

Practices of translation and the making of migrant subjectivities in contemporary Italy

ABSTRACT

In 1998, Italy passed a law (Article 18) granting “victims of human trafficking” temporary residence permits to “escape from situations of violence and abuse.” There were two conditions: the applicant had to agree to pursue criminal action against her exploiter and to participate in a state-funded “rehabilitation” program mostly offered by Catholic groups engaged in combating criminality and foreign prostitution as a form of “modern slavery.” Linking prostitution to female migration and slavery has significant implications for how migrant women are interpellated within the receiving country. When characterized as victims, these women are figured as lacking the dual capacities of desiring migration and appropriating laws that grant legal recognition. This article explores both the willed and imposed multiplicity of subject positions of these women within the fields of charitable and institutional languages. In Italy, qualifying as a “political refugee” or as a “victim of human trafficking” is often the only means of achieving the legal rights necessary to avoid repatriation. [*translation, citizenship, migration, subjectivity, ethnopsychiatry, Italy, anthropology of institutions*]

This article focuses on several components of the rehabilitation program for “victims of human trafficking.” Taking each component as a different strategy for converting migrants into citizens, it examines the intersections between practices of linguistic and cultural translation and forms of citizenship. Migrants must pass through several institutional settings to obtain legal rights and social services. By analyzing how institutional languages and cultures frame stories about the migrant, I examine the respective assumptions about citizenship. I argue that, in contemporary Italy, the different projects of citizen making are inscribed in complex processes of translation, and that the figure of the migrant has a “mirror function” (Sayad 2004) of illuminating the forgotten history of the receiving country. The analysis that follows therefore questions the receiving society’s practices of inclusion and exclusion of its others.

I went to Turin, Italy, in 2002, initially to examine practices of cultural mediation within the setting of ethnopsychiatry and, more broadly, to understand the relationship between emerging therapeutic approaches to migrant patients, practices of translation, and new conceptions of citizenship. I was interested in the new professional class of cultural mediators and in the creation of a discourse within ethnopsychiatry in which identity and mental health become something that can be negotiated between migrants and Italian institutions.¹ Soon, I realized that cultural mediation and translation were concerns not only in ethnopsychiatry but also in various institutions such as police stations, Catholic shelters for migrants, schools, and courtrooms. Each institutional setting engages in practices of translation to produce an intelligible account of the migrant. I approached the production of migrant stories as the translation of alterity into the languages of these institutions, and as a means of creating citizens—those who are recognized as members of a community and adhere to its diverse bureaucratic logics.²

For a woman seeking a residency permit under Article 18, the first step of the rehabilitation requires filing criminal charges against her traffickers. Other steps involve living in a shelter (usu. run by Catholic nuns); professional training in Italian language, cooking, and housekeeping

“Italian style”; elderly care; and medical examinations. Women are sometimes referred to the hospital or the ethnopsychiatric clinic for psychological support. Nuns, psychiatrists, ethnopsychiatrists, and cultural mediators collaborate in rehabilitation programs and often share the fragments of women’s stories that each is able to collect in an effort to understand the larger context of their lives.

My argument has two main theoretical points. I argue that different conceptions of citizenship are at play in contemporary Italy. When it comes to victims of human trafficking, becoming legal is often figured by legal and religious institutions as emancipation. On the one hand, I suggest that, likewise, redemption and expiation are not only crucial issues for Catholic groups involved in aid programs for migrants but they are also at the core of integration policies promoted by the state through the rehabilitation of migrant prostitutes.³ In this sense, the form of citizenship that I observed emerging from this approach to migrants is what I call “confessional citizenship” because legal recognition is granted on the condition that women file criminal charges against their traffickers and go through a program of reeducation that evokes the experience of expiation. This will grant legal papers and “freedom from slavery.” Being recognized by the state involves the production of a victim narrative (through the act of *denuncia*, or filing criminal charges), and the commitment to being socialized in what is recognized as the “Italian way of being” of the female citizen. This process takes place through what may seem an act of self-effacement in which women’s stories are rephrased into the juridical language of the state and the religious language of Catholic groups.

On the other hand, other institutional settings such as the ethnopsychiatric clinic where I conducted part of my research promote a different model of citizenship. In this context, becoming an emancipated subject has a different valence: rather than converting migrants into “Italians,” ethnopsychiatry is concerned with reactivating connections and forms of belonging with the migrant’s culture of departure. Hence, resorting to one’s own cultural background—or the representation of it that ethnopsychiatry provides—is the condition for healing and for being able to adapt to the receiving society without abdicating one’s own difference. I refer to this second process as “cultural citizenship.”

Here, I engage in a debate about emerging notions of citizenship and their relations to biological understandings of human beings, conceptions of the body, illness, and the performative power of categories such as “victim of violence” or “asylum seeker.” “Biological citizenship,” “therapeutic citizenship,” and “genetic citizenship” (Fassin 2001; Nguyen 2005; Petryna 2002; Rose and Novas 2005; Ticktin 2006) are some recent terms coined by anthropologists to describe shifting conceptions and experiences of citizenship within and outside of Europe that encompass the ac-

tive politics of life and death and provide those who aspire to become citizens with a language with which to access the rights and services provided to members of the community. In the Italian context, Andrea Muehlebach has talked about an emerging “ethical citizenship” under neoliberal conditions that imagines citizens as bound together by moral and affective, rather than social and political, ties, and through duties, rather than rights (Muehlebach 2007). Although expanding understandings of citizenship from its conventional basis in law and political science, these new designations—which assign an adjective to the practices that produce and are produced by people who belong to or make use of the community—risk creating a surplus of characteristics linked to citizenship that may in the end void the term of its explicative power. With this critique in mind, I locate my work at the intersection of this theoretical discussion on citizenship and the narrower legal definition that affects migrants’ lives in very specific ways. Migrant women discussed in this article become legal residents—not full citizens—after completing the rehabilitation program; they therefore attain certain legal rights such as residence, access to health care, and the opportunity to work. I consider the conditions that grant legal residency as the antecedent to full citizenship. The difference between a resident and a citizen is partially of degree of integration within Italian society (ten years of legal residency will grant citizenship), and at the same time of blood and ancestry (children born in Italy to undocumented migrants are themselves undocumented).

I make my second but related point by engaging both philosophical and anthropological reflections on *translation*. I use this term both literally—as the process through which a language is rendered into another language—and as a theoretical metaphor through which to think about difference. In fact, the question of translation is central not only to hermeneutic philosophy but also to anthropology because it questions alterity, and its commensurability or incommensurability: given the multiplicity of languages, what makes them translatable one into the other? Can translation reach and convey the alterity of the other?

It is precisely around these questions that various contemporary hermeneutic approaches confront one another, explicitly or implicitly. On the one hand, by privileging communication, relation, and the overcoming of distance among languages, some philosophers emphasize their translatability and the autotransparency of a community of communication (Apel 1980; Gadamer 1975; Habermas 2000). These theories suggest that it is possible to achieve intelligibility and transparency between languages, but they conceive of “community” and “language” as too stable to provide a subtle understanding of the complexity of dialogues (Crapanzano 1992). The process is aimed at coming to a compromise and making translation “clearer and flatter than the original” (Gadamer 1975:348). On the

other hand, philosophers such as Benjamin (Benjamin and Arendt 1968), Heidegger (1975), Derrida (1985), and Blanchot (Blanchot and Rottenberg 1997) emphasize distance and the irreducible difference of the other. Here, translation is a leap into the unknown of language and the impossibility of shedding light onto it. Every translation is an attempt to take this leap and to translate one side of the abyss that separates languages without effacing it (Heidegger 1975:19). It evokes opacity, rather than transparency, and, thus, always evinces the impossibility of giving voice to what in language is destined to be silent and intractable (Resta 1988). According to this position, translation is not flatter than the original but, instead, produces an "epiphany." Benjamin referred to this characteristic of translation when he described it as the literary form that is "charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own" (Benjamin and Arendt 1968:73).⁴ Anthropologists have added to this debate the fundamental question of power relations. When we translate, we also confront the inequality of power embedded in different languages: some prevail and others are erased (Asad 1986; Maranhão 2003). Translation can domesticate and annihilate difference (Heeschen 2003); in so doing, it also has the capacity to liberate difference (Münzel 2003).

In my ethnographic research, I observed different practices of translation that resonated with both these traditions of thought. The tension between them opens a productive space, within which we may examine the forms of citizenship that are produced. By rendering the migrant prostitute's story into the bureaucratic language of denuncia (the act of filing criminal charges), women enter the realm of the rehabilitation program that aims at both their redemption from exploitation and transformation into female Italian citizens. In ethnopsychiatry, on the contrary, the pretence of being able to collect the migrants' stories in their own languages conveys a desire to reanchor the other in his or her cultural difference. At play are two forms of citizenship that require practices of redemption: confessional citizenship implies making migrants into Italians, whereas cultural citizenship implies remaking them others.

In this article, I follow one Nigerian woman through the rehabilitation program for victims of human trafficking: at the police station where she filed criminal charges against her exploiters, at the Catholic shelter where she was housed, at the public hospital where she was hospitalized, and at the ethnopsychiatric clinic where she was later treated as a patient. I decided to tell the story of Joy, or, I should say, the story of Joy as I have collected it, because it is representative of other stories of Nigerian women who, like her, arrived in Italy illegally, worked for a while in the sex industry, and then entered the rehabilitation program to escape abusive situations or to obtain a residency permit. As

João Biehl points out, "Following the plot of a single person can help one to identify the many networks and relations . . . in which regimes of normalcy and ways of being are fashioned and, thus, to capture both the densities of localities and the rawness of uniqueness" (2004:478). In line with this style of ethnographic writing, I approach the narration of an individual's story as the unique expression of experiences that are inscribed in, produced within, and productive of a larger context (Crapanzano 1980; Das 2000; Desjarlais 2003; Pandolfo 1997a, 2006; Shostak 1981).

Discourses of Italian fragmentation and new questions of immigration

Contemporary experiences of migration stem from a larger set of problematics that have characterized Italy's relationship to capitalist nation-statehood during the 18th century. I will provide a brief discussion of the discursive afterlife of late-19th- and early-20th-century debates about Italian national identity in current projects of "making Italians." To be sure, contemporary practices of making Italian citizens out of migrants may be read in relation to the famous and often (mis-)quoted declaration by fin-de-siècle Italian nationalist Massimo D'Azeglio: "We have made Italy, now we must make Italians" (Steinberg 2007). Far from a steady march of rationalism and capital across the peninsula, Italy's entrance into modern nationhood has revealed what is often glossed as "fragmentation" (Allen and Russo 1997; Piattoni 1998). Many writers have attempted to understand these forces with such dichotomies as tradition-modernity; agriculture-industrialization; and popular religion-Catholicism (Ginzburg 1980; Holmes 1989; Yanagisako 2002). These oppositions—dear as they were to liberal-democratic policymakers—were grafted onto geographic space. Italy's relatively late and somewhat turbulent entrance into nationhood has been viewed as the result of a deep fracture (socioeconomic at best and racial at worst) between North and South (Gramsci 1978).⁵ In official discourse, the southern regions, and their diverse population, were identified as the "backward" contrast to an industrially advanced North (Banfield 1965; Schneider 1998). Anthropologists have shown that the South's asymmetrical relations with the North cannot be reduced to a culture of poverty (Banfield 1965; Belmonte 2005; de Martino 2000; Putman 1993). Instead, the North has legitimized its political control through an Orientalist discourse that reifies the many regions of southern Italy into a univocal "question." Nicola Mai has demonstrated how, in contemporary Italy and post-Maastricht Europe, old representations of southerners are now translated onto migrants as the other against which to define a new EU-compatible Italian identity (Mai 2002).

As “the southern question” was feverishly debated in public discourse just after unification, so emerged two additional and related problem sets: (1) increasing numbers of impoverished Italians left (primarily southern) Italy definitively to find work in northern Europe and the Americas, and (2) Italy struggled to enter the colonial contest with schemes for “demographic” colonization in the Horn of Africa (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2005; Del Boca 1992; Ginsborg 1990; Labanca 2002).⁶ Each of these related fields was tied in the late 19th century to Italy’s struggle for a role among the great Western powers; at the heart of these preoccupations was the question of crafting national subjects who would be capable of carrying Italy toward its longed-for modernity.

These discussions about the propriety of Italian citizens were inevitably marked by understandings about race (*razza* or *stirpe*) and culture (*civiltà*) that would emerge again in Italy during liberal Italy’s invasion of Libya (1911–12) and the fascist invasion of Ethiopia and Cyrenaica (1934–36). In 1912, Italy passed the first law that granted Italian citizenship on the basis of *jus sanguinis*—bloodline and inheritance, in contrast to the territorially based *jus soli*. Such regulation endorsed a notion of nationality as a tenacious bond that could endure emigration and be passed down to descendants in the diaspora (Ballinger 2007). The emphasis on blood and ancestry profoundly influenced the subsequent citizenship law (Law 91, 1992), which still regulates issues of residency and naturalization today (Calavita 2005).⁷

Questions of citizenship cropped up again after WWII, when Italy experienced a series of “internal” migrations: the repatriation of Italian nationals from former possessions, the management of non-Italian displaced persons seeking refuge, and another exodus of laborers from rural southern areas to northern Italian cities (Ballinger 2007; Brettell 2003).⁸

This brief history suggests that today’s attempts by Italian institutions to manage these newest migrants are not novel but, instead, are part of a complex of processes that are at least as old as the nation-state itself. Since the 1990s, anthropologists writing for an English public have started paying close attention to phenomena of migration to Italy (Carter 1997; Cole and Booth 2007; Merrill 2006) and to forms of integralism (Holmes 2000), intolerance, and new racism (Cole 1997; Cole and Booth 2007; Sniderman 2000) that emerged in response to the increasing presence of foreign populations. This article builds on these studies by showing how the encounter between migrants and Italians raises unresolved questions about Italy’s past and ambiguous negotiations between nationalization, migration, and colonialism. It also addresses the question of European identities after Maastricht and the imperative to negotiate between cultural affinity and a multicultural and multiracial Europe (Holmes in press).

Denuncia: The subject verbalized

I am sitting in the office of Inspector Caccia, in Turin’s police station. I am here to accompany Joy, a young Nigerian woman who is filing criminal charges against the people who brought her to Italy and forced her to work as a prostitute. She qualifies as a “victim of human trafficking”—a status which will eventually grant her a residency permit. She looks disoriented; I don’t think she knows exactly why we are here. The nuns at her shelter told her she had to file criminal charges in order to enter the rehabilitation program, and they asked me to accompany her. Inspector Caccia has a reputation as “the inspector of Nigerian women;” he is known as having some sort of cultural competency. He has earned this name thanks to the hundreds of denunce (official statements) he has collected from Nigerian migrant women over the years, and for having a personal interest in Nigeria, a country he has visited a few times. He works with a Nigerian cultural mediator, Promise, who is in charge of translating the women’s stories into Italian. Promise is in the room with us. She is confident; she speaks fluent Italian and English. She sits next to Joy. It is clear from the first exchanges between them that they speak two different Nigerian languages. Joy only knows a few words of Italian and speaks a pidgin English. But this detail stops neither the cultural mediator nor the inspector from beginning to collect her story. Promise asks questions in English, Joy stutters answers in her broken English, Promise translates Joy’s stammered words into Italian, and dictates the text of the denuncia to Inspector Caccia who acts like a clerk following the orders of a superior.

P: “How were you brought to Italy? Did your madame come to get you in Nigeria?”

J: “No.”

P: “How did it work?”

J: “Through a friend of brother Daniel who lives in London.”

P: “Did you know why you were coming to Italy?”

J: “No.”

P: “Why didn’t you ask before leaving Nigeria?”

J: “Didn’t know.”

P: “How did it work with passports?”

J: “With fake name, a Muslim name.”

P: “When did you leave Lagos? What day, month, and year?”

J: “Don’t remember; maybe August.”

P: “Where did you go from there?”

J: “London.”

P: “What was the name of the Nigerian man who brought you to Italy?”

J: “Mark.”

P: “What did you do with him? Were you still a virgin?”

J: “Yes.”

P: “Did he rape you?”

J: "Yes."

P: "Did your madame do voodoo to you? Did it happen before you left Nigeria or in Italy?"

J: "Yes, in Italy."⁹

Promise asks a series of questions almost without interruption: very precise questions, about people, journeys, addresses, dates, encounters, place descriptions, relationships between people, debts, and money (borrowed, earned, lost, and lent).

The document that resulted from this interrogation reads as follows:

It was my brother Daniel that, unbeknownst to my mother, invited me to his house in Lagos and then put me in contact with a Nigerian guy named Mark who promised that he would be able to help me get to London so that I could finish school, and who then organized my departure for Italy. I state that in Nigeria I had never heard anything about girls being brought to Europe for work or school and then forced into prostitution. I left from Lagos on August 4th, 2002, around 11pm. I traveled with a passport that had my photo, but not my personal information. I don't remember the name that was on the passport, but it was definitely a Muslim name. In fact, they had made me dress as a Muslim woman in order to render the personal information on the passport more believable. As soon as we arrived in London, Mark brought me to his house and made me follow him into a room and, that night, regardless of the fact that I begged him to leave me alone, abused me by raping me. This made me suffer a lot and it contributed to confirming my conviction that I had fallen into the hands of bad and unscrupulous people. We arrived in Turin the following day. It was September 15, 2002, a date that I will never forget. That day he sold me to my madam. The day after my arrival in Italy, Grace, my madam, cut pieces of the nails on my left hand and a lock of hair from my head. She then made me give her some pubic hairs and my underwear, which she stained with blood after having made an incision in one of my fingers. In making me give her these "things," which she organized in a cardboard box after having wrapped them in a piece of fabric, she demanded that I always do everything she ordered me to; otherwise, something awful would happen to me—sickness or insanity. She then made about 20 incisions above my breasts with a razor blade. She then forced me to start prostituting myself immediately. [my translation from the Italian, from my field notes, Turin, Italy, May 12, 2003]¹⁰

The interrogation and the writing of the denuncia lasted five hours. Joy's hesitance and stuttering did not come through in the document. Joy's trembling voice, broken sentences, and confusion were erased. Yet she had just performed the very act that granted her access to services

and rights that allow her to become a visible and legal subject in Italy.

What does this story tell us about the possibility of being a migrant subject at the threshold of institutional languages and their inability to provide a narrative that can account for the migrant's experience, while at the same time providing the possibility of becoming visible and recognizable as a subject? Denuncia is an act of translation in which migrants get caught as they attempt to make a space for themselves within the receiving society.

In terms of immigration legislation, what distinguished Italy from other European countries until 1986 was the near absence of legal controls; in that year, the first Martelli law was passed (and then further revised in 1990), aimed at regulating the legalization of migrants and closing the borders until further laborers were considered necessary. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) conceived of a Europe without borders in which people and goods could circulate freely. However, in accord with the Schengen and Dublin Conventions, European immigration policies became stricter by sanctioning the militarization of external borders, the immediate expulsion of illegal migrants, or their temporary custody in detention camps. Within "Fortress Europe" questions of asylum and migration became a matter of "security" more than human rights and citizenship.

In 1998, the Italian center-left government revised the Martelli law and it introduced a "model of reasonable integration" aimed at preserving "personal integrity" for migrants, and, in line with the decentralization of the welfare system of the beginning of the 1990s, at strengthening integration policies with the involvement of civil society organizations (Zincone and Ponzo 2006). Article 18 for the protection of "victims of human trafficking" was part of this project. In 2002, as the culmination of more than a decade of anti-immigrant discourse supported by the extreme right, the law was revised following more repressive-legalist stances. The rights for "victims of human trafficking" were not challenged. In fact, within the context of the legislation, Article 18 is the only regulation that allows illegal migrants who are already present in the country and who are not eligible for refugee status to apply for a residency permit, granted that they qualify as "victims." For this reason, Article 18 is also referred to as a "normative oasis" within the law, or as an anchor of hope for those seeking legality.¹¹

Ambivalent inclusion: Truths, lies, and the paradoxes of institutions

On the day of the denuncia, the interrogation of Joy resulted in the precise and pressing rhythm of state bureaucratic language, masterfully conveyed by the translation of the cultural mediator. Joy was, in a way, dispossessed by stuttering, lack of words, and moments of silence and emptiness

in remembering a story that, for the most part, she did not want to remember.

In brief, the story that resulted from that day of interrogation runs somewhat as follows. I will paraphrase and summarize the text of denuncia as it took form by the end of the interrogation.¹²

Joy is 18 as she enters the rehabilitation program. She left Nigeria a virgin when she was 15. Her brother arranged for her to travel to Europe, with the promise that she could pursue her studies there. Joy completed primary school but dropped out at the beginning of secondary school, as money was lacking in the family. Her father is absent from her life. Her mother has a small seasonal business in the local market in Benin City. She never knew where Joy was taken or what she was doing. In Italy Joy was sold to Grace, the woman who became her madame. Grace told her that her travel from Nigeria to Italy cost them 90,000 Euros, and that in order to pay her debt quickly she had to work as a prostitute. Joy thought that being a prostitute meant wearing heavy make up and had no idea that she had to have sex with men. Grace told her to put on a mini skirt, a wig, high heel boots, and a tight shirt and sent her on the streets to work with the other Nigerian women. From that moment onwards, she was told that her name was Juliet, and if someone asked her age, she would say she was 20 years old. After her first client she was taken to the hospital for constant bleeding. Once she was discharged, the madame forced her to go back to the streets even if the bleeding continued. She worked from 8 am to 9 pm every day and gave all the money she made to Grace. Grace made Joy take an oath not to betray her and pronounced these words: "If you don't pay your debt, you will die. If you tell anyone about what is happening to you, you will become crazy. I bought you with the money I earned from my own prostitution and now you have to return the money with yours." The police caught Joy several times, but never deported her. Her madame used to hit her with a belt every time she would come home without having earned enough money. She once escaped from her madame's house and lived with another Nigerian woman for a few months. During this time she continued to work as a prostitute, to pay Grace, but also kept some money for herself. One night, she was raped by three Italian men. She was taken to the emergency room and social workers approached her to explain about the possibility of entering the rehabilitation program for victims. In the denuncia, she declared that she had made a conscious decision to join the program.

The practice of filing criminal charges takes place by means of translation and represents the moment in which women enter into a pact with the state and become legal. Although the document silences many aspects of the women's lives, their stories constitute the content of denun-

cia and become the official story. In this process, Joy occupied the position of an "I" (denuncia is written in the first person), crafted for her by the bureaucratic language of the police document and internalized by Promise. Most of these statements sound alike, and the women are often aware of the questions they will be asked to file criminal charges. Therefore, Joy was allowed to perform a speech act that enabled her rebirth as a legal resident. Although her voice was lost in translation, her position as a legal subject was constituted in the very process of translating her story into the text of the document.

In the process of translation, some women experience ambivalence and unease in filing criminal charges against people whom they perceive as "benefactors" as well as "exploiters," insofar as the accused made it possible for them to migrate, to make money, to help their families, and to make new lives for themselves. The state cannot account for the fear and sense of guilt provoked by the action of denouncing family members involved in the women's migration. Also, the police office is not the space where the fear of going mad—that paralyzes some women as they tell the whole story—can be heard. Denouncing a pimp is often experienced as breaking an oath, and this entails the curse of madness. In Joy's case, one of her brothers organized her travel to Europe. The fear that, by denouncing her "traffickers," other family members back home would be threatened to death and that she might fall into madness, made Joy ambivalent about telling her "story."

In our conversations, neither Joy nor other Nigerian women used the term *voodoo*, which typically appears in the denuncia and is often the topic of discussion of police officers, care providers, and psychologists. Joy and others prefer to refer to their devotion for gods and goddesses such as Mami Wata. This attempt to make the law "culturally sensitive" by introducing a term to describe Nigerian women's experience of "swearing oaths" at shrines before departing from Nigeria or on their arrival to Europe serves a double purpose: on the one hand, it points to the breaches within the bureaucratic language that allow for the creation of concepts—such as "voodoo"—that are an attempt at cultural sensitivity but that also reify the migrant's alterity. On the other hand, in drafting a denuncia, the concept of "voodoo" is manipulated to prove the degree of victimization of the women, coerced to obey their exploiters by means of exotic cults and occult threats. It represents a complete loss of the expression of personal desires and choices, something the women know too well when they file criminal charges and decide to adhere to the category of "victim," whether it truly applies to their story or not. They know how to talk about "voodoo," in the sense police officers use it, and they know how to do things with it, but they do not invoke this term outside of the institutional settings where it represents one of the criteria to measure the degree of subjugation to prostitution networks. Words make

things happen. They know that being a victim of voodoo gives them more of a chance to qualify as victims.¹³ Such a label, therefore, has a double power: although it erases the ambivalence of women's experiences by reducing them to the category of the "victim," it also allows for other experiences to take place.

The nuances of what it means to be a "victim," and how it is woven together with conscious choices and meditated decisions on the part of the women—who have often taken prostitution into account as a phase of their migration experience before landing on the shores of Europe—do not emerge from the denuncia. "I kind of knew that I was going to work as a prostitute for a while, and then I would find a normal job," shared a woman from Benin City, "but I never thought it meant working in the streets at night; I needed money to support my siblings in Nigeria after my parents died." A young woman from Romania pointed to a similar experience when she told me:

I left my country because there was no job and I didn't want to depend on my parents. The people who brought me to Italy told me that I would work as a babysitter, but I knew I would work as a prostitute. I thought I could do it for two or three months of my life, make a lot of money, and then go back to Romania, but then the months passed and I stayed. I have sent my family enough money for them to live well for several years.

The discourse around trafficking is articulated through fixed dichotomies such as victim-agent, slave-sex worker. It sustains itself by drawing from the most extreme cases of abuse and violence that migrant women face as illegal migrants and coerced prostitutes because these cases are "easy" to think about (Agustin 2003). What challenges the official discourses are all the cases that do not fit any of these dichotomies but that, instead, are possibly explained in between or, better, outside dichotomies that attempt to decode the experience of migration. Although these dichotomies reduce the complexities of migration to extreme poles, they also produce forms of inclusion and exclusion to which migrants can resort.

The hospital and the shelter: Elusive stories and the language of biomedicine

Immediately after filing the denuncia, Joy had several crises. During these episodes, she would tremble with fear, at times ending up in uncontrollable fits and seizures; be completely unresponsive to the nuns; and become physically rigid and stiff. She was afraid of sleeping in her bedroom by herself. In more dramatic moments, she would run to the kitchen and grab a knife. She reported hearing a voice telling her to kill herself. It was the voice of Grace, her madame. For days the nuns did not know what to do, aside from stopping her from

harming herself. They would describe her crisis as follows: "She crawls on the floor as if she was a snake; her body becomes as heavy as a piece of wood that weighed 200 kilos; we can't lift her even if the four of us together try. She says she wants to die." The nuns described these episodes as "epileptic convulsions" and justified them as consequences of the subjugation she experienced through what the nuns understood as voodoo rituals.

Before hospitalizing Joy, they called her pastor from the local Pentecostal church. He performed rituals with water, which reduced her to crawling on the floor. He suggested that the nuns contact Joy's madame to tell her to stop performing rituals against Joy, "otherwise," he told the nuns, "she is going to die in seven days." None of these rituals worked. After another crisis on Christmas night, Joy was hospitalized. Her diagnosis showcased the overlapping languages and criteria: "psychotic syndrome linked to her prolonged exposure to serious psychophysical traumas." The psychiatrist explained her "posttraumatic psychotic syndrome" as a consequence of being forced into prostitution at a young age, being raped twice, and being reduced by her madame's voodoo rituals to a state of psychological subjugation. He concluded she was prone to dying or going mad, if not treated. The symptoms reported were "hallucinatory voices of a persecutory type, delirious and persecutory interpretations, anxiety attacks, nightmares, and insomnia." Apparently, the last crisis started immediately after Joy had found out that her madame was still a fugitive. "If she is free, she can do rituals on me."

Meanwhile, the nuns were always with Joy and, at the suggestion of the psychiatrist, tried to collect information about her life before coming to and while in Italy. Her story seemed impenetrable to them, constantly eluding their attempts to grasp some truth about her past that would explain her current suffering. During one psychiatric appointment, one of the nuns said: "Each time, she tells a different story. It is as if she did not have a center, an identity that could hold, a story to which she could adhere, a culture that could sustain her." The Nigerian cultural mediator also complained that Joy always lied: "she never gives me the same version of the story."

The psychiatrist reflected on the nuns' concerns: "The different versions of the story could be a strategy of survival, a defense; if she told the true story she would probably die; she is not able to handle the truth of her own story." He alluded to a dangerous truth that could only be approached through lies and fearful attempts to own it again (or maybe own it for the first time), at the risk of being annihilated by it. Joy's migration, her exile, can therefore be seen as a possibility to occupy her story differently, in a way that could make healing possible. But this story couldn't emerge within the hospital and the biomedical language.¹⁴

The psychiatrist's interpretation shows how various actors reacted differently to Joy's numerous narratives. The

opacity of each fragment of Joy's story confused their attempts to rehabilitate "victims" and their goal of freeing them from subjugation to making them autonomous subjects. According to the confessional logics of both Catholic groups involved in aid programs and that of the state, rehabilitation is aimed at providing the women with an alternative anchor for identification, translating the socially unacceptable identity of the "prostitute" into the more commensurable one of the "victim."

In Italy, the separation of church and state has been a central theme since unification, when the state could not afford to alienate the Catholic Church because of its wealth and charitable apparatus (Quine 2002). This legacy continues as the Italian state relies on the Church's resources to implement social policies. Moreover, Catholic social doctrine has deeply influenced both the foundation of the EU and current formulations of neoliberalism, by promoting a model of social and economic life that privileges the social (Holmes in press; Muehlebach 2007).¹⁵ As Douglas Holmes argues, the EU is designed according to the framework of solidarity in the midst of diversity that fosters the image of a society based on a delicate interdependence between different groups and moralized individuals that owed one another active support (Holmes 2000).

As victims, migrant women are recognized and taken in by social services. Outside of the narrative of the victim, recognizing the other in his or her difference becomes a terrain fraught with the danger of losing one's own center, or, with de Martino, we could say of losing one's own presence (de Martino 2000).¹⁶ For de Martino, the "crisis of presence" refers to the individual's existential fear of being effaced by situations that challenge his or her ability to handle external and internal realities. This risk is shared by both migrants and Italians alike, when their mutual differences and incommensurabilities conflict. This is how I interpreted the anxiety and fear I heard in the nuns' concerns about Joy's "psychotic episodes" and the impossibility of grasping some coherent narrative that could then be labeled as Joy's story.

As for Joy, she did not have many prefabricated stories at her disposal other than the story of the "victim" provided by the denuncia, which found its *raison d'être* within the Catholic rhetoric of confession and redemption. Approached as a "victim," she responded as a "victim." Joy's experience also points to something I have observed in other migrant women's life stories. They come to inhabit the category of the "victim" for periods of their migration trajectories; they often have that category ascribed to them, but they are never completely subsumed within it. Hence, the confused versions of the past that creep into their narratives, as a way of redeeming a story that cannot be told while it attempts to make itself visible. Joy's suffering was an account in and of itself, a way of telling an ineffable story in institutional settings that represent, to her,

multiple alterities that prevent the production of a single narrative.

When she was discharged from the hospital, she expressed her concern about what would happen to her once she had fully recovered: "I don't know how to do anything; what will I do when I get better? I am nothing, I can only go back to the street." Her concern, apart from practical ones concerning a job, speaks to her fear of being recognized solely as a suffering victim. Being labeled a victim contains the migrant in a moment of loss, outside of which the risk of experiencing a crisis of presence re-presents itself with full force.

Ethnopsychiatry: The play of diagnostic and cultural interpretations

After her first hospitalization, the nuns and the hospital psychiatrist consulted with the ethnopsychiatrists at the Centro Fanon, and eventually Joy was taken in charge as a patient. Established in the late 1990s by a group of Italian psychiatrists, psychologists, and anthropologists who were interested in medical anthropology and in the question of cultural difference, the Centro Fanon was conceived as a political response to the rising discrimination against migrants (Beneduce 1998). Partly inscribed within a revival of clinical ethnopsychiatry in other European countries (Fassin 2000b), this center is engaged in the debates on psychiatric reform in Italy. There is a movement toward a revision of the Basaglia Law (that instituted community-based structures to cope with the problem of mental illness) by reintroducing residential hospital care. Clinical ethnopsychiatry (originally associated with colonial psychiatry) is a site where, through the incorporation of different etiologies of mental suffering and healing approaches, a strong counterdiscourse to normative psychiatry is produced. Culture provides therapists a framework for developing a new practice of listening where the patient's claims to the magical and the supernatural—as constitutive orders of subjectivity—are taken seriously and often used as therapeutic tools.

Cross-cultural psychiatry has evolved differently in many countries because of various factors, including the political status of minority groups, histories of colonization and migration, and different conceptions of citizenship (Watters 2007). In Italy, reflections on the relationship between culture and psychiatry have been influenced by Tobie Nathan's ethnopsychanalytic approach to migrant patients in France. His work focuses on the symbolic meaning of traditional healing practices and on formal analogies with psychotherapy (Kirmayer 2000). Although the goal to reanchor migrants within their traditional culture as a therapeutic technique is explicit in Nathan's practice, the work of the Centro Fanon is also influenced by other philosophical traditions—such as phenomenology,

existentialism, and, in anthropology, the work of Ernesto de Martino. The specificity of Italian ethnopsychiatry can only be understood against the backdrop of the debates around the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill and the radical critique of public institutions initiated by Franco Basaglia in the early 1970s (Pandolfi and Bibeau 2005).¹⁷ Moreover, Frantz Fanon and his radical denunciation of colonial power relations and the violence embedded in all institutions represent the ground on which the group of practitioners at the center base their reflections around discrimination and race and conceive trainings for mental health practitioners and social workers who work in public services. In this context, all these legacies come together in interesting and sometimes contradictory ways.

When asked at the Centro Fanon about her crises, Joy responded with frustration and anger at the fact that she had yet to receive her residency permit. She had been in the rehabilitation program for four months. Although she had filed criminal charges, the bureaucratic time of issuing such documents is often extremely long. When she met the ethnopsychiatrist at the center, she refused to talk to him. A Nigerian cultural mediator was present during the consultations and, unlike the mediator at the police station, she spoke the same language as Joy (Edo). The ethnopsychiatrist asked questions such as: "Are you in contact with your family in Nigeria? When was the last time you talked to your mother? Have you talked to the brother who sent you here without telling you about prostitution?" She would respond with "yes" or "no" or with long silences. After several attempts on the part of the ethnopsychiatrist, Joy started telling "her story" from the time she had arrived in Italy. It sounded, uncannily, just like the text of denuncia archived at the police station. And then she burst into a long list of grievances:

I am tired of telling the same story over and over again. I gave them my story and I still don't have a residency permit or a regular job. I am going crazy because my madame knows I have reported her to the police. I live with Catholic nuns who pray day and night and I am still sick and without papers. Why don't their prayers work? If I go mad, it means voodoo works here in Italy as well. This man can't do anything about my papers; what's the point of telling him my story anyway?

The cultural mediator not only translated the ethnopsychiatrist's questions for Joy but was also given the space to ask her own questions and collect Joy's story without specific instructions from the therapist. The idea is to create a space where patients can use their own words and languages to express what they are going through. In this context, the cultural mediator is asked to be much more than an interpreter, an expert at finding equivalences between languages. Rather, she is asked to be a juggler of words and concepts, flexible enough to make them

resonate in the language of the other, whether he or she is a patient or therapist. Even so, for several weeks during the consultations, any question or reference to Nigeria was met with Joy's complaints about not having papers, the denuncia not being effective in giving her legal status, not having money as she did when she worked on the streets, and so on and so forth. The ethnopsychiatrist resisted making a diagnosis. Further, he suspended the previous diagnosis in his attempt to let another story emerge. However, the ethnopsychiatrist encouraged her to slowly get back in touch with her family in Nigeria and, more generally, with her life in Nigeria. He suggested that she read African literature—if that was something she used to like to do. Or that she goes to the exhibition of African art currently showing at the art museum in town as a way to reconstitute ties with "home." When she started seeing the ethnopsychiatrist, Joy resisted all attempts to draw her life and story back to where she was from. She did not know what an art exhibition was. When the therapist explained to her that there would be statues from Nigeria, she understood him to be describing real people who might report her to the people she had denounced and cause troubles to her and her family back home. The therapist told her to write down all the words she would hear in her head and said that if the voices told her to kill herself, she should cry out "the doctor forbids it!"

Eventually a different story crept into the usual exchange of words. Charity, the cultural mediator, evoked the possibility that Joy belonged to a secret society in Nigeria, which would explain her resistance in revealing the details of her life back home. On that day, Joy had a strong headache that made it more difficult for her to talk. The therapist put his hands on her head and asked her to tell him about her past in Nigeria. "You are safe here; the doctor protects you from the people who want to harm you through voodoo rituals." She remained silent, with her eyes closed. "Do you have another name, an African name?" "Yes?" "What is your African name?" "Ivié." Slowly she started saying more. She was worried about going mad because she had not paid her debt to her madame and she had broken the oath. "My madame will do anything to destroy me, to make me go mad." The ethnopsychiatrist asked the cultural mediator the expression in Edo for "to go mad." "Iwaré." "Is it a general term or is it linked to voodoo rituals?" "It means that the people who do magic to you make you become a cadaver without a body; you become a slave, useless, the living dead, as being at the threshold of life and death." At this point Joy started to complain about back pain and her legs being very heavy, as if full of water. She had experienced these symptoms before but had never revealed them to the therapist. He then asked her if she had ever participated in the worship of Mami Wata, the goddess of water, wealth, abundance, and success. Many migrant women from Nigeria are devotees of Mami Wata, the goddess to

whom they are offered as a bride before embarking on the experience of migration. After a while, she recounted that her mother had brought her to one of the Mami Wata ceremonies and that for a long time she had worn an anklet as a symbol of her devotion. When she came to Italy she joined a Pentecostal church and ceased worshiping Mami Wata. A flurry of words uttered by Joy, translated by the cultural mediator, picked up by the ethnopsychiatrist, and reappropriated by Joy circulated during the consultations. Her symptoms seemed to resist any linear account; they pointed instead toward confused relations, opaque memories, ruptured belongings that exceeded any psychiatric diagnosis and could not be made commensurable through any possible clinical account in the biomedical sense.

How is the voice of the migrant rendered, translated, heard, erased, and produced in different institutional settings? What are the implications of these experiences for the subjectivities of migrants? These are questions of translation. Being caught in webs of translation was a quotidian experience for me and the people with whom I did research—migrants and Italians alike. But also, translation as a long-standing philosophical and anthropological question points to the complexities of what it means to live together in a society that figures the presence of migrants as a “threat” and is obsessed with the need to make the other understandable by translating difference into more familiar terms, which are often uttered in institutional languages. I see this process of translation as deeply ambivalent and fraught with paradoxes. On the one hand, translating can be an act of power and erasure that makes the inequalities of languages evident (Asad 1986). On the other hand, Walter Benjamin has taught us that the task of the translator is to abide with the difference and multiplicity of languages and find “a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages” (Benjamin and Arendt 1968:75). In this sense, translating is not an exact transposition of meaning from one linguistic system into another but, rather, a process of transformation that both languages (the one from and the one into which we translate) undergo. The paradoxes lie in the fact that each practice of translation while erasing, also transforms both migrants’ and Italians’ forms of life. Through an act of effacing, it also constitutes migrant subjectivities.

Paradoxes of redemption

Filing criminal charges and living at the Catholic shelter are two phases of rehabilitating victims and converting them into citizens. They represent phases during which migrants are converted into citizens. Some of the women in the program happen to be patients at the Centro Fanon as well. In this last context, becoming an emancipated subject has a different valiance: rather than converting migrants into citizens, ethnopsychiatry is more concerned with reacti-

vating connections and forms of belonging with their cultures of departure. I once heard a police inspector say: “Today I am unable to verbalize the Nigerian woman; please come tomorrow.” What he meant was that he did not have the time to listen to her testimony and write it as the official document of denuncia. To verbalize something means to put it into words, and in Italian a *verbale* (which is the noun deriving from *verbalizzare*) is an official document containing a damaging admission to the police, offered as evidence. What does it imply to verbalize a person? What does it mean to verbalize a migrant who applies for a residency permit? In this sense, denuncia, spelled out in the antiseptic language of the police report, provides women with the words to tell their story, to be born as legal subjects, to find a space of recognition through a narrative that neither belongs to them nor resonates with their personal story of migration. The question of redemption and expiation is not only a crucial issue for Catholic groups involved in aid programs but is also at the core of integration policies promoted by the state. Just as spiritual redemption for a Catholic is attained by passing through the phases of purification (remorse, confession, penance, transformation, and forgiveness), the program functions according to the logic of expiation. Filing criminal charges is a form of social and bureaucratic confession that is strictly connected with the will to pay one’s own debt to society through both penance and reform of oneself.

For Michel Foucault, since the Middle Ages Western societies have established the confession as one of the main techniques for the production of truth. A confessional outpouring has ensued since the 19th century that shaped various fields of knowledge such as justice, medicine, education, and love (Foucault 1980). The proliferation of confessional technologies in modern Europe was based on the assumption that truths are hidden within the individual. Processes of revealing are viewed as purifying. The history of penance teaches us that by the very act of verbalizing sins, the individual expels them; by naming the transgression one becomes clean of its consequences. Although confession is more about admitting one’s own sins, the practice of denuncia is about claiming one’s own condition as a victim. Nonetheless, filing criminal charges in the context here discussed seems to have a confessional connotation inasmuch as it marks the first step of the reform of the person. The other steps of the program, such as spending time at a shelter, are conceived of as phases during which women become “autonomous subjects,” redeemed from the position of the victim. At shelters and police stations the stories of these women are often already crafted for them in the style of the confession that entails expiation.

Women often share contradictory stories that are perceived as lies by the institutions, as if they were using these narratives as tools to craft their new life in Italy, as migrant subjects constantly at the junction of divergent

social projects and discourses in which they must be “rehabilitated,” “autonomous,” or “emancipated” (Moorehead 2005). In Joy’s case, she was unable to tell a story different from the one of denuncia when she first met the ethnopsychiatrist. Many migrant women struggle with the incommensurability of their own difference and they themselves get caught in the mechanism of commensuration, of wanting to be assimilated, reduced to the identical, becoming Italian. The persecutory dimension of one’s own culture (Benslama 2000; Pandolfo 1997b, 2000) that migrants may experience is precisely what often allows them to coincide with the stories Italians design for them.

What happens differently in the ethnopsychiatric setting? What happens to the stories told and kept silent when patients, ethnopsychiatrists, and cultural mediators meet in a consultation? What practices of translation are at play, and how are psychiatric diagnostic criteria put into question? In this setting, patients often arrive after having been diagnosed at the public hospital. They are sent to the Centro Fanon as migrant patients in need of a different kind of treatment. The presence of cultural mediators allows patients to speak in their mother tongue, and different interpretations of the patient’s suffering can thus circulate during the consultation. Mediators are asked to explain and clarify symptoms according to the cultural idioms of the country of origin of the patient and can also participate in the diagnosis and cure administered to the patient (Nathan 2001). Their role is to mediate between the cultural content of the patient’s idioms and the explanatory models of the doctors (Kleinman 1981, 1988). This allows for a different telling and a different listening. Stories that resist being told are not necessarily about prostitution or migration, but they often concern life before migration: stories about family members whose ties are precarious, tense, and persecutory. The account that women are at first compelled to give is the one they give at the police station. For most of them, the act of denuncia is the first time they have had to answer to the question: “What is your story?” What happened before migration remains caught up in a time and space that find neither the tone nor the words to be said. Allowing for the migrants’ words to circulate in the clinical setting to talk about symptoms, to name suffering, is a way of creating a space of mediation where the unsaid of the migrant’s story can emerge and find its own articulation.¹⁸ Acknowledging the legitimacy of cultural interpretations seems to unblock both the patient’s and family’s speech and to release associative chains that resituate symptoms within a personal and collective history (Corin 1997).

Diagnosis as a process of exploration

One way in which translation works in the ethnopsychiatric setting is through the formulation—or suspension—of diagnosis (a kind of translation itself). Therapists are cau-

tious with the use of diagnostic manuals’ criteria. Yet they are aware of the patients’ need to receive a diagnosis to acknowledge their suffering. The process of naming the experience of suffering is shared by all participants in the consultation. Practitioners view diagnosis as an exploratory process to learn the patients’ interpretations. Family members are involved in naming the moments of crisis (often from afar by phone calls made by cultural mediators or patients themselves), and ethnopsychiatrists juggle their own explanatory models and cultural explanations. In the words of one ethnopsychiatrist, “coming up with a diagnosis is an open process of exploration, and not of labeling and fixing. It takes into account multiple voices and aims at serving a purpose for the patient, such as being able to name his/her suffering in a way that can be heard by their family and people back home.” The assumption is that any diagnosis that claims to have recognized and identified symptoms within an explanatory model is paralyzing. In a context where matters pertaining to gods and spirits are put in tension with the language of secular psychiatry and psychoanalysis, clinical practice is fundamentally reshaped and made “culturally sensitive” and “reenchanted” by logics that escape the language of secular time. Diagnosis is less a process of recognition of causes and symptoms and more a form of acknowledgment of a fluid situation where the subject is to be understood not only in psychoanalytic terms but also as defined by external agents.

In my fieldwork at the Centro Fanon, I have observed that demedicalizing suffering has its side effects. In some cases using culture as a substitute for diagnosis can provoke anxiety in the patient. In this sense, identifying the patient’s positioning toward his culture has important implications for the diagnosis and kind of treatment chosen. Although I argue that approaching diagnosis as a multivocal process certainly resonates with a practice of translation that recognizes the incommensurability of languages—and, therefore, migrants’ voices can resonate differently within this setting—I also suggest that this very process carries some risks. First of all, magical and religious beliefs risk being assimilated by therapists into a generic understanding of the patients’ “culture,” leading to an objectification of cultural difference. Moreover, although ethnopsychiatrists are engaged in finding an “intermediate space” between the therapist’s theory and technique and the patient’s ways of expressing suffering in the attempt to avoid reducing symptoms to biomedical diagnostic criteria, they at the same time take up the task of “cultural reeducation” of patients in their cultural universe, by encouraging them to be in contact with their families or by the use of magical objects and fetishes in the therapeutic setting. I argue that this latter task points to the compulsion to contain difference within what comes to be identified as the migrant’s culture, which in his early work Nathan called the “womb.”¹⁹ I also suggest that diagnoses can be performative and not just paralyzing;

they sometimes speed up the bureaucratic process of getting documents, as Joy's story will show.

These aspects of ethnopsychiatric practice raise fundamental questions: how much space and reflection are given to the persecutory dimension of one's own culture and mother tongue in this setting? What if departure from one's own cultural universe had to be fully experienced before healing can take place and a return can be possible? Couldn't exile instead of home return—in the symbolic or literal sense—be experienced as therapeutic, as a process of emancipation and not only as a loss?

The reverse of culture as therapeutic

In her work in a Moroccan psychiatric hospital, Stefania Pandolfo reflects on the different vocabularies of healing to which patients resort (Pandolfo 2008). In between therapies of the djinns and modern psychiatry, they are caught in the dichotomies of magic–tradition on the one hand, and psychiatry–modernity, on the other hand. Pandolfo argues the impossibility of fully inhabiting the psychiatric institutional references, as well as the cultural reference itself. In her ethnography, she shows how the return to tradition can be experienced by patients as a moment of subjugation, rather than of emancipation. The language of the other—in this case, the language of psychiatry—provides the possibility of imaging life disentangled from cultural identifications.

In the context of exile and migration in Europe, psychoanalyst Fethi Benslama argues that ethnopsychiatry's invocation of culture as therapeutic reduces the individual to an anonymous group (2000). In his view, by readdressing migrant patients to an already fixed cultural knowledge, ethnopsychiatry not only misrecognizes the specificity of the individual but it also effaces it. In the sociology of migration, migrants are often portrayed as passively moved by the need to migrate, attracted by the illusion of the wealthy North that confines them outside of their cultures. The question of desire is completely effaced: the desire to leave, to exit, to exile oneself from a culture that has become unbearable and at times persecutory. Such is the desire to speak the language of the other as an experience of emancipation and discovery. Migrating, Benslama suggests, creates a rupture in the course of the life of the subject who has become a foreigner to himself or herself and to others. This experience puts in question the very sense of being in the world. Reeducating someone in his or her culture prevents the subject from being in touch with that questioning that is peculiar to the individual as such and not as a member of a group. Before reinhabiting one's own culture, the subject needs to experience the discontinuity represented and produced by migrating. In psychoanalytic terms, this involves living within that rupture to reown—or own for the first time—what figures as one's own culture, one's own home.

This uncertainty and the ability to experience it function as therapeutic.

At the Centro Fanon, I observed that patients and practitioners are caught in between several ways of thinking about the subject—the psychoanalytic and the ones outlined by other etiologies—and different interpretations can coexist, sometimes in discrepant ways. By emphasizing culture as therapeutic, practitioners risk essentializing the migrant and shadowing their desire to adhere to other categories such as the one of the victim or those provided by Western psychiatry. In certain contexts, these categories make things happen: they beget some forms of recognition.

Conclusion: The conundrum of recognition

Denuncia represents the possibility of telling a story that can be traded for recognition and inclusion, in other words, for a residency permit. It is the inscription of a truth and a presence, both partial and in tension with other truths and other ways of being present. It provides a narrative that is crafted through specific connections and chronological demands, aimed, ultimately, at forging connections between migrant women's unstable and transitory selves. What concerns me in the case of "victims of human trafficking" who appeal to Article 18 is the fact that the institution of the subject as a subject of the law can only happen in translation. Within the police department, the testimony is received in translation that becomes the pact one makes with the state to subject oneself to its norms and rules in exchange for legal recognition.²⁰ This recognition is granted on the basis that women adhere to the identities that are politically available within the receiving society, in this case the identity of the victim. By means of denuncia women provide what figures as a "bureaucratic confession," which, I argue, leads to a project of "confessional citizenship." Inclusion is achieved through an autobiographical account, the disclosure of a life that needs to be reformed to be fully recognized.

Yet the woman's testimony at the police station also happens by means of her own voice and language. When women are interrogated by cultural mediators who speak their mother tongues, the first phase of the testimony does not happen in translation but in the woman's language. This testimony is lost in the process of making the account understandable in the bureaucratic language. This act of speech—which is not heard by the institution—constitutes one order of testimony that escapes translation and the reduction of the story to the language of the law. Although in this article I have focused on the testimony that is uttered in translation, what is said outside of it represents a fundamental moment of enunciation and constitution of women's subjectivities. This kind of testimony characterizes the space of the clinic more than the space of the police

department. In the context of ethnopsychiatry, stories are not precrafted as in other institutional settings. Here, the risk is not to reduce the migrant to an already crafted victim story but, rather, to assign patients to a fixed idea of their culture of origin and to reify culture in the name of a “culturally sensitive” approach to suffering. Paying attention to cultural difference can have a double effect: although it provides clinical practice with the language in which to question Western psychiatry’s diagnostic criteria, it also risks objectifying culture as yet other diagnostic criteria.

The work of mental health practitioners at the Centro Fanon is constantly challenged by these risks, and it derives its political importance precisely from these tensions. Their clinical practice does represent a rupture in the dominant psychiatric discourse. In this sense, their work is capable of reflecting the epistemological uncertainty produced by migrant patients who by their very difference ask for another kind of understanding and treatment. By paying attention to the difference of the migrant on its own terms and by denouncing the power relations within which migrants are caught, ethnopsychiatry positions itself within the domain of the political and initiates a broader critique of biomedicine and of current policies of integration. Yet by the very fact of constructing its own epistemological specificity on the difference of the migrant, this approach risks essentializing such difference and assigning it to the other, instead of witnessing it in the other. In this sense, it promotes a form of “cultural citizenship.”

When Frantz Fanon analyzes the colonial situation, he shows that the colonized struggles for recognition not simply against the colonizer’s objectifying gaze but also against a sovereign state apparatus, which defines the terms of the struggle for recognition. Similarly, receiving countries’ politics of recognition risk promising equal recognition to all while defining the very terms of inclusion by which the other may be recognized. As Judith Butler has explained, the subject is bound to look for recognition of its own existence in categories that are the making of a dominant discourse (Butler 1997) and that provide the individual with an opportunity for social intelligibility, but at the price of a new form of subordination.²¹ Yet this subordination is the condition for the subject’s existence. Although the Italian state portrays women as victims who come to occupy the position of a sovereign subject, in practice they reoccupy a position that is assigned to them by a sovereign state but that, in some ways, is alien to them. The outcome of this recognition is not, as the dominant discourse would have it, liberation, but, following Fanon, “white approval” (Fanon 1967).

Joy’s story is still unfolding. After several months, she received the residency permit, but instead of the one for “victims of human trafficking,” she received one for health care reasons. Apparently, her medical history made her eligible for this kind of permit as well as for the one for “victims,” and her “psychiatric problems” made the bureau-

cracy move faster than her condition as a “victim.” This was the reason they gave Joy at the police station when she asked for an explanation. She was furious. This kind of permit would not allow her to work, and she felt completely disabled. She was eventually able to convert it into the permit granted to “victims of human trafficking.” For migrants in general, the residency permit is often a question of life or death. The lack of recognition on the part of the institutions, especially after having signed a sort of pact with them, can be experienced as a form of social death. It represents the possibility of falling into invisibility. Joy was also expelled from the shelter. She was still having crises, but the nuns and the other residents believed that she was inventing them to attract attention and have things done for her: speeding up the process of getting the residency permit, finding her a job and a house to live. She lived at friends’ places, went back to the Pentecostal church that she used to attend when she worked as a prostitute, and reconnected with people she knew before entering the program. I do not know whether she ever went back to work in the street. With time, she found temporary jobs to look after the elderly. She stopped having crises and stopped going to the Centro Fanon.

Notes

Acknowledgments. I am deeply grateful to Joy and other migrant women for sharing their experiences with me. I thank Roberto Beneduce, who allowed me to follow his work as an ethnopsychiatrist at the Centro Frantz Fanon, the nuns who allowed me to take part in the everyday life at the shelters, and police officers who tolerated my presence as a researcher. I am mostly grateful to Elisabeth Aguebor Attila, who showed me what it means to be a cultural mediator in the setting of the police department and to translate women’s stories of prostitution and migration. I thank Stefania Pandolfo, William Hanks, Lawrence Cohen, and Mia Fuller for helping with this project since its very beginning. Veena Das and Didier Fassin were very engaged and inspiring discussants on two panels where I presented parts of this project. I greatly benefited from the critical readings of Kelly McKinney, Elisabeth Roberts, Alessandra Miclavcic, Rhiannon Welch, and George Baca. Special thanks to my writing group at the University of California in Berkeley (spring 2006), and, for comments to an earlier version of this article, to Lucinda Ramberg, Laura Hubbard, Kevin Karpiak, Tamar Rapaport, Vincenzo Spigonardo, Tatyana Mamut, Fouzieyha Towghi, Chris Vasantkumar, Rima Praliauskiene, Natasha Schull, Ben Peacock, Zeynep Gursel, Mike Coffino, and Aurora Donzelli. My father, Alessandro Giordano, was an engaged interlocutor throughout the duration of this project. I am grateful to audiences who commented on portions of this argument at the Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry at McGill University and in the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Berkeley. Forms of institutional and material support for this project were granted by the Institute of European Studies, the Department of Italian Studies, the Graduate Division, and the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

1. Cultural mediators are usually members of migrant communities who translate between migrants and Italians in institutional settings such as hospitals, prisons, schools, and legal courts. Trainings for cultural mediators are organized by municipalities and local NGOs involved in integration programs for migrants.

2. I conducted research in northern Italy from July 2002 until June of 2004 in three different institutional settings, which work in conjunction to provide care to a wide range of migrants: (1) a Catholic nonprofit association that helps migrant women sex workers file criminal charges against their exploiters; (2) a Catholic *comunità d'accoglienza* (roughly translated as “host community” or “shelter”) run by nuns and designed as a temporary residence for migrants; and (3) an ethnopsychiatric clinic that offers psychological support exclusively to migrants.

3. Throughout this article, I use both the terms *prostitute* and *sex worker* to talk about migrant women who entered the program of rehabilitation for “victims of human trafficking.” Although I am aware of the different connotations of these terms, I also think that they point to a dichotomy that my work attempts to question. The divide is based on how one conceives of women’s sexual labor. On the one hand, the term *sex worker* situates sexual labor as work that has been consciously chosen as a source of income. In this context, sex work is not represented as merely exploitative and women are agents of their decisions. The term *prostitute*, on the other hand, alludes to the condition of victimhood and exploitation to which women are subjugated. My ethnography shows how the agent versus victim representation of sexual labor is not always appropriate and does not capture the ambivalence that migrant women experience in being involved in it. They have sometimes made conscious decisions to work in sex work, and at other times they have been forced into it. The complexities of their experiences, the coexistence of different kinds of reasons—conscious and unconscious—behind their migration plans, are often erased by the terms that describe sex labor. For these reasons, I have decided to use the terms somewhat interchangeably.

4. In “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” Benjamin explains that “it is necessary to found the concept of translation at the deepest level of linguistic theory. . . . Translation attains its full meaning in the realization that every evolved language (with the exception of the word of God) can be considered as a translation of all the others. . . . Translation is removal from one language into another through a continuum of transformations, . . . not abstract areas of identity and similarity” (Benjamin et al. 1978:325).

For Benjamin, translating is unveiling the relation between the language of God, the language of humans, and the language of things. The language of God is the language of creation; his word is mute and it soundlessly calls things into existence. “In God name is creative because it is word, and God’s word is cognizant because it is name” (Benjamin et al. 1978:323). The linguistic essence of God is *verbum*, where there is complete coincidence between word and thing. The language of humans, however, is receptive and sonic. Humans are destined to name what God has called into existence by a silent word. “The human word is the name of things” (Benjamin et al. 1978:324). Therefore, the human task is that of translating the mute into the sonic, to give names to what God has created. The language of humanity lacks the creative power, whereas the language of God lacks sound. The language of things lacks both; it is mute and devoid of knowledge. For Benjamin, “The paradisiac language of man must have been of perfect knowledge; whereas later all knowledge is again infinitely differentiated in the multiplicity of language” (Benjamin et al. 1978:326–327). Translating is therefore an attempt to make a gesture toward this original perfection where there was no distinction between languages. It is

an attempt to reconstitute an ultimate language that belongs to the future: “To each translator thus his own messianism, if he works towards making languages grow in the direction of this ultimate language, attested to in every present language by what each language contains of the future—and which the translation seizes upon” (Blanchot and Rottenberg 1997:58). In “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” Benjamin is developing a theory of language that rests on the understanding that every human is, for divine will, a translator of God’s word into human language. In “The Task of the Translator,” he addresses another level of translation. After Babel, translating is not only giving sound to the mute word of God but also means dealing with the difference and multiplicity of languages. Translating is not an exact transposition of meaning from one linguistic system into another but, rather, it “ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages” (Benjamin and Arendt 1968:72).

5. When the Italian kingdom was unified in 1861, state builders of the North region of Piedmont sought to promote a secular and rational government as the conditions of modernity, whereas the state of poverty in the South endured. At this time, Italian internal social and cultural division emerged even more markedly than before. As Antonio Gramsci points out, industrial workers failed to understand that the northern belief in the innate backwardness and biological inferiority of the southerner was the way of reinforcing the hegemony of the ruling class (1978). Represented by the North as a process of liberation of the South from Bourbon colonization, in substance Italian unification marked a period of internal colonialism.

6. In Italian popular memory there has been and continues to be an almost radical repression of Italy’s colonial past—its crimes and genocides. The myth of “*Italiani brava gente*” (Italians as kinder colonizers) is the only memory of the colonial past that has been consistently passed on from one generation to the other. This almost complete absence of debate around colonialism—partly because the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were not accessible until the late 1970s—has not only impeded a critical revision of it but has also silenced a possible reflection about the encounter with the other in the context of colonial relations of power and of contemporary migrations to Italy (Palumbo 2003; Pinkus 2003).

7. Germany shares a similar conception of citizenship as being transmitted almost exclusively by blood relation, whereas France grants it to those residing on its territory. Although the immigration reforms of 2003 have allowed second-generation Turkish immigrants in Germany to obtain citizenship status more easily, it remains that many German Turks are nonetheless excluded from certain benefits of citizenship. By contrast, France remains the model of *jus soli par excellence*. Italy stands somewhat in between these two models: although Italian law resorts to the language of blood and ancestry, in practice immigrants who have been residents for an interrupted period of time and prove to be fluent in Italian and integrated in various aspects of “Italian life” are granted citizenship. The cultural dimension of Italian-ness could be interpreted as a contradiction to the law—based on *jus sanguinis*—and as a way of both fostering cultural assimilation and a more racialized discourse on blood. My ethnography shows how, for victims of human trafficking, speaking Italian and being trained in certain professional “Italian-style” skills are the conditions for success in the rehabilitation program and in obtaining legal residency.

8. Pamela Ballinger documents how between the fall of Mussolini and the 1980s what distinguished Italian citizens from other residents of the lost possessions who wanted to return to Italy was Italian as the *lingua d’uso* (language of use). Also, within national boundaries, ethnic minorities in the border regions of Valle d’Aosta, Venezia Giulia, and Istria had to speak Italian to

be recognized as such. In the 1947 Peace Treaty, a note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Border Commission stated that the option process for Italian residents abroad who had been born in the ceded territories could preserve citizenship if the language of daily use was Italian.

9. I use synonyms to ensure confidentiality and protect people's identities. In the case of Nigerian women, I have nonetheless used names that are common among them. These are Christian names such as Joy, Grace, Promise, Favor, Prudence, Charity, and Amen. Their African names are used as second names and do not always appear in official documents.

10. "È stato mio fratello Daniel che, all'insaputa di mia madre, mi ha invitato a casa sua a Lagos e successivamente mi ha messo in contatto con un ragazzo nigeriano di nome Mark che, in un primo momento, mi ha promesso di essere in grado di farmi andare a Londra per terminare la scuola, e che successivamente ha organizzato la mia partenza per l'Italia. Preciso che in Nigeria non avevo mai sentito parlare di ragazze portate in Europa per lavoro o per studio e poi costrette a prostituirsi. Sono partita da Lagos il 4 agosto 2002, verso le 23. Ho viaggiato con un passaporto che riportava la mia foto ma non i miei dati anagrafici. Non ricordo il nome e cognome riportati sul passaporto: sicuramente si trattava di un nome e cognome musulmani. Infatti mi avevano fatto vestire alla moda musulmana per rendere credibili i dati sul passaporto. Mark, una volta arrivati a Londra, mi portò a casa sua e mi costrinse a seguirlo in una stanza e, durante la notte, nonostante lo abbia pregato di lasciarmi stare, abusò di me violentandomi. Questo fatto mi fece molto soffrire e contribuì a confermare la mia convinzione di essere caduta nelle mani di persone cattive e senza scrupoli. Arrivammo a Torino il giorno dopo. Era il 15 settembre 2002, una data che non potrò mai dimenticare. Quel giorno lui mi vendette alla mia madame. Il giorno dopo il mio arrivo in Italia, Grace, la mia madame, mi tagliò dei frammenti di unghie delle dita della mano sinistra e una ciocca di capelli del capo; si fece poi consegnare alcuni peli del pube e le mie mutandine, che macchiò di sangue dopo avermi praticato una piccola ferita ad un dito della mano. Nel farsi consegnare queste 'cose,' che sistemò in un contenitore di cartone dopo averle avviluppate in un pezzo di stoffa, mi ingiunse di fare sempre tutto ciò che mi avrebbe ordinato: in caso contrario mi sarebbe successo qualcosa di grave, malattia o pazzia. Con una lametta da barba mi fece poi una ventina di piccoli tagli sopra il seno. Pretese, quindi, che cominciassi a prostituirmi subito."

11. See Vincenzo Castelli in *Articolo 18: "Tutela delle vittime del traffico di esseri umani e lotta alla criminalità (l'Italia e gli scenari europei), Rapporto di ricerca"* (2002:25).

12. In "Translating the Other: An Ethnography of Migrant Encounters with the Police, Nuns, and Ethno-Psychiatrists in Contemporary Italy" (2006), I do a detailed ethnography of the entire interrogation at the police station, and I document the different phases of the production of the text of denuncia. For the purpose of this article, I limit myself to an excerpt of that process and I summarize the story as it emerged in the context of the police station and in the genre of denuncia. In paraphrasing it, I am aware of the fact that I engage in yet another form of translation. In the essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Roman Jakobson states that "the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially a sign 'in which it is more fully developed'" (1966:232–233). Adopting Peirce's theory of signs and meaning (Peirce and Buchler 1955), Jakobson implies that translation is a necessary condition for the production of meaning to take place. He identifies three different types of possible translation. The first type is called "reword" and it occurs when a word-sign is translated by means of other verbal signs within the same language. This type of translation is also known as intralingual. According to the in-

tralinguistic model, all paraphrases, explanations, and definitions are translation. The second type, translation proper, or interlingual translation, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs in some other language. The third type is transmutation or intersemiotic translation: in this model verbal signs are interpreted by means of nonverbal sign systems (Jakobson 1966:233).

13. In a very interesting article entitled "'Voodoo' on the Doorstep: Young Nigerian Prostitutes and Magic Policing in the Netherlands" (2001), Rijk van Dijk talks about the trafficking of young Nigerian girls for the Dutch sex industry and the role of "voodoo" in the girls' submission to Dutch male desires. The discovery of this transnational traffic gave rise to what he calls a "voodoo scare" that resulted in an unprecedented effort in the policing of magic in Dutch society. He writes:

Dutch police services were confronted with what they believed was "African voodoo" in their crusade against child prostitution in the Netherlands' largest cities. Although they did not know what it was they were fighting against, the police felt they were obliged to protect society from what they perceived as a spiritual threat which originated in a "dark continent" and intended to keep Nigerian minors in a bondage of exploitation by the Dutch sex industry. [van Dijk 2001:559]

The police even created a special task force with the name "Voodoo team."

14. In an article on testimony and traumatic memory, Kelly McKinney analyzes the ways in which the "trauma story" is elicited and structured in the context of psychotherapy with survivors of political violence. The praxis of getting patients to tell their trauma story, what McKinney calls "the narrative imperative," was institutionalized in the early 1980s as the cornerstone for all psychotherapeutic practices, especially for treatment of PTSD. More recently, it has been argued that psychotherapy is a culturally specific technique, and "that many survivors prioritize their needs or understand their distress in political or social terms and may not consider therapeutic memory work a pressing and necessary condition for managing their suffering and rebuilding their lives" (McKinney 2007:268). One of the strands that came together for the narrative imperative was the testimony method as it was formalized in 1970s Chile by mental health professionals who treated torture victims. This method found its roots and cultural resonance in the Catholic confession and the testimonio tradition in Latin America. McKinney argues that the "grid of victimization" risks denying, rather than honoring, the full moral and psychological agency of victims, "therefore preventing the attainment of one of the recuperative goals of empathic listening and bearing witness" (McKinney 2007:291).

15. Andrea Muehlebach has explained how in the 1980s, the Washington consensus directed the policymaking of institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), by emphasizing market liberalization, privatization, structural adjustment, and fiscal austerity. The post-Washington consensus, on the contrary, promotes an organicist model of social and economic life, and it brings the social back in the analysis (Muehlebach 2007:29).

The post-Washington consensus was pioneered by the Nobel prize winner, onetime World Bank Chief Economist, and Columbia University economics professor Joseph Stiglitz. Stiglitz is also member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of the Social Sciences, which was established by Pope John Paul in 1994. . . . The post-Washington consensus reverberates Catholicism in ways that distinguishes it from the Washington

consensus. . . This convergence is important to consider if one wants to understand neoliberal Europe as a cultural rather than merely a political and economic project. [Muehlebach 2007:31–32]

16. Throughout his work, Ernesto de Martino is concerned with the crisis of modern civilization that is much greater than the crisis brought to the surface by fascism (1922–43) and WWII—both events he experienced in the first person. It concerns the crisis that is endemic in modern society and that he identifies as the potential of an imminent “end of the world.” It is within this context that his concept of “crisi della presenza” (crisis of presence) takes shape as a central concern of his reflection about the place of the individual within society. Influenced by Heidegger, Sartre, and Hegel’s master–slave dialectic, de Martino developed his own understanding of what it means to be in the world. In *Il mondo magico* (2000), de Martino first introduces the “crisis of presence” through a discussion of the Malaysian context. De Martino describes the experience of *latah*, the dissociative state in which a person becomes strongly vulnerable to external influences, imitating and echoing others and generally losing the boundaries of his or her own personality and sense of self. It constitutes a loss of presence to the world, a loss of consciousness on the part of the person who, confronted by stressful and disruptive events, is incapable of maintaining an active position in the world. In de Martino’s words, “The distinction between presence [as consciousness] and the world that makes itself present crumbles” (2000:93). He refers to the subject’s risk of no longer being in the world, of “not being-there” (*il rischio di non esser-ci*), which recalls Heidegger’s reflections on the being in relation to the world in which one is, and on the different ways in which the Being reveals itself in the world at different moments in history. Although de Martino seems to be interested in the “crisis of presence” more from existential and historical perspectives than from a strictly psychoanalytical one, in an article entitled “Crisi della presenza e reintegrazione religiosa” (Crisis of presence and religious reintegration) published in the philosophical review *Aut Aut* in 1956, he establishes a parallel between certain instances of loss of presence and mental illness. The mentally ill has lost the ability to engage dialectically with the world and to relate to the object as outside of one’s self. The subject is no longer able to relate to the world symbolically and instead identifies with the world losing his or her sense of self and place as an actor in history. At the core of the crisis of presence is the anxiety that “underlines the threat of losing the distinction between subject and object, between thoughts and action, between representation and judgment, between vitality and morality: it is the cry of one who is wobbling on the edge of the abyss” (de Martino 1956:25).

17. Franco Basaglia embodies the critical tradition of politically engaged mental health reform originating in the 1960s and 1970s. Recognized as the leading figure of the democratic psychiatry movement in Europe, Franco Basaglia (1924–81) became the director of the Gorizia mental asylum in 1961, and in 1971 he transferred to the asylum in Trieste. It was in Trieste that, together with a group of colleagues, nurses, and social workers, he started a systematic and consistent critique of mental health institutions and the violence embedded therein. He was one of the main architects of the 1978 Law 180, which ratified the closure of the *manicomio* (mental health hospital) and promoted the organization of a community-based psychiatry through the institution of mental health centers (Basaglia et al. 1987). Law 180, also known as Legge Basaglia (Basaglia Law), prohibited the construction of new asylums, imposed the gradual emptying out of the old ones, and established norms for instituting community-based sociomedical structures to cope with the problem of mental illness without falling

back on institutionalization. This law was based on the principle that the dignity of the patient needed to be restored through the recovery of the freedom and responsibility that were lost at the moment of confinement and through the constitution of a hospital life that would be tolerable. By involving the community in changing the cultural attitudes toward deviancy and all forms of diversity, Law 180 also fractured former relationships between psychiatry and justice and terminated the practice of the exclusive management of mental illness by doctors. It confronted the old contradiction between *custodia* and *cura*, between control and treatment, and it redefined the institution as a positive space in which a different kind of therapeutic encounter could take place (Basaglia 1981).

18. In her ethnography of Cambodian Americans in Oakland and San Francisco, Aihwa Ong has referred to “talking medicine” as the practice of asking patients to talk about their experiences and beliefs to provide information that could facilitate diagnosis and the patients’ acceptance of health care providers’ authority (Ong 2003:103).

19. One of the central themes in Tobie Nathan’s work is the metaphor of culture as the womb (Nathan 1994). The womb contains and protects, but it eventually expels and forces us into a relationship with alterity, with the world other than the mother. In this sense, the womb is a space that articulates ambivalences having to do with confronting alterity. Ellen Corin explains that the metaphor of the womb allows us to think that “just as the psyche is protected by a ‘membrane’ regulating exchanges with the environment, identity is enveloped by a second structuring membrane framed by culture from the outside” (Corin 1997:350). Displacement and migration can create a rupture in this “membrane” that facilitates the assignment of meaning to different experiences. In Nathan’s work, the purpose of therapy is to reconstitute this structure by reanchoring the patient within his cultural background.

20. Didier Fassin compares the process of requesting allocations of state budget in support of the unemployed and the renewal of residency permits for migrants in contemporary France. For him, *supplique* (plea or petition) is the genre in which such requests are formulated on the part of the applicant. It refers to the obligation to tell one’s own story before the state to access services. It is a form of confession *laïque* (secular confession), through which one’s suffering is exchanged with a residency permit or access to financial aid and services. This is something Bourdieu might refer to as *la charité d’État* (the charity of the state). The applicant has nothing else to exchange but his autobiographical account, spelled out in the register of a plea, with the aim to evoke feelings of compassion and piety in the receivers of the requests. “The fragments of a broken biography stand for the only currency to access a right” (Fassin 2000a:956, my translation from the French). Similarly, qualifying as a “victim of human trafficking” requires exposing oneself to the institution in the form of a biographical account. Denuncia creates not only a relationship of distance but also one of closeness and proximity to the institution. The story is meant to provoke feelings of compassion and empathy with the victim and to create proximity between the migrant woman and her judge, the state. Fassin explains that biographical stories made up of fragments to negotiate with the state are a form of exposure in a double sense: in the sense of giving oneself to the sight of another (*s’offrir à la vue*) and of putting oneself in danger (*se mettre en danger*). It requires displaying one’s own sign of victimhood (suffering, subjugation, exploitation) and exposing one’s existence in the sense of putting it in the hands of the state, in exchange for some kind of recognition. Being a victim becomes a critical means of obtaining in relation to the state. By submitting themselves to the category of “victim,” women are recognized. This form of recognition issues from a lack of other

witnesses, of other ways of speaking about the migrant prostitute, and of creating a space for other stories to be told differently, by migrants and Italians alike.

21. In the context of the Italian Camorra trials in Naples, Marco Jacquemet has analyzed how discourse practices aimed at representing social order are fundamentally implicated in relations of domination, and that such practices control the institutional process of government. These representations do not depict the world but, rather, dictate it. Within institutional settings, the discursive practices are one of the most efficient instruments for the construction of dominant representations of the social order, to the point of persuading others to comply with these representations (Jacquemet 1996:ch. 5). Similarly, the discursive practice of denunciation provides a specific representation of the victim of human trafficking that does not disrupt the social order, and it interpellates women to occupy a position that complies with the same order.

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accepted June 11, 2008

final version submitted April 23, 2008

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