

**“LA MIGRATION COMME MÉTAPHORE”,
Jean-Claude Métraux,
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The child psychiatrist Jean- Claude Métraux approaches the theme migration from an unusual viewpoint. He describes the ubiquitous experience of all human beings: the migration in time, by which he means the incessant change throughout the whole of life regarding the societal as well as the personal and family environment. This means a continuous confrontation with saying goodbye to the past and mourning what we have lost in order to adapt to the new environment. And last but not least the changes in the environment due to the current intensive globalized migration and the related confrontation with the stranger which also affects our psychotherapeutic activities.

Jean-Claude Métraux appeals to all who work in the helping professions like psychotherapists, psychiatrists, nurses but also jurists, politicians, and anyone involved with migrants. It stems from his own experiences in Nicaragua in the nineteen eighties where he worked with communities affected by the civil war to create a primary healthcare system and also from his long term psychotherapeutic experience with migrants and asylum-seeking people in Lausanne, Switzerland. The close collaboration with interpreters brought new insight into the meaning of language, the needs and concerns of his patients, but also the ideas and prejudices of the local population with regard to aliens, the others. Using migration as a metaphor he succeeds in illustrating what residents and immigrants have in common.

The pointed remark “we are all migrants” brings forth an alternative view of the term migration. Starting with the history of his grandparents who “migrated” within Switzerland from small villages to bigger cities he shows the influence even migration within a country can have on the succeeding generations and the reasons for going to a new place are often similar to the ones of migrants from foreign countries. Though the reasons for his grandparents moving from the countryside to the city were both societal and familial, they also hoped to find better economic conditions for their families. But it is not only location migration which changes us; there is also our journey through life which affects us. It is a voyage marked by hope, loss, disappointment, luck and grief. The reader is invited to become aware of his personal and migration history; without overlooking the societal, cultural and legal differences when compared with migrants and asylum seekers from foreign countries. The author elaborates carefully the different periods of migration to make clear that a journey of migration is much more than just overcoming the actual distance between two places. It’s a long way from leaving the well-known and intimate world to arrival in a new, and in the beginning mostly

unknown world. It is characterized by goodbyes and sadness not only that which concerns the familiar environment and close relationships but also having to part with ideas, dreams, hopes and values. Integration in a new place is only possible if the working through of the mourning process is successful. But integration does not mean just adopting new cultural values and behaviors but to be able to integrate them into one's existing concepts and experiences. At the same time the receiving community has to become conscious of the changes in their country due to the arrival of the others, of the foreigners in order to enable the integration.

Métraux wants us to question our personal history. In the second part of his essay he examines critically the attitude of the western world regarding other cultures. Beginning with Edwards Said's book "Orientalism" he discusses the Eurocentric interpretation of the South by which other societies are depicted as deficient. For Métraux the emphasis is on "maîtrise"; a term which is best translated by 'mastering'. In western culture mastering is of central importance be it as self-control, or as dominance, but also in the sense of mastering knowledge. Therefore the education and training of migrants from non-European countries are very often not recognized as it is automatically assumed that they do not meet our standards. Hence immigrants often do not get jobs according to their educational background which leaves them with feelings of being offended and consequently integration becomes more complicated. The author sees this orientation in deficits in the term "interculturality." He compares it with the term Orientalism of Saïd. Migrants once more are kept at arm's length and the supremacy of the western world is confirmed.

The essay terminates with the author's experiences of working with migrants and asylum seekers in psychotherapy, and by means of short clinical vignettes he indicates an alteration in attitude. He underlines it with anthropological theories like the meaning of gift and barter (don) and theories about "reconnaissance" a term which means recognition, knowledge and appreciation according to the context. Recognizing "paroles précieuses", precious words in the conversation as a gift leads to a change in the relationship between those seeking help and the therapist. The one-sided relationship at the start will be changed into a mutual give and take. New experiences are possible and a common ground can be found without obliterating the differences. The migrant learns to see himself not only as petitioner but as somebody who has to give something and to be on a par with the therapist.

„La Migration comme Métaphore“ is an impressive appeal to take the migrant not primarily as the foreigner, the stranger, and shows that we are for him likewise the stranger. How difficult it is to maintain the balance in therapy with migrants can be seen for instance in questioning educational concepts. How is it possible to criticize without treating them as backward and uneducated but nevertheless keeping their own ideals and moral values. Jean-Claude Métraux consistently invites us to reflect on the power structure between East and West, North and South as well as our position as "helpers", as professionals, and in our quality as social protagonists and individuals. He emphasizes the meaning of words and how we use it in establishing relationships.

The author shows a big commitment in helping his patients to integrate into the new environment and to find with them ways to understand this new world without negating the old one. Reading the book the question arises sometimes how Métraux deals with the fact that he as a medical doctor, in the eyes of the migrants has a special position as he represents the one who has knowledge and power to help and heal.

This is reminiscent of the concordant and the complementary countertransference of H. Racker. Concordant countertransference denotes the position of the analyst as a subject who sees the patient as an object which has to be understood, there is an identity between subject components and object components. Complementary countertransference means the transference of the analyst; the patient represents internal objects of the analyst and the reactions referring to this are unconscious. Of special importance is the principle of Talion; in other words a positive transference is accompanied by a positive countertransference and a negative transference by a negative countertransference. Becoming conscious of the individual, familial and societal change in a spatial as well as in a temporal sense, helps to understand better the personal emotional reactions towards the others and to act empathically without acting out personal unconscious phantasies. This is based on a twofold identification within the countertransference. On the one hand the “concordant identification” means the reaction as response to the psychic structure of the patient. On the other hand the “complementary identification” as the reaction of the therapist based on his role as an object of the patient. Racker like Métraux acts on the assumption of a treatment situation of two persons of equal value; both are confronted with their inner fears and difficulties and with the external reality. Both have to cope with these facts in the therapeutic situation. The difference between the two is how they deal with the objectivity. Racker emphasizes the inner division of the therapist with which he or she examines and continuously analyzes him or herself. This means an objectivity which is conscious of the concordant and the complementary identification and its use in the therapeutic process but not an ideal objectivity or one immersing into subjectivity.

According to my own experiences this is a crucial point in the treatment of migrants. They are confronted with a new culture, generally with a new language and unknown social behavior and learning to integrate into a new environment. I warmly recommend this book to all those interested in new perspectives on therapy with “people from elsewhere”. As the book is only available in French, I have tried with this review to give to the non-French speaker a comprehensive view of the content.