emotional sphere it is evident that leaving so young caused an emotional break, whose consequence is a hardening of relationships within the family: the relations both with mother and brother appear at the moment complicated, while the opportunity to get in touch with her father is

irremediably lost because of his premature death. As for the professional aspect, the price that Cinzia pays is no less significant. Since her mobility has constantly been driven by a need to move away, Cinzia has not been interested in her professional growth: the outcome is the lack of a career with defined boundaries. Indeed, not only her current job (shipping agent) does not have any connection with her study of languages, but her whole work experience seems to be a sort of patchwork of experiences without any coherence.

2. Rita: mobility bringing no change²

Rita was born 40 years ago in a small town in Southern Italy. She comes from a family of the lower middle class, both her parents work as office workers in the public administration. Also in Rita's case we find a painful situation in the family at the origin of her history. Her parents work all the day, and during her childhood she spends a lot of time alone: in fact, her two sisters were born long after, being 8 and 11 years younger than her respectively. Her solitary wait for her mother's coming back from work, staying at a window overlooking the void, represents the vivid image of her deep sense of solitude:

“There is something that often comes back to me, anyway the fact that I who was often at home, I mean I was almost always alone at home because my mum couldn't afford a baby sitter, my relatives didn't live near and she often left me alone and I was always in my room looking outside waiting for my mum [...] I clearly remember this standing in front of the window fantasizing, I mean really amazing imagination, you know? And looking outside without looking at the people because there were no buildings in front, at the time there was still a plot of land, and in distance there was a building so I would look at the road and wait for my mum.”

The birth of her sisters on the one side marks the end of her loneliness but on the other signs the beginning of a new difficulty. Rita, in fact, too early finds herself charged with the responsibility of looking after them; she plays the role of a maternal substitute, so that the children call her “mummy”. Her mother, meanwhile, has to take full care of the family ménage, without any valid support from her husband:

² Originally this case interpretation had been written by Pasquale Musella, member of the Italian team of Euroidentities Project, who participated in the joint analysis and co-presented the first version of the paper at the ESA Conference in Nuremberg in September 2010.

“Then [my father was] very careful with money, I mean also because of this we had a life of sacrifices, because my mum had to pay for everything. I mean he worked and put money aside to buy a house, my mum had to pay the bills, buy books, clothes, I mean with one salary and three children, you know, you cannot... You can't treat yourself, give your children pocket money, in fact I never got pocket money neither did my sisters.”

The relationships with her parents are not satisfying. Rita's father is in fact a strict man, worried about the judgment of other people; he is not only an authoritarian figure, always commanding and controlling everything, but also a frustrating person, inclined to prevent and block any desire of the children. Rita feels observed and judged by him continuously:

“Yes and then anyway I mean... we didn't do much, we weren't... precisely because of my father, you see? Just think, my father never gave us... he never wanted us to have a bicycle, I mean the town I mean our house had a courtyard where we could play anyway and well I learned to ride a bicycle really late and one of my sisters can't even now precisely because my father forbade so many things.”

In her present perspective it is her father who is the cause of her deep and persistent lack of self-esteem.

“I am a person with zero self-esteem and I think that it already began at that time I mean also... in my opinion also my father had to do with it a little, this fear of making a mistake and then inevitably you make a mistake. I mean, I still remember... fifteen years ago more or less we were somewhere in the countryside doing something, I had to do something and he stood there looking at me and in my opinion he was looking to see if I made a mistake, I was so terrified I made a mistake.”

As for her mother, Rita feels the weight of having had to replace her in the maternal role. Moreover, still now she reproaches her tendency to play the role of a victim; a tendency that Rita believes she has inherited from her:

“In my mum there is a side that I don't particularly like and that I recognize also in me and perhaps it's precisely for this reason that I don't like, I mean this thing that... I mean this lack of... I

don't know... for example your relatives do something to you and you rather than say openly I don't like it, she comes up with some 'witty' remarks saying "oh yes, I am always wrong" this is a thing which always really annoys me, I mean when she does it with me I really become a beast because... Are we talking about something in particular? Don't come out with an expression like "everything I say is wrong"! When I hear this kind of words I really get angry! Eh... and I'm a bit like this, I don't say that but when I'm a bit nervous I feel that the world hates me, that no-one wants me, that no-one loves me."

Finally, also Rita's relationships with the external world (teachers and classmates) are problematic: in particular, her living at home as an adult makes being and feeling part of the group of the peers difficult for her.

The difficult aspects of her childhood and adolescence, in particular those connected to the female gender role, seem to have fostered in Rita the need to build a different model of femininity. The way adopted in order to achieve her desire to be a kind of woman distinct from her mother, has been leaving her small town of origin. After she finishes school, in fact, Rita begins a pattern of biographical action in order to distance herself from her town. During the years spent at the linguistic high school she began to love the study of foreign languages, so she decided to move to a big city, Naples, and to enrol at the university, where she specialised in Russian. Rita at that point, deciding to leave her natal context behind in search for a new model of life is an autonomous reflexive in making. The arrival in Naples represents therefore a flight towards a broadening of her horizons (a kind of 'escaping towards'). Her life as a student away from home is enhanced by an unprecedented freedom. Away from the narrow-minded mentality of her town, paternal authoritarianism, maternal victim attitude, and the responsibility of having to look after her sisters, Rita can finally become what she really feels to be, live her age, behaving like any other student. Among other things, the positive value of those years is accentuated by the fact that Rita experiences a completely new and different self-image, as her new friends seem to accept and appreciate her ideas and her way of being. These new significant others therefore represent an important mirror (just like Cooley's theory of the looking-glass self, 1902), as they send back a positive image of her:

"I remember one of the first things is that I was at home with friends and they were people even apparently completely different from those I had mixed with up to that moment, there were people who played music, who loved punk, who smoked joints,

right? Erm... and they were people different from me anyway but I mean I didn't feel different from these people... Erm... the thing is that I liked those people, I considered them very interesting and I remember that one of my first thoughts that one day I expressed an opinion if I'm not mistaken it was actually on a piece of music but not simply I like it I don't like it, but a real opinion with reasons I like it because blah blah blah and clearly all messed up as I am, I'm an idiot, I'm saying God knows what, when I saw the reaction of these people who were listening to me and didn't make me feel stupid I said well then... what I think isn't all wrong! I mean, it was a comparison with another reality, with a reality completely different from that of my school friends at senior school or acquaintances in town."

Over the years, her strategy of escape towards a more open environment started to show the first signs of giving way. Rita in fact remains enrolled at university for many years, going on very slowly in her studies: she knows that her life in Naples as a student away from home could not last forever. It is in this phase of her life that Thomas, who represents an essential element for continuing the biographical action pattern started many years before, comes on to the scene. Very soon Thomas, a German artist who moved to Naples some years before, becomes the fulcrum of Rita's life. It is thanks to him that she finds a reason to stay some more years in Naples after graduation; it's through him that she discovers an artistic vein she had no idea about till they met. The potential to take the form of an autonomous or a reflexive somehow throughout the years becomes more difficult to realize. Rita does not ask herself what she really needs and wants in her life. She does not plan her career nor shows any other concerns. She starts going adrift becoming more and more dependent on her partner.

After spending another year in Naples they decide to move to Berlin, a city better suited to their ambitions in the artistic field, where they are still living in a multi-ethnic and Bohemian quarter. In Berlin Rita must start all over again. She is not able to make use of the languages she had learned over the years at school and university. She also has some problems to learn German. Under these conditions Rita's work situation – after five years spent in Berlin – is rather problematic. Her work in the artistic field makes little or nothing in financial terms, and she is forced to do occasional and poorly paid jobs. Moreover, the social capital accumulated in the past also reduces because her best friends live in Naples. In fact, Rita does not have any life projects other than those Thomas has for her. Indeed, she is quite dependent on him: she has not learnt good German, she does not earn enough, and furthermore she is not able to move autonomously in the artistic world:

“He has always had this conviction that I am an artist I mean he believes in me, in my opinion I think he believes more in me than in himself, I mean he always says that I know perfectly what I want, I don’t believe it though I mean for me to have him near to advise me on proportions, on the combination of colours, I mean when I work I never close a file because I work with photomontages so they are always digital data, I never close it, I never say this work is finished if first he hasn’t said okay, okay.”

We could even say that if apparently Thomas has been the one to carry out her project of moving from the periphery (her place of origin) to the centre (Berlin), in reality he represented for her a decisive reversal of her course, if not a real regression. In fact, the encounter with Thomas plunged her back into the condition of a daughter, this time of a supportive and caring father as she never had. Therefore, the transfer from Naples to Berlin turns out to be an involuntary turning back compared with the Neapolitan period.

Both Rita’s initial aims to realize a more evolved gender model and to become an adult (in the sense of active agent) failed, mainly because of her dependence on her partner. But at the moment she does not appear ready to make an assessment of her life: she does not see the fragility of her condition of dependence on Thomas, her lack of self-esteem, the absence of a credible perspective of becoming part of the Berliner art world. In the interpretation she gives of her current situation she tends to brush over difficulties and to accept her condition of economic marginality in return for serenity that Berlin offers her:

“In reality you know my life is almost... is always the same I mean, a life of... I mean I don’t have expectations you see? I’m not one to go to the cinema every week, dancing, out every evening so with what little I earn, that’s fine, it’s the quality of life I like I mean I’m relaxed, there is no-one stressing you, you’re not afraid to walk down the street alone.”

The idea of returning to her home town or to Naples is not feasible since, in each case, Rita would have to deal with places which she strongly wanted to move away from. The trap she fell into is therefore a condition of paralysis, in the sense that she can neither go forward nor back. In Rita’s case, as in Cinzia’s one, we can see how mobility does not necessarily correspond to a deep metamorphosis of personal and social identity, and how it can actually feed further distortions in the biographical development, if negative elements such as the lack of self-esteem remain or are even reinforced in the new context. Moreover, Rita’s case reveals that mobility may lead to a zeroing of both the skills obtained

and the social networks built at home, especially if moving abroad is interpreted as a watershed, an element of radical discontinuity between the past and the present. We can also see how in the case of women, even with a high level of education, transition from more traditional towards more modern contexts does not necessarily equate to a journey of emancipation. Moving from an area of the periphery to the outskirts of the centre can give rise, as for Rita, to a condition of marginalisation where people can neither turn back nor manage to make room for themselves in the new society. The fact Rita has no more expectations, no plans or dreams, shows she has developed into a fractured reflexive.

3. Nevia: mobility as a condition for biographical metamorphosis

Nevia, a 29-year-old woman, comes from a social milieu very different from the ones of Rita and Cinzia. Born in a big city in the Centre-Northern part of Italy, she grew up in a privileged, upper-middle class family. Even in her case, however, there is a great fragility due to a difficult family situation. Nevia, in fact, has been a victim of the processes of deinstitutionalization of family, and above all of two people – her father and mother – who have separated not only as husband and wife, but also as parents, and for this reason, have subjected Nevia to all sorts of traumatic experiences.

Nevia's father is an unstable man who (being previously married with children) leaves his second family (Nevia, her mother and her younger sister) for another woman after only three years of marriage. Due to this fact Nevia has to pass through numerous experiences of abandonment and separation, as well as numerous moves. After the separation, in fact, the family firstly moves to another Northern town, where the paternal grandparents live, and later to a smaller town, which was the home of her maternal grandparents. Her father moves close to a big city in another region and only rarely comes to see his daughters. While the first two transfers were not particularly traumatic, as the family – even without her father – maintained its integrity (“I think it was still a happy moment of life”, she says), the next move was absolutely traumatic: at the age of 11, without any explanation except that their mother was no longer capable of looking after the children, Nevia together with her sister has to move to their father's house.

“I don't remember seeing him a lot and I don't know what he was doing but all of sudden one day he came and he kind of said, oh well, you know, -ehm- I talked to -eh- kind of the local NHS and -eh- we don't think that your mum can make it with you so you're coming to stay with me. OK ((*laughing*)). So basically one day, I don't know, my sister and I we leave and we go to live

with my dad, who for me at the time was kind of like a total -eh-foreign ((*laughing*)).

While Nevia coped with the separation from her father by strengthening her emotional tie with her mother, she responds to the confusion caused by the sudden separation from her by constructing an apparent situation of stability in her new pseudo-family (her father, new his partner and her daughter), and specially by becoming deeply attached to her father and hostile to her mother, even more when Nevia hears that she started to live with a new partner.

“So -eh- I wasn’t happy with her, I was very jealous about my mum and I didn’t like thinking that -ehm- she was living with another man... The whole thing I really didn’t like, it was very, -ehm- if you like he was with my mum, which I didn’t have a lot of contact and stuff.”

In fact, the irresponsibility of her parents – who constantly accused each other without thinking of the consequences on the children – sets off in Nevia a pattern of ‘emotional pendulum’, which consists in turning to one of the two parents in response to an experience of abandonment or betrayal on the part of the other. When her father decides to move to the United States, Nevia is not prepared to lose her relative stability by going back to her mother, who, as she feels, had rejected her. Therefore, she decides to go with him, unlike her younger sister, who prefers to go back to live with her mum and her new partner. During the time spent in Texas, Nevia (who meanwhile discovered that she has insulin dependent diabetes) strengthens her attachment to her new family, and her step-sister, who is almost the same age and who finds herself facing the same problems with adaptation.

“So, I don’t know, I think it was two years where basically -ehm- I was more a family type of person, I relied a lot on the family... I mean I get along with everybody, I did get along with -ehm- Elena as my, who was my dad’s partner ((*laughing*)) -ehm- and then there was Sara, she was a year older than me, so I think we were very close at that time because we were going to the high school together and we had to face a lot of, you know, problems with the school”.

Therefore two years later, back in Italy, the option of going back to her mum, who now has a family with her second husband, her sister Alessandra, and a new baby, is something that Nevia does not even consider. Now she feels she can fix her

roots: she starts doing well at school and makes new friends. Moreover, Nevia encounters her ‘super love’ and his family, which in some way ‘adopted’ her.

“And then finally in the fifth year it was okay... And, yeah, I met, I made good friends -ehm- even if it was just two years of basically high school in Italy at the end. I made good friends because they were all -ehm- it was very -ehm- close to where I live and so I met a lot of people who I had also met when I was doing my -ehm- middle school... Plus that year when I finished basically high school -ehm- I met this guy and ((*sighing*)) basically he was my super first love ((*laughing*))... If I had to look in the past and say, what was the best time of your life? I think university and the friends that I met there and going out with this guy, I think it was all very, very good, And I also got really, really close to -ehm- his family, he had -erm-, I think he had the perfect family, the one that I didn’t think I had... really they were treating me like I was their daughter”.

It is once again the father who threatens the equilibrium that Nevia has so painstakingly built. In fact he decides to divorce his new wife, who moves to another city: so, Nevia loses the woman who for years has been taking care of her, her daughter who had become a sister to her, and the little sister born of the remarriage of his father. Nevia tries with all her might to preserve her private life and to maintain the stability of her family, by taking up the role of a wife:

“My dad was alone, so he was there, you know, imagine alone, super selfish person -ehm- big Italian man like he wouldn’t be able to cook something, anything. So kind of, I was doing, I was kind of taking care of him because I felt a bit sorry and, you know, I was the lady in the house, which you might say that. So I mean he had somebody helping out with the cleaning and everything but I was cooking and, you know, doing shopping together and so I was spending a lot of time with him.”

Just like a wife, she feels betrayed when her father begins to look for a new (Eastern European) partner on the Internet, when he begins to travel often to meet women ‘selected’ on the computer screen, and when he even brings some of them home, to ‘try them out’ in living together. Nevia feels done out of her role of ‘lady of the house’, and above all betrayed by her father, who puts the needs of his partner of the day before those of his daughter:

“And, I don’t know, I remember I was coming back in the evening from uni and I was going in the kitchen, you know, started to cook something because they were doing nothing. And, and I opened, you know, the cupboard in the kitchen and everything was like, you know, they fell over. Things had been moved around and I was like, (dad) did you move the stuff? Oh, you know, I think she did that because, you know, she wants to feel a bit at home... it was really frustrating because I wasn’t doing anything, I wasn’t doing anything bad. I was living in my own place but not feeling like I was in my own place and most of it my dad was not saying anything... he wouldn’t say –eh- you should be nice to Nevia, he didn’t care.”

Once again Nevia reacts by re-activating the ‘emotional pendulum’: now the pole of attraction becomes her mother, whom she starts to visit very often during the weekends. But this time, made stronger by the security she acquired in the last years, she changes course, and rather than return to stay with her mother, she initiates a new path that will take her to choose her life and the place to live, not as a victim of others’ decisions, but as the protagonist of her own choices. The first step is leaving on an Erasmus programme, a very relevant experience for the development of her biography. The nine months spent in France, in fact, prove to her that, rather than asking for love and inner security from outside, she is capable of building them up on her own:

“For me it was really the first time, oh gosh I’m living away from home, not with my dad, and it was a very relaxing –eh- experience. I always stay with the same guy I was going out with in Milan and I managed to break through that year but it was, I was so happy and I really liked the school there and everything. So it was very good/.”

The second step is, once returned in Italy, going to live on her own. Her new situation of personal stability resists when her father – who through Internet met a new girl and decided to marry her – tells her that he is going to work in the Far East for a number of years with his new (fourth) wife and even when her beloved boyfriend, after almost eight years of relationship, leaves her. This new abandonment represents a totally destructive event for Nevia, as she had found in him a male figure that was not only the antithesis but also a substitute of her father:

“-Eh- he was (studying) psychologist... So it was the first time that I met a person that was really listening to me and –eh- I could really talk to him.”

Nevertheless, she does not fall into the temptation of returning to live with her mother (“I didn’t go back to live with my mum because it was always kind of a bit too late and, you know, I didn’t need her, as she says”) and continues her way towards autonomy by beginning to work. It is now that Nevia undertakes a moratorium period in which she experiences, perhaps for the first time, a lifestyle not driven by control (a disposition without doubt accentuated by her disease, which compels her to a measured and careful lifestyle):

“And another friend of mine she’d been dumped as well basically the same time, so it was (better). I thought (??) because I was kind of, the way I would behave before and probably when you have a boyfriend you go out a bit less compared to friends that are single. And my God that year, you know, was crazy, I think I was going to work, going out after work for aperitif and then going out again, I was basically coming home at midnight, waking up at six to go to work”.

After one year, Nevia takes the third step of her journey towards becoming, in Archer’s terms, an autonomous reflexive. She decides to leave and this time moving is her own decision (“It wasn’t often my true, true choice... So this time I really, I got rid of any influences on anything”). The destination is London, “a comfortable place to stay” and to start what she calls “a new era” of her life. Taking distance allows Nevia to look at her past with new eyes. Today she is able to assign to each his or her part of the responsibility for what happened, also to herself: unlike her sister, who refused to transfer to America, she fell victim to her father’s lies about her mother.

Though the biographical work she did thanks to mobility allowed Nevia to – at least partially – reconcile with her past, she is now paying the price by being far from her loved ones, and with the regret which derives from this.

“My sister basically she didn’t listen to what my dad was saying and she kind of kept going with her own -eh- thought just not listening and not thinking... But at the time I was very, I was very close to him and not too close to my mum, so I thought, oh, you know, let’s go... and my sister she -ehm- she totally said, no. So it’s fine because she was like the younger sister and she said, no, me I’m not going -eh- to the US with dad, I want to go back with mum... and that’s when we basically started to -ehm- we had two different lives, two very different lives, because I basically went with my dad and she went with my mum.”

In her present perspective everyone can be understood: her abandoning mother who now is none other than a woman who in a difficult period of depression found herself deprived of her children; the boyfriend who left her is seen now only as a boy she asked too much help without giving anything in return. The only person still to blame is her father, responsible for the loss of her mother's affection, for the break up with her boyfriend, since it has been the suffering caused by her father which brought her "to dump on him all the stress", and even for her diabetes, which she imputes to the big shock of being separated from her mum.

Now Nevia is ready to shift her emotional focus from her family of origin to the one she feels able to create. Malcolm, her new English partner with whom she began living, is the opposite of her father: stable, helpful, attentive to her needs; with him Nevia lives a symmetrical duality, and with him she shares her plans for the future, including the idea of leaving London, which for her "is like probably a beginning" and perhaps of getting back closer to her mother and her sister. For Nevia it is finally possible to come back.

"Malcolm is learning Italian now so he's really... So that's a good start because, you know, it might be an option. I don't say no, I mean, I'd be super happy to go to Italy if there was a more decent job situation. That's the only thing that holds me from going back now but I'd be super happy to go back home, maybe this time near my mum. Why not? (*Laughing*) So, that's it."

Conclusions

Summing up the cases presentation we would like to state once more that the outcomes of transnational mobility depend on the possessed resources and the level of self-reflexivity, or in other terms, biographical work. The amount of different types of capital is crucial but if it is not accompanied by the ability to make use of them, it does not bring expected advantages. This scenario is clearly visible in the case of Rita, who lacking self-confidence and convinced by her partner about her artistic vain, is not able to make use of her previously attained cultural resources. In this case, the inability to use capital is also connected with low level of aspirations. The false assumptions about one's possibilities are equally dangerous when, as again in case of Rita, they are too low (much lower than the actual capabilities defined by resources) and when, encouraged by the discourse of unlimited opportunities, they are too high, ignoring the constraints imposed by social conditions. The case of Rita also shows that mobility does not necessarily correspond to a deep metamorphosis of personal and social identity

development, and actually it can create the prerequisites to feed further distortions in the biographical work.

Mobility may become the main structuring principle in one's biography, as we saw in case of Cinzia. It is not anymore a means to achieve, to escape, or to discover, but it becomes an end in itself. People may move in space without any sense of direction, any ultimate purpose, trapped in a 'flight with no way out', disconnected from places and from other people, becoming "a vagabond without a destination". The price one pays for it is the loss of home. The ties with the family of origin become weaker, as one feels excluded from the shared problems, worries and joys building up family life; and the chance to start one's own family in the course of time becomes smaller. Settling down in one place for a longer period of time is problematic as the best known reality is the reality of moving. There are also professional costs paid as a result of transnational mobility. What is supposed to be an open opportunity structure in some cases turns out to be an occupational trap. Mobility promises occupational advancement, as in the European space supposedly it is possible to search for jobs in all labour markets and to construct freely one's career. However, the autonomous construction is possible only when people have many different types of resources at their disposal. Those who do not possess economic, cultural and social capital, are much more limited in their choices and instead of successful, highly specialised constructions, they build patchwork careers, consisting of different kinds of jobs, available at a certain time and place, which then do not form any coherent pattern and do not lead to any significant occupational advancement. The existing opportunity structure is not equally accessible to everybody. For those who do not possess significant resources or are not able to make use of them, European mobility brings a danger of a biographical and professional trap. As we could see in the cases of Cinzia and Rita, mobility not only did not level down the initial inequalities, but it multiplied them.

Transnational mobility may bring the conditions for biographical metamorphosis, leading to the development of autonomous or meta-reflexivity, as we saw in the case of Nevia, but also for biographical trap, as clearly visible in the Cinzia and Rita cases. Deciding to move people may, paradoxically, search for stability and continuity in their lives, acceptance and belonging, which they missed in their place of origin. There is some hope involved that the new environment will bring them what they need most: a new family and new purpose in life. It may turn out, however, that instead of a better and more fulfilling life, they find themselves blocked, unable to move forward or to go back. For the difficulties in one place, moving to another place seems to be a remedy, but it is only an apparent solution as soon it is discovered that moving, when not accompanied by biographical work, leads only to further marginality. We observe here that the

Matthew effect is as strong as ever, privileging those who initially have been well equipped in different kinds of material, symbolic and biographical resources.

As observed before (Spanò et al., 2012) “the process of integration does not distribute its beneficial effects in the same way to everyone. The traditional factors of inequality at the individual level (gender, level of education, social class) and the societal level (the different positions of countries in the ‘hierarchy’ existing between the Member States along the North-South geographical axis, and the temporal one, Old and New) still play a determining role”. It is equally important to look at people’s reflexivity in order to understand what kind of experience European mobility is for them. As the analysis of different cases of transnational mobility has demonstrated, except the usually taken into account types of resources, like economic, social and cultural capital, biographical work leading to higher self-awareness and facilitating the definition of one’s ultimate concerns, is itself a resource of great value. As Archer rightly stated, “the imperative to be reflexive is becoming categorical for all” (Archer, 2012: 1). Therefore the outcomes of the process of mobility and transnationalisation in Europe directly depend on the efforts individuals put in reflexive elaboration concerning their previous experiences, their position in the world and the possible courses of action they can undertake in the changing context.

Biographical costs of mobility, though real, cannot be defined *a priori*, apart from the actual experience. The analysis of biographical conditions leading to mobility and the later costs this decision entails opens up a new perspective for the policy makers. Most of the social policies issued until now have addressed individuals on the move without taking into consideration the conditions leading to mobility and the difficult processes of adaptation and potential later homecoming. The promotion of European transnationalism has been so far one-sided, stressing the positive aspects of mobility and passing over possible risks and traps. As in all social processes, there is a darker side also in the case of transnational mobility, which should be stressed as well, allowing it to enter the public discourse and social awareness. Social policies should not be limited to the structural level only. Creating opportunities to move freely in Europe is a very important initiative but it needs to be accompanied by a reflection that individuals may profit more from the possibility to live and work abroad if their decisions stem from and are followed by biographical work. Following critical realists we recognize the fact that there are properties and powers particular to people which include reflexivity towards and creativity about any social context which they confront (Archer, 1998: 190). These reflexive powers should be supported in all possible ways in order to allow people to make the most of the structural opportunities provided.

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