

RECENSIONI

Laura FERRERO, Chiara QUAGLIARELLO, Ana Cristina VARGAS (eds) | *Embodying borders. A migrant's right to health, universal right and local policies*, New York and Oxford, Berghahn, pp. 280.

This is an ambitious edited volume that promises an important contribution to today's timely issues of migrants' health and access to local healthcare resources. As the title itself suggests, the socio-political construction of borders not only materially impairs migrants' mobility: borders are also embodied and experienced as both barriers in accessing healthcare resources and internalised discourses on citizenship and deservingness. Given the thematic diversity of the chapters comprising the book, the introduction does the important job of keeping them together and does so by delineating an overarching argument, which is theoretical and methodological at the same time. Through a sustained engagement with the diverse ethnographic material foregrounded in the chapters, Ferrero, Quagliarello and Vargas' project addresses "the issue of the health of migrants from a perspective of an interdisciplinary dialogue between medical anthropology and human rights, in addition to being effective on a conceptual level, also [it] represents a political stance" (pp. 2-3).

The introduction opens with a critical assessment of the effects that nearly a decade of austerity in Southern Europe have had in socio-economic and political terms. On the one hand, austerity has coincided with the rise of far-right parties across Europe; a rather dramatic political shift that has meant stricter if not openly xenophobic migration policies. On the other hand, austerity has resulted in the retrenchment of welfare states; a neoliberal turn that has basically meant a dramatic curtailment of public healthcare resources and services, for citizens and non-citizens alike. The editors move on from this issue to introduce and discuss health as a human right. This is a take that might seem controversial as it implicitly assumes "rights" as a universal reality rather than a Western political category in



need of problematisation. Even though an overview, albeit brief, of the relationship between anthropology and human rights is offered, a deconstruction (or even the historicization) of “human rights” would have granted the introduction further analytical strength, while allowing the authors to better grapple with issues of citizenship and deservingness.

Del Bono’s afterword “Forced migration, state violence and the right to health” works as a concise conclusion but, quite interestingly, it also seems to open up unexpected margins to rethink the contributions through the analytical and ethnographic categories of care, violence and humanitarianism.

The volume is divided into two parts. Part 1 “Borders and Inequalities” looks more closely at issues of citizenship and deservingness in the US, Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo and South Italy. Relying on media analysis, Viladrich (Chapter 1) offers interesting insights into today’s debate on the economic pros and cons of granting migrant youth healthcare insurance coverage in the US. Thematically and geographically close to Viladrich’s, Kline’s contribution (Chapter 2) shows how discourses on borders are internalised: Latinx migrants in US South not only experience the everyday work of borders impacting on their livelihoods; they appropriate their political rhetoric to the point of describing themselves as undeserving. Golberg, Silveira, Barbosa and Martin (Chapter 3) look at Bolivian migrants in Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo and tease out the correlation between poor working and housing conditions and the soaring rate of tuberculosis amongst them. Quagliarello’s contribution (Chapter 4) touches upon the experience of migrant women and how they experience unwanted pregnancies in the context of Mediterranean crossing. Quagliarello offers a powerful account of their arrival to the island of Lampedusa, southern Italy, where they first encounter the medical personal and experience the spatio-temporal fragmentation of the local healthcare system and its impact on their lifeworlds. Each contribution attempts to bring to the fore migrants’ experience and to connect such ethnographic insights to the broader theoretical debate on the above-mentioned issues.

The second part of the volume, “From Individual to the Community”, features four contributions more closely focused on the role of local healthcare networks in migrants’ search for healthcare. Cingolani (Chapter 5) presents the case of the Roma people in Turin, and highlights the importance of transnational mobility in contexts of discrimination and marginalisation. Kerbage and Marranconi (Chapter 6) look at a group of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, focusing on their experience of local mental health services; the authors delineate, but do not detail, a promising analytical framework whereby mental health becomes an urgent political

issue. Vargas and Ferraro's contributions (Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, respectively) tease out the shortcomings of the Italian public healthcare system; Vargas offers an insightful explanation of the role of intercultural mediation, especially focusing on the work of Centro Fanon in Turin, a healthcare facility whose organisation draws on from the rather controversial legacy of the French ethnopsychiatrist Tobie Nathan. Ferrero's chapter thematically aligns with Vargas', but more closely focuses on the role of long-term migrants in "becoming" the local healthcare infrastructures, in fact providing information and support to newly arrived migrants to map and access available healthcare resources.

The book represents an important contribution to rethink issues of migration and healthcare and, more crucially, it has the merit to bring to the attention of the international academic audience the work of several Italian scholars (some of the contributors are themselves either Italian or based in Italian universities) whose contributions to the discipline are likely to go unnoticed, given the linguistic and disciplinary hegemony of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. While I appreciate such efforts for reasons that are personal and academic at the same time, reading the book I could not help but consider that each contribution could have benefitted from a more thorough dialogue with the contemporary literature on migrations and healthcare (quite notably, references to Ticktin and Fassin are almost absent), rights, deservingness and citizenship but also on borders and migration. Anthropological scholarship on such matter has been burgeoning especially in the last decade, therefore a more sustained engagement with such literature would have further opened up interesting analytical and ethnographic possibilities to assess issues of migration, borders and healthcare on a comparative ground, across diverse scales and in terms of local configurations of social marginalisation, political discrimination and structural violence. In this context, the lack of sustained engagement, either ethnographic or theoretical, with the anthropology of the state feels rather striking despite the declared intent of the editors to hold "local policies" as ethnographic entry points to discuss migrants' access to local healthcare services. Similarly, the authors frequently mention bureaucracy and legal documents yet do not seem to adequately problematise how bureaucracy is a mode of governmentality and, at the same time, a terrain of contentions upon which migrants try to negotiate their access to healthcare resources and put claims on the state.

I have found occasionally confusing the many theoretical approaches that the introduction especially, but to an extent all the contributions foreground in often contradictory ways: for instance, the concept of structural violence

(as in Farmer) is used to complement more phenomenologically grounded approaches such as embodiment (as in Csordas). Overall, a more accurate problematisation of the concept of social suffering might have helped not only broaden the debate on medicalisation. It would also have allowed the authors to break free from Kleinman's conceptualisation of illness narratives.

Besides some perplexities relative to the theories each author relies on and attempts to dialogue with, what I have found somewhat puzzling is the use – often unproblematic, in fact barely problematised – of the (word) ethnography and its relation to the broader theoretical framework which undergirds the volume. We might indeed depart from a very basic question, “What counts as ethnography?” but this would not probably lead us to any clearer answer or understanding. I thus want to pose the same question but in different terms. I wonder how the contributors have thought of ethnography: does ethnography serve the purpose of confirming existing theories or is ethnography a means to expand on them further? Do the authors hold on to the idea that ethnography is just a method to collect “data” or have they actually “let the ethnography speak”? It seems to me that ethnography, as conceptualised and mobilised in this volume, is reduced to a bare reportage rather than explored in its potential of heuristic and analytical tool in its own right.

Letizia BONANNO
University of Kent
l.bonanno@kent.ac.uk