

Migration, Gender and National Identity: Spanish Migrant Women in London Ana Bravo Moreno (2006) Peter Lang, Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York Wien (ISBN 3-03910-156-0).

Migration to the UK is a very complex issue which requires deep interdisciplinary analysis in order to be fully understood. The book under review by Ana Bravo Moreno, entitled *Migration, Gender and National Identity: Spanish Migrant Women in London*, addresses, qualitatively, some of the most subtle issues in migration studies with reference to the identity construction of migrant women. In the book, Bravo Moreno analyses how women of Spanish origin construct their national identity in relation to a variety of categories, among which: generation, gender roles, education, motherhood, religion, period of migration, class, intermarriage.

The book - based on a sociological study involving interviews with women of Spanish origin living in the London area - demonstrates that there are still issues to explore in migration studies, so adding a new dimension to our knowledge of life within a strongly multicultural environment.

The book discusses various categories of identity, among which ethnicity, education, class, language use, ethnic accent and - above all - gender. It focuses on three migratory periods: 1940-1959, 1960-1975 and 1976-1992, all within Francisco Franco's period of dictatorship in Spain which lasted from almost four decades, from 1939 to 1975. The reason why the author refers to these three periods is based on the fact that type of dictatorship under Franco's regime represented an extremely important element in the definition of Spanishness. Therefore, being able to conduct interviews with women who left Spain at different periods in the last fifty years was considered as fundamental to the definition of how much the Francoist regime has influenced their national identity construction as Spanish women.

Bravo Moreno indicates that the history of the Spanish immigration of the last half a century has been mainly male-focussed. Indeed, the migration of women has often been considered as a consequence of the migration of the man of

the house: the father or the husband. Seeing the women as a dependant has meant that their visibility in official reports and statistics has been very scarce. Moreover, the author rightly affirms that there are several flaws in the literature on migration of the 1970s and 1980s with regards to the active role of women in migration. She argues that some authors regarded as migrants only those individuals who were doing a paid activity. Due to this, women who were working as housewives or - as it was the case for many of Bravo-Moreno's respondents - in domestic service 'became a non recognised category of worker, and therefore, invisible and more dependant than any other' (p. 36-37).

The author stresses, instead, that women need to be seen not as victims but as active agents in the migratory flows. Indeed, many of them did not migrate as dependants; however, the analysis of their experiences as migrants is a relatively recent phenomenon.

The way the volume is organised appears to be very effective. The material is divided into three parts: *Approaches to international migration, immigrant women and identity*, *The shaping of national and gender identities before migration* and a third part including the chapter *The role of Governments, Church and families in Spanish migration to the UK*, *Narratives of Spanishness, Englishness and foreignness: working class women* and *Narratives of Spanishness, Englishness and foreignness: middle and upper middle class women*. These divisions are very helpful as the first two parts are, in my opinion, propaedeutic to the pages referring to the core of the book which deals with the study of the narratives of the protagonists of the migratory movement. The chapters entitled *Narratives of Spanishness, Englishness and foreignness* are by nature multi-layered and refer to identity issues involving the self, the family and the identity of the individual as a part of a wider community (Spanish, English or multicultural). The accounts within these two chapters clearly emphasize the dialectical nature of national/ethnic identity formation which can take place simultaneously and dialectically, in various ways in different contexts.

By presenting the words of the respondents, Bravo-Moreno analyses their narratives and attempts re-conducting certain elements to specific causes. By doing this, the author starts from the private accounts of the interviewees and then digs into their inner motivations and feelings with a strong reliance on personal biographical elements. What we get is a very complex analysis of issues related to the respondents' personal lives which include their education, the triple burden of work outside the home and within the home with child and eldercare.

In the book, the author stresses the significance of the very traditional Catholic values and education in the creation of a strongly gendered Spanish identity. Indeed, reliance on the most traditional Catholic values was typical of the politics of Francisco Franco. These were inculcated to the population in different ways: through an education conforming completely to the Catholic dogma, national laws clearly biased towards the Catholic Church and a strong censorship. The reliance on the values and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church in most aspects of public and private Spanish life was what created a fervent *nacionalcatolicismo*.

Bravo-Moreno's analysis of the stories of these respondents, illuminated by references to the history of Spain from 1935 onwards, sheds some light on the different avenues of possibilities in the construction of identity of women outside the Spanish border. By referring to the words of the interviewees, the author encourages the reader to think about all the elements involved in the definition of the identity of migrant women. This appears to be a very complex process of re-elaboration and re-invention in relation to their different living context of the home, work, family friends in the UK and the family in Spain. These women are forced to reflect upon themselves and their roles within all of these contexts which seem to refer to a deep seated conformism to the values they were exposed to during their upbringing in Spain.

Interestingly, this element, although very easily recognisable in the words of the respondents of the working class respondents, is still clearly visible in the accounts of the mid-

dle class interviewees. In brief, the author - through the analysis of the biographical accounts of the Spanish women interviewed - underlines how gender-related values and traditions are still ingrained in the upbringing of the younger generations. These appear to correspond to different types of expectations for boys and girls in relation to work within and outside the home, education, childcare and care of the elderly.

Having been brought up with a strong sense of respect for the Spanish traditional values, the migrant women of Moreno's sample, even in the country of immigration, keep on holding onto a code of behaviour which involves the perpetuation of patriarchy. These values seem to be so deeply set into the respondents' minds that it is very interesting to note that even younger women - often intermarried with men from a different cultural background who might not have the same expectations of people born and bred in a strongly patriarchal society - seem to keep on referring to the traditional model of the *mother-wife-daughter*.

The author underlines that 'ethnicity is constructed within the household' (51), so emphasising the fundamental role played by the private sphere in the construction of ethnic/cultural/national identity. However, it is also very evident that the public and religious spheres strongly impinged on the private one, mutually reinforcing each other. In fact, from an early age many of the interviewees had to accept the rules defined by the Church, by the school and their parents, which aimed at making of them the future homemakers, able to manage their household while their husbands were out earning the family income. As the author underlines, gender roles within the interviewees' families of origin entailed that they had to restrain their desire of attending or continuing education. As they were aware, this was not an option for them, while it was for their male siblings.

Although it is not possible to consider as homogeneous the styles of self-representation adopted by Bravo-Moreno's respondents, the author suggests a key for the interpretation of their narratives. She does this by underlining the strong

links between the interviewees' economic capital, cultural capital and self-representation and by separating their responses in relation to their social class. Interestingly, however, although, the respondents' self-representations appeared to be very different on the surface, yet, all of them referred to Spain as the place of emotional identification.

In the interviews many of the women referred to the fact that they hold onto the Spanish values of the family, the food and language. These values - with the exception of the use of Spanish language at home - are highly important also for the interviewees who are from a middle class background and often intermarried. This element confirms further what has been noted elsewhere, *i.e.* that it is the women's role that of being the custodians of culturally specific ethnic values and family customs (Ganga 2007:42).

A particularly interesting element is characterised by the author's stress on language use for the definition of an individual's sense of ethnic/cultural belonging and/or participation to the life of the place of immigration. Indeed, according to several studies, language represents one of the most significant elements in the construction of individual identity (Clement 1980; Eckert 2003; Fishman 1977, 1989, 1999; Fortman 2002; Liebkind, 1984). Fishman (1977: 25) defines language as the 'quintessential symbol' of ethnicity. From this derives the respondents' strong attachment to their native language and their sense of belonging to a linguistic community. However, language can also represent an element of discrimination which can keep at a distance those who are not particularly fluent. The working class respondents' lack of fluency in the English language meant that they had to accept jobs in the ethnic-linguistic labour market or in the domestic service, which, in turn had consequences on their self-perception as Spanish migrants in the UK.

Another element, which was correctly emphasized by the author, was the key role played by some of the middle class respondents' ethnic accent, which in spite of their fluency in English, represented for them an important border-making language element.

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In relation to the ethnographic material, the author's stance is that of an observer. On a couple of occasions, however, there is the feeling that her personal standpoints might be different - possibly for generation and/or upbringing - from those of some of the respondents. However, this does not detract from the value of her analysis. Instead, it emphasises further how difficult the role of the interviewer in qualitative migration research can be in overcoming researcher-participant divides (Ganga and Scott 2006).

One set of voices which is, however, in my opinion, missing is that of the other members of the interviewees' families. The experiences of their husbands and children would have certainly greatly enhanced the depth of the book by providing enriching accounts from different and, possibly, more detached viewpoints. In any case, the book fulfils the expectations by offering a voice to Spanish migrant women belonging to different age groups and social classes and providing a critical account of their words in relation to their backgrounds.

It is the case to note that, the various doubts, crises and coping strategies adopted by many of Bravo-Moreno's interviewees in their personal, familial and community identity issues seem to correspond to the living experiences of migrant women from other ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Although the book's subtitle is *Spanish Migrant Women in London*, which clarifies its focus and narrows down its scope, this publication could have the potential of being of interest to a wider audience. The book could, in fact, be useful to all the researchers interested in the investigation of the several aspects involved in the construction of a multifaceted identity, while contributing to the ongoing analysis of women's role in shaping the current nature of today's multicultural cities.

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