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Abbildung 1: Buchcover



Jean-Claude Métraux: La migration comme métaphore, troisième édition

Précédé de «Le voile et le linceul» par Jean Furtos.

3ème édition.

Paris: La Dispute; 2018.

291 pages.

Prix: Euro 26,00

ISBN: 978-2-84303-287-5.

By agreement with the author, this review, like that of the first edition in 2012 [1], is written in English, since German-speaking colleagues are more likely to understand English than French, and French and Italian speakers very probably understand English as well.

Métraux's book has met with extraordinary success. I cannot tell exactly to what factor this success is due, but maybe it has to do with the strong appeal for a change in the attitude of professionals towards their clients, be they migrants or other "patients". The formula "we all are migrants" may well be an appealing new paradigm.

In the afterword of the new edition, a "letter addressed to the people of the sea", the author cites (among more than 30 citations of responses to the book) my review of 2012:

"This book not only gives an insight into work with migrants - which it does indeed very well - but it's also a new clinical, sociological and ethical discourse and a mode of thinking which everybody, but especially persons in the helping professions, should try to make their own."

Using this and other quotations, Métraux demonstrates to his supposed audience of refugees that at least some people in "the North of the North" had been reached by this book so that despite "too many cliffs" one might "imagine shores or banks" where the refugees and the Northern people could meet (p. 249).

This "letter" is, of course, also addressed indirectly to "Northern" readers in an attempt to encourage us to change the outdated attitudes of those who are supposed to know how to deal and behave with migrants from other cultural backgrounds. The author denies that there is any essential difference - "We are all migrants!" - So we should revise our attitude not only towards third world refugees, but also to our direct neighbours.

The foreword to the new edition, "Le voile et le linceul" (The Veil and the Shroud), on pages I to XVII, gives us an historical update, so as to demonstrate the necessity to reflect on the issue of migration and to improve the way we treat refugees. Métraux provides an analysis of the personal development of the terrorists who struck in France and Belgium (Charlie Hebdo, Bataclan, Zaventem, Nice, etc.), and he does this by considering it in parallel with the issue of migration. In their case, the change of personality - the evolution from one state of belonging, thinking, feeling, etc. to a new one because of a displacement in space and/or time - had failed. At school, they were forced to adopt the values of their French environment, whereas at home they were exposed to a growing burden of the culture of their parents' country of origin. This clash splintered these young people's personalities into two parts (the traditional one and the one suggested by their "Northern" surroundings).

It is worthwhile to follow in depth the argument of splintering of the personality. Métraux promises to refine his analysis in a future book, in which he plans to explain,

among other things, the contradiction between terrorists who have a history of juvenile delinquency and those who do not.

Métraux has coined the term of “mandat migratoire”, a mission of the migrant, comprising the expectations of their families, including those members who stayed in the country of origin. They have a dual mandate: to succeed in school and later in life, and to be loyal to their origins. The first presupposes that the young people are inculcated with the conception of the world conveyed by their schooling; the second – loyalty to their origins – is equally pressing. This “creative integration”, if successful, would be highly desirable. If these two missions become contradictory, it is owing to factors such as the intolerance of the two (hostile) camps and the lack of practical means of transiting between the two worlds.

The process of mourning as a prerequisite for a successful integration of one's own history with the new situation is masterfully expounded in the chapter on the phenomenology of migration. The different sections of the book show how difficult this can be – and what forces are directly opposed to such successful development. One of the factors that complicate migration into our Northern world is the “deficit model” which implies that we regard certain differences in the other as flaws or “regression”.

Métraux also stresses the importance of the sense of belonging to a group:

“At the root of all racist thinking, including anti-Islamic attitudes, there is a diffuse social suffering caused by impotence: it's the impression of being incapable of preserving the survival of groups of belonging (appartenance), on

which we depend as the origin of our subjective feeling of identity.” (p. 241, 1st ed.)

He implies, of course, the existence of inner groups as representations of the groups in the outer world. The precariousness of inner groups makes one seek to belong to people who promise a sort of holding in a social movement – which can be a radical religious or political formation of any sort. This is a treacherous path by which to establish a sense of belonging! Métraux highlights the issue of a feeling of lost identity due to constraints associated with migration.

In his foreword to the Italian edition [2], Antonio d'Angiò stresses the fact that Métraux opens up a new discourse based on the discovery that we all are migrants. He seems to be astonished that this discovery took place in the realm of psychiatry involving children, adolescents, adults, families and communities, and concludes that Métraux is a good example of a psychiatrist who is able to withstand the temptation of biological reductionism and avoid the omnipresent shortcomings of psychiatrization.

I highly recommend Métraux's book to everybody. It contains not only clinical and sociological considerations, but also a passionate appeal to society in general for a change of attitude in political and professional praxis.

References

- 1 von Salis T. Book review: Jean Claude Métraux: La migration comme métaphore. *Schweiz Arch Neurol Psychiatr*. 2012;163(04):161–2. [doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4414/sanp.2012.02373>].
- 2 Métraux JC. *La migrazione come metafora*. Milan: Casa editrice il Ponte; 2015.