

**ETIOPIA, MEXICO, CHICAGO.
FROM ETHNIC “WELFARE COMMUNITIES” TO URBAN
“ECOLOGIES OF DEMOCRACY”: CULTURAL (DIS-)INTEGRATION
OR TRANSCULTURAL IMPROVISATION?**

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Integration represents a democracy controversy in the context of the neo-liberal welfare restructuring. Varied migrants' practices crisscross stiffened boundaries between citizens and non citizens to enact solidarity networks and create their “ecologies of democracy”. In Chicago two ethnic “welfare communities”, the Ethiopian refugees' one and the Mexican aliens' one, represent different trade-off between observance of law and personal volition and offer an unusual frame on the issues of protection, pluralism and local democracy. The paper can be considered as an attempt to overcome the “functionalist” paradigm of “integration” by crisscrossing the boundaries between two public policy research fields, welfare and migrations, and focusing on the spaces of transcultural contamination by which protection is tied to autonomy and solidarity.

Key – words: welfare, migration, integration, autonomy, citizenship

Beyond “functionalist integration”: In search of urban “ecologies of democracy”

Under the effects of local and supranational socio-institutional dynamics provoked by the processes of globalization, welfare policies have been changing their nature of public beyond the automatism demand of public/demand of state (de Leonardis, 1998). The welfare state formation has been considered historically as a boundaries-building process that bonds people and territories and influences dispositions to share (Ferrera, 2005). Boundaries of welfare are those institutional demarcations which are essential for modern citizenship and, as a result, for solidarity and redistribution (*ibidem*): they are mechanisms of social closure, thus sources of group formation, and tend to separate the community of citizens from outsiders (aliens or foreigners). In front of a double dynamic characterized by claims for a supranational space of citizenship and retreats into regionalisms, cities emerge as controversial mechanisms of

solidarity and group formation: *welfare mix* spaces characterized by different forms of contractualisations as well as of politicisation of social policy in terms of collective mobilisation expressing itself through channels other than those of representative democracy. In such a context, the issue of migration challenges local welfare policies as new boundaries-building processes. The emerging national cleavages – insiders/outside-native/non native cleavage or a fully-fledged pro-integration/anti-integration cleavage - are leading to defensive restructuring of national welfare systems at the subnational level (*ibidem*). By contrast, emerging migrant's "spaces of life" (Crosta, 2007 b) tend to delegitimize stiffened boundaries between citizens and non citizens and dissolve the relationship citizenship/territoriality/ sovereignty: migrants behave as outsiders who can enter and re-exit, stay inside, share under certain conditions and for a limited time.¹

It has been said that integration policies hide their inability to admit that the Other is not assimilable (La Cecla, 2005). They tend to perpetuate a rigid and professional dichotomy policymaker/policytaker and are based on a teleological conceptualisation of the society according to which citizenship can be considered as the product of a policy process of circular causation between intentionality, action, efficiency and efficacy. In such a context, disintegration may be the only counterpart: anomia is assumed to be the permanent regime of the Stranger trapped in a vicious cycle of disorganization and deviance, if not integrated in the host society.

The comparison between two ethnic "welfare communities" in Chicago forces us to go beyond the "functionalist" frame of integration by two steps. First, beyond the contraposition citizen/non citizen, I use the concept of "itinerant populations"² (Crosta, 2007 b) as a strategic construct to overcome the conventional opposition mobile (migrant) /permanent (resident): it can be traced materially but is not independent from the interest given by the individual to the places where he/she intends to stay (*ibidem*). Second, I focus on the relationship emotion/norm/culture by which migrants create their "spaces of life" (*ibidem*) as "ecologies of democracy" by using the concept of *transaction*, in the sense of a "strong interaction" state/society, that is, in the actor-making process, into/during and because of transaction (Crosta, 2003), with attention on the unintended consequences of social interaction. In this context, beyond the contraposition policies/practices, migrants' "welfare communities", as practices of living, constitute "populations" and build "territories" (Crosta, 2007 b). Societal boundaries bonding people and territories are permanently reshuffled and make a logic of "do-it-yourself society" subverting the idea of a predefined

¹ Hammar (1990), for instances, uses the political figure of the *denizen* to problematize the dichotomy citizen/non citizen.

² This is a personal translation from Italian to English of the concept of *itineranza* in Crosta (2007 b)

“weak interaction” state/society (the dependency of the society from the state) that reduces the society to a political demand (Crosta, 2000). The paper can be considered as an attempt to reframe the issue of “integration”. First, main “anti-assimilationist” features of the Chicago School studies and the transnationalist approach on migrations are highlighted. Second, indignation, misunderstanding and improvisation are the frames by which migrants’ “welfare communities” are compared as different modes of “integration” in the context of the neo-liberal re-invention of Chicago. The Chicago School and the transnationalist approach look at migrants’ spaces as spaces of the “superimposition of the Stranger”; my aim is to open a reflection on the spaces of “transcultural improvisation” crisscrossing the contraposition citizenship/non citizenship.

“Integration” and Democracy: from the “superimposition of the Stranger”....

The Chicago School, mainly through Thomas and Znaniecki’s contributions, and transnationalism have both deconstructed the issue of “integration”.

The Chicago School studies focus on the capacity of the Stranger to manage the conflict between cultures in sending and receiving countries in the context of liberal capitalism. According to Park (1928) the Stranger is a “marginal man”. The resistance to assimilation leaves him in a permanent transition where traditions are replaced by the permanent splitting of personality and the consequent individual disorganization. In *The Hobo* (Anderson, 1923), the breakdown of ties with the family and the neighborhood community traps the individual in a permanent mobility that makes him incapable of transforming the richness of experience in creativity: a vicious cycle that degenerates in extreme individualism and poverty. In *The Chinese Laundryman*, Siu (1987) opposes to Park’s “marginal man” the “sojourner” as an immigrant who gets hold of its group culture and does not intend to settle as a permanent resident in the host country: unlike the “marginal man”, he doesn’t live between two cultures and he doesn’t search for the *status* in the society of the dominant group. Siu (*ibidem*) points out that this feature is not a cultural trait of Chinese migrant but the consequence of forms of institutional discrimination influencing their permanence in the United States: the laundry, rather than a choice, is a constraint self-perpetuating over generations.

In *The Polish Peasant* (1927) Thomas and Znaniecki observe the issue of integration in terms of processes of adaptation to the new world, by focusing on the cycles of organization/disorganization by which the individual may overtake the phase of “social reconstruction”. By detecting the relationship between learning and control, the authors express the idea of a mutual interdependence between social actors’ personality and the situation in which they act. They

collapse the sending and receiving end of the migration trail into the same analytical framework and reject the assumptions that assimilation is a linear process leading to an undifferentiated American norm. According to Fitzgerald (2006) *The Polish Peasant* highlights that Polish Americans institutions simultaneously promote ethnicization as Polish Americans, incorporation into the US economy and polity, and support for the “national liberation” movement in Poland: it’s not the repetition of their culture in Poland but its change so that it becomes serviceable in the American context.

Making a comparison of immigrants associations in different national contexts, Fallers *et al.* (1967) hold that the perception of legitimization of the host country is fundamental in shaping the forms of migrants’ self-organization. Chinese associations, for instance, created in Singapore and in Madagascar show different modes of self-organization. They are organized by clan in Madagascar while in Singapore, by contrast, the settlement of Chinese populations is characterized by the evolution of the associations: first, they are secret societies against a foreign government; then, voluntary associations with mixed social *status*; finally, religious associations in the context of a stronger socio-economic differentiation.

In continuity with the *The Polish Peasant*, transnationalism challenges the “methodological nationalism” according to which the nation-state is the appropriate location for research (Wimer and Glick Schiller 2002). Transnational migrant communities develop bottom-up: transnationalism is considered as the less visible form of globalization on behalf of the disconnected, the excluded and the losers (Portes, 1997). The focus is on a conceptual space the borders of which are blurred and defined by migrants’ transnational practices as well as by the researcher’s interpretation of them (Sinatti, 2008). In continuity with Thomas and Znaniecki, the transnational approach on migration focuses on relocation of migrants, in terms of migrants’ capacity to develop original patterns of adaptation between sending context and receiving societies and, as a result, on the circulation not exclusively of people (and economic resources) but also of more immaterial objects such as ideas, attitudes and imaginations (*ibidem*). The temporal dimension of transnationalism constitutes a major difference from past migratory trends. The trajectories of migration become less linear and increasingly varied: return migration, circular migration, onward migration, intermittent migration (*ibidem*). Migrants are not anymore permanently settled in a host society and cut off their ties with the home country, but increasingly tend to engage simultaneously in home and host countries, maintaining and developing social relations across distant locations (*ibidem*). Unlike past activities of migrants and refugees, regular and long-term contacts make networks quickly become institutionalised (Portes *et al.* 1999). Transnational research moves from the individual to a higher meso-level of

attention, that is, the family, kinship clusters and the larger migrant networks that become institutionalized over time (Sinatti,2008). On the one hand, Thomas and Znanieki recognized a rupture of territorial residence and cultural/political belonging (Fitzgerald, 2006): the deterritorialization of the nation state (Sinatti,2008). On the other hand, new concepts arise from the transnationalist approach: long-distance nationalism (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001), nations unbound (Basch et al. 1994), flexible citizenship (Ong 1999). Anyway, both the Chicago School and transnationalism recognize migrants' spaces of life as signs of the dissolution of the link citizenship/territoriality/sovereignty but remain focused on them only as "spaces of the superimposition of the Stranger".

...to "contaminations with the Stranger"

Moving to the "spaces of encounter with the Stranger", conflicts and their manipulation make an ecological dimension of democracy emerge where indignation, misunderstanding and improvisation replace conventional frames of consensus, transparency and integration.

According to Aristotle, indignation (*nemesis*) is assumed to be a propaedeutical quality to justice (*dike*). It is based on a capacity of identification with the Other and of conceiving a fair society. Disdain is provoked by what is assumed to be unjust, "what occurs without merit" (Aristotle, *Retorica* II, 9, 1386 b 14). Spinoza holds that indignation is a strategy of resistance: it succeeds in re-organizing, rather than disintegrating, the society thanks to the enactment of solidarity (Bove, 2002). Although it is considered a passive feeling ("Hatred towards somebody who hurts another one" *Eth. III, def. Degli Affetti*, 20), indignation enacts processes of identification with the Other and encourages actions to set the Other free (Bove, 2002).

Indignation enriches democracy of an emotional dimension that makes more convenient to observe social interaction through the concept of improvisation, rather than through the dualism knowledge/decision. Improvisation, according to Weick (1993) is a process, a continuous redesign in a turbulent and pluralist environment characterized by inefficiency and crisis. The management of multiple meanings calls for the ability of *bricolage* as "a recombination of seemingly miscellaneous materials focused on the past and affected more by the ways in which people have codified the past than on how they envision the future" (*ibidem*: 353). Improvisation is strictly linked with other two concepts. First, that of self-efficacy: that is, transformation of knowledge and abilities into action is mediated by thoughts about themselves and their capabilities and it influences processes of learning. Second, improvisation occurs in situations of premise control. Rather than through rules or bureaucratic organization, it's a third-order control: socialization practices, routine, channels of communication

control premises available for decisions and, thus, produce temporary stabilities. Inefficiency and crisis are sources of change, because “expand repertoires and update understanding of the environment” but to compensate the difficulties of the functioning they need “collateral organizations” (*ibidem*, quoting Hubbert: 371) where simultaneous participation “in more than one organization structure is a valuable means to preserve the divergence necessary for change and the convergence necessary for stability”(ibidem:371).

But the concept of improvisation needs to be reframed through an interactive approach: moving thereby from the concept of uncertainty to that of “misunderstanding” (La Cecla, 2005). According to La Cecla (*ibidem*), the misunderstanding is a “trap of the encounter” which implies “a solidarity while we don’t understand each other” (*ibidem*:7). It is like “a boundary that takes shape”, un “*terrain vague*”, “an occasion of translation by which the incommensurability between cultures comes to terms”, un “buffer zone” that lets differences disclose (*ibidem*:9). The temporal dimension of the misunderstanding is fundamental: it’s a time to cross frontiers, a place where two identities need time to face each other. In such a context improvisation means “manipulation of conflict” in terms of times by which uses of resources constitute “populations” and build “territories” (Crosta, 2007 b).

Thinking about the issue of “integration” through these unusual traces of democracy, two migrants’ welfare communities in Chicago have been observed in their ability to create “ecologies of democracy”³ in the context of two interdependent dynamics: first, the north-american shift from a “liberal” welfare state based on the commodification of workers left without state protection (Esping-Andersen,1990) to the “penal state” (Wacquant, 1998) strongly characterized by the criminalization of ethnic minorities; second, in front of the welfare state retreat, the neo-liberal reinvention of Chicago with its changing mechanisms by which the conflict is managed in a society of differences.

“Ethiopian” and “Mexican” improvisation: the Chicago case

Liberal Chicago was the “city of neighborhoods”. Ethnic ghettos were spaces of “ordered segmentation” (Suttles, 1968) by which conflicts and oppositions developed as well as spaces for balancing a public morality used to protect from the Other and a personalistic morality characterized by face-to-face interaction where the precedent was the standard for judgement and kinship and group ties replaced previous spaces of belonging. The neighborhood identified a peculiar “ecology of democracy”: it was the fundamental mechanism of ethnic integration. On the one hand, the neighborhood was the unit of action for the

³ What follows is the result of a combination of ethnographic approaches – life history and snowball sampling – by which I pragmatically adapt my research to the Other, that is, Ethiopian refugees and Mexican aliens.

Irish *political machine*, a peculiar kind of government based on feudal ties between the government and the governed and capable of transforming a formal system of political-administrative decentralization into a pyramidal party organization by using political patronage and clientelism as tools to “integrate” elites affairs and “ethnic” demands of the working class. On the other hand, the neighborhood was the catalyst of protest movements to defend workers’ rights at the end of the nineteenth century. “Anarchical” labor movements in Chicago degenerated in some of the most dramatic clashes with institutions in the United States: for instance, Upheaval riot in 1877, Haymarket Square Riot in 1886; Pullman Strike riot in 1894. Indignation often could turn into hatred and self-destruction: West Side Chicago riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968 represent an emblematic case.

The reinvention of neoliberal Chicago is characterized by the breakdown of *machine politics routines* and the more horizontal restructuring of relationships between the government and the governed. In front of federal/local policy controversies on welfare and international migrations, migrants’ protest shifts from ethnically-segmented labor movements to interethnic networks of community organizations. This goes hand in hand with the emersion of new “ecologies of democracy” weakening the neighborhood as mechanism of cultural integration.

“Ethiopian Metamorphosis” and the “professional camouflage” of identity

Levine (1972), one of the best-known Ethiopianist, uses the metaphor of *Samena Werq*, “Wax and Gold”, to highlight that Ethiopian culture is a “combination of opposites” where the “Wax” is the obvious meaning and the “Gold” is the hidden one: according to him, an appreciation of it is essential to understand the problems facing Ethiopians in their movement toward modernization and their unique role among African nations.

“Chicagoan” Ethiopians perceive their presence in the United States as a “combination of clashing opposites”. They are only 10000, alone, without family, in search of an autonomous daily management of the coexistence of distant worlds: nostalgia for Ethiopia, horror of refugees camps in Kenya and Sudan, shock in the United States. They desire the Gondar’s sun and can’t adapt themselves to the snow in Chicago; they lock the door every night in Chicago while they used to sleep outside in Ethiopian villages. They feel unsafe in Chicago because failures in adaptation may lead to suicide while they felt trapped in a permanent perception of fear and uncertainty because of forms of “do-it-yourself justice” in Ethiopia as well as in Kenyan and Sudanese camps.

Ethiopians feel distant from the African-american population, permanently dependent on public relief, and close to Eastern Europe populations because of

similar religious traditions and sense of kinship. They can not tolerate when north-american compassion for a population of the “Third World” puts on the background the honour of an ancient Ethiopian identity. They reject public relief as soon as possible and work as taxi-drivers, hairdressers, waiters, in search of an autonomy clashing with their aspirations and forcing to give them up.

Ethiopians don't have “their” neighborhood in Chicago. Their “spaces of life” (Crosta, 2007 b) are interstitial. They live in multiethnic neighborhoods as Rogers Park, Edgewater, Uptown in the North Side Chicago as well as in the suburbs like Evanston, Elgin, Wheaton. The *Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago* (ECAC), in Broadway Street, in Uptown, is a point of reference for Ethiopians in Chicago; in an secondary street, *Gojam Berenda* is a shelter for young Ethiopian refugees. Each Sunday, Ethiopians move from suburbs or neighborhoods where they live to reach their self-organized churches: the Orthodox ones in the suburb Evanston and in the South Side Chicago; the Evangelical one in the North Side. Furthermore, Ethiopian restaurants represent controversial spaces of encounter in Chicago. They are 4 in 2005. One is open only at dinner in the gentrified neighborhood of Edgewater. Three are located in a peripheral area of Uptown, 2-3 blocks distant each other. A restaurant is not established for passion but simply as an “occasion” (de Certeau, 2001): to legitimate the legal *status* in the USA; to protect from the shock to live in a culturally distant world; to acquire visibility and interact with local institutions. Restaurants represent spaces of memory and friendship as well as traps of the Ethiopian interethnic conflict reproduction. Spaces of memory and friendship for foreign and American clients deeply linked to Ethiopia because of personal experiences. Spaces of ethnic solidarity when the restaurant owner takes care of Ethiopian taxi-drivers at lunch time. Spaces of transnational transgression when Ethiopians have lunch with Russians just to end the encounter in a secret cellar. Spaces of permanent ethnic conflict when the sign-board “Ethiopian and Eritrean Food” provokes the closure of the restaurant as well as when a restaurant managed by a Jewish Ethiopian woman or an Eritrean man are excluded from informal networks of local solidarity created by the Amharic population.

Essential to Ethiopians in Chicago is their commitment for a multiethnic Ethiopian State through two spaces of action intentionally kept distant: the community association and the political diaspora.

The *Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago* (ECAC) is a non-profit association committed to serve the needs of international refugees and immigrants in the metropolitan Chicago: since 1985 it has given welcome services to 10000 persons and since 1992 sponsorship to almost 850 refugees coming from Africa, Middle East, South-Eastern Asia, Caribbean. Its “local” competence has been strongly influenced by international politics. Ethiopian

migration in the United States is temporary permanence for studies during the 1970s, then turns into unstable but permanent flows dependent from the discontinuous federal approach on Ethiopian issues at the end of the 1980s. First, the federal government encourages a “controlled exit” from Ethiopia. At the beginning of the 1980s the political repression of Ethiopian students’ protest⁴ leads to the exit of almost 2 million Ethiopians. UN officials overtake a controversial selection of people in Kenyan and Sudanese camps to give sponsorship as “political refugee” in the United States⁵. In such a context, the lack of assistance by North-American institutions for an Ethiopian dead in Chicago provokes indignation. ECAC is created as a voluntary association “by Ethiopians for Ethiopians” in 1984 to face the dramatic conditions of Ethiopian refugees in Kenya and Sudan camps. It has been established by Ethiopian-American citizens, mainly Amharic, ex-students remained in Chicago and political refugees of the 1980s. First, there’s a strong commitment, familiarity and few economic resources: voluntary members of the association welcome political refugees at the Chicago airport and give orientation on the host country through individual and collective meetings. Then, the association moves from self-organization to economic dependency from the State of Illinois in order to give stability to services offered.

ECAC overtakes a process of reinvention because of changed international balances at the beginning of the 1990s. Following the Russian withdrawal of support to the Ethiopian government, the federal government declares that “Ethiopian refugees emergency in Africa is over”, stops the entry of Ethiopians under the status of “political refugee” and opens the program *Diversity Visa Lottery* in Ethiopia: the effect is the creation of a new population, “Diversity immigrants” without sponsorship and mainly with lower levels of education than previous Ethiopian refugees. Meanwhile, the State of Illinois withdraws funds to ECAC for assistance to Ethiopian refugees. In such a context, aware of the real still dramatic conditions of refugee camps, indignation provokes a double reaction: the strengthening of a diaspora of opposition to the Ethiopian government and the “internationalisation” of ECAC. Ethiopians in Chicago represent a fundamental unit of reference for the *Ethiopian National Congress (Ye’ Ethiopia Hagerawi Gubae – EE HA GU)*, a non profit organization against the Ethiopian government, organized by *charters*, small units throughout the United States at the end of the 1990s. At the same time, “Chicagoan” Ethiopians play an active role in the multiethnic political movement *United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF)* created by the merging of 13 political parties against the Ethiopian government. On the one hand, a stronger engagement of

⁴ Red Terror is the DERG (Amharic abbreviation for Temporary Military Administrative Council) response to the White Terror, that of student movements fighting for a civil government.

⁵ It’s common opinion among political refugees that the “temptation” of a faster acquisition of the status of “political refugee” in USA was used by CIA to dismantle Ethiopian communist youth movements in Sudan.

some of ECAC members in the diaspora of opposition to the Ethiopian government goes hand in hand with the strengthening of interactions between populations in Ethiopia and ex - political refugees in Chicago. On the other hand, the strong political commitment leads unexpectedly to a further segmentation of Ethiopian identity in Chicago. The desire of a multiethnic Ethiopian State remains trapped in interethnic tensions strongly influencing political activities in the United States too: in 2005, near political elections in Ethiopia, Chicago's *charter* meetings permanently degenerate in ethnic conflicts hindering activities of the unit.

On the contrary, in order to overcome the risk of ECAC's closure provoked by federal decisions, indignation leads to the "internationalisation" and, as a result, to new "ecologies of democracy". Ethiopians find themselves in a *well - understood misunderstanding* (La Cecla, 2005) : they show to be passive victims of institutional decisions while enact their own tactics to survive. The effect is a *metamorphosis by double loop learning* (Bateson,1976). ECAC turns into a "bipolar star"⁶: on the one hand, it remains a point of reference for Ethiopian refugees in Chicago thanks to special programmes aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and improving social and health services funded by the City of Chicago and private associations; on the other hand, thanks to funding from the State of Illinois, it expands its competence to offer integrated welfare services to international refugees coming from Africa, Middle East, East Europe. The ECAC opening to international refugees provokes an "intermittent control" of the association activities by the State of Illinois that restrains times by which welcome activities are carried out. As a result, accelerated times in emerging transcultural spaces enact forms of "extra-political cooperation" based on the analogy of experience and the joint action to solve problems (Pellizzoni, 1998) and, thereby, provokes the transformation of the original spaces of belonging Ethiopia/ Kenyan and Sudanese refugee camps/Chicago in spaces of "transcultural improvisation": interaction between ECAC assistants and "clients" - refugees coming from different national contexts turns into a *double misunderstanding* (La Cecla, 2005), where forms of empirical commensurability and mutual recognition are characterized by the instantaneity of the "here and now".

In ECAC a "professional camouflage" tries to manage the conflict between Ethiopian identity and American citizenship. The community association, aware of the interdependency between services given to Ethiopians and those to international refugees, acts by "collateral organizations" (Weick, 1993). On the one hand, the activities are periodically formulated thanks to the exchanges

⁶ In astrophysics the "bipolar star" is a system formed by two stars tied together by mutual gravitational force. I use the term to put evidence on the splitting and the interdependency of competence by which the Ethiopian community association reinvents itself.

between two committees: the first one representing the ethnic, religious and generational components of Ethiopians, the second one formed by business men, trainers, professional experts and representatives of international refugees associations in Chicago. On the other hand, activities, softly supervised by the ECAC executive director, lead to weakly hierarchical “frontier spaces”⁷ blurring boundaries among Ethiopians, American citizens and international refugees.

“Mexican Hybridisations”: between rebellion and antagonist cooperation

More than the Ethiopian ones, Mexican forms of self-protection are based on the permanent treatment of the conflict with institutions. Nowadays Mexicans constitute the largest population of “non citizen legal immigrants” in the United States while Mexican “aliens” (almost 11 million) outnumber the legal ones.

On the one hand, Mexico-USA migrants’ flows have been shaped by the overlapping effects of Mexico-USA governments’ approaches on economics and migrations. The creation of a continent-wide free-trade zone has gone hand in hand with controversial forms of regulation of migrants’ flows to the United States. In 1986, while Mexican government joins the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of the USA federal government treats “undocumented migration” as an issue of “national security”. In 1996, while the Mexican government implements the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and acknowledges “dual citizenship” to Mexican migrants, the “anti-immigrant bandwagon” in the United States leads to the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (Immigration Reform Act) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (the Welfare Reform Act).

With regard to IRCA, amnesty is offered to long-term undocumented residents while sanctions are enacted against employers of them. With regard to the “anti-immigrant bandwagon”, non citizen immigrant, legal and undocumented, are barred from receiving means-tested federal and state benefits while the income threshold required for immigrants to sponsor the entry of relatives is risen. Three effects may be highlighted. First, the regularization of 2 million Mexicans turns a back and forth migration into a permanent residence with no return to Mexico (Gutierrez, 1999). Second, the implementation of IRCA’s employer sanctions provokes the workers’ recruitment shift from direct hiring to subcontracting arrangements, undermines wages and working conditions for Mexican workers, opens up wide gaps between undocumented and documented migrants (*ibidem*). Third, the “anti-immigrant bandwagon” furtherly encourages forms of

⁷ For further inquiry in the concept of “frontier spaces/frontier zones”, see Sassen (2000).

commodification both of documented and undocumented migrants by exacerbating the boundaries of citizenship.

In such a context, by contrast, Chicago, the third city for Mexican population behind Los Angeles and New York, presents itself as a “frontline of democracy”: a space of “free circulation” both for citizens and non citizens. A municipal ordinance against the federal government protects the freedom of circulation of the undocumented migrants since 1985⁸. According to the ordinance, the Chicago Police Department has not to cooperate with the federal *Immigration and Naturalization Service* (INS) to arrest undocumented migrants. Anyway, this ordinance is powerless in front of the forms of labor commodification of undocumented migrants caused by IRCA. In 2005 the State of Illinois intends to regulate the growth of the *day labor agencies*, controversies units of intermediation used as subcontractors by employers. The reaction of the City of Chicago is ambivalent: it formulates the ordinance, rarely implements it⁹, uses directly *day labor agencies* as a consequence of the privatization of municipal services.

Unlike the “professional camouflage” by which the conflict between Ethiopian identity and American citizenship is managed, Mexican aliens have to use multiple normative systems to protect themselves from “deception” practiced both by institutions and ordinary citizens. They move between *coyotes* rules to cross the frontier Mexico-USA and Chicago’s forms of labor recruitment; between freedom of circulation in Chicago and fear of federal deportations outside Chicago, in the Cook County. The cleavage legal/alien fragments Mexican-american neighborhoods as spaces of ethnic solidarity. In search of assistance for documents in a host country, “illegal” Mexican migrants are often ripped off by Mexican-americans; at workplace they become competitors of first-generation Mexican-american citizens, fired and replaced by them; in the neighborhoods, especially the Latino ones, they are blamed to be disturbance of public order and blackmailed by youth gangs because of the lack of legal documents.

Growing awareness of political, rather than economic, reasons for their social conditions, provokes indignation and, as a result, fast *hybridisations* between citizens and non citizens with a high capacity of *deuterolearning*, that is, autonomy in choosing forms of learning to solve problems (Bateson, 1976). Unlike the Ethiopian “bipolar star”, based on the laic and apolitical integration of welcome services for Ethiopians and international refugees, Mexican *hybridisations* create an “action network” aimed at treating permanently the conflict with institutions through specialized issue-related competences, strong

⁸ City of Chicago, Exec. Order No. 85-1 (March 7, 1985)

⁹ In front of the employers’ threats to leave Chicago with the following effect to move more than 250,000 workers outside Chicago.

ties between religion, kinship and self-organized forms of protest, a fast institutional conflict canalisation. In such a network, they can find themselves in situations of *well-understood misunderstanding* (La Cecla, 2005). Against the federal rhetoric of national security, “free circulation” beyond the frontier Mexico/USA and a transnational Latino identity is the focus of the self-organized “group” *Pueblo Sin Fronteras* created to defend migrant rights at the end of the 1980s. The “group” acts on simultaneous sides. The Center *Sin Fronteras*, established in the Latino neighborhoods of Pilsen and Humbolt, is engaged with initiatives of community empowerment both in Mexico and in the United States. Il *Sin Fronteras* Law Programme offers legal assistance, mainly free, to undocumented Latinos in Chicago while the self-organized *Adalberto United Methodist Church*, the moral “group” branch created at the end of the 1990s in the Latino Humboldt neighborhood, offers “aliens” the opportunity to be converted from the Catholic Church in order to develop cultural autonomy and political responsibility. The movement *La Familia Unida* stems from the “group” and is spreading throughout the United States by engaging undocumented single mothers in political activism against federal deportations; *El Zocalo Urbano*, a university student movement created in 2005, relies on the *Sin Fronteras* “group” to sensitize youth on the contradictions of the federal treatment of “illegal migration”.

The Mexican “action network” creates weakly connected spaces and varied temporalities. Beside the multiple fights of the more rooted *Pueblo Sin Fronteras*, the issues of local development in countries of origin and human trafficking enact further *hybridisations*.

Chicago’s migrant clubs cooperating with Mexican institutions for local development in Mexican countries perceive to act in a situation of *double-understood misunderstanding* (La Cecla, 2005) with Mexican institutions, thus allowing to both develop their own actions autonomously. The federal program *Three-By-One*, created at the beginning of 2000, enacts partnerships between Mexican central/local governments and migrant clubs in the United States on the issue of local development. The program indeed is used as an “occasion” (de Certeau, 2001) both for institutions and for migrants, undocumented as well as legal, to pursue their autonomous interests. On the one hand, it satisfies the need of Mexican institutions to legitimise themselves beyond national boundaries. On the other hand, Mexican migrants use it as a tool to “practice democracy”: thanks to it, they intend to influence the representative democracy in Mexico and to give more institutional visibility to Mexican populations. Unlike the older Ethiopian diaspora of opposition, the emerging Mexican diaspora is of antagonist cooperation with Mexican institutions. As long as Mexican migrants give economic support to local development projects in Mexico, their

engagement in the creation of community centres “by Mexicans for Mexicans”¹⁰ in Chicago subverts conventional spaces of belonging: rather than only social services centres, they intend to create autonomous spaces of intermediation between Mexican and North-American institutions.

Finally, the issues of human trafficking and labor exploitation force to act in a permanent situation of *double misunderstanding* (La Cecla, 2005) subverting boundaries between social operators and victims of human trafficking. The *Chicago Workers' Collaborative* is a mixed network, made up of Mexican aliens, American citizens and neighborhood associations (previously working autonomously on the issue) created in 2004 and supported by the State of Illinois. The emergency interactions between social operators and victims has developed a shared extreme “itinerant” competence in an “out of control” context of action. The executive director of the *Chicago Workers' Collaborative*, ex- English teacher for Mexicans, has learnt to intercept situations of crisis, thus becoming one of the points of reference in the Mexican informal networks in Chicago. On the other hand, ex-victims of human trafficking working with *The Workers' Collaborative* become “infiltrators” supported by the State of Illinois to detect and collect proofs of psychological and physical abuses perpetuated by the *day labor agencies* and at workplace.

Unlike the Ethiopian *metamorphosis* and its capacity to create temporary stabilities through weakly hierarchical “collateral organizations”, Mexican *hybridisations* create an “acephalous” action network where horizontality and permanent temporariness encourage learning elasticity and autonomy.

Beyond citizen/non citizen: unusual plots of urban democracy

In front of the neo-liberal restructuring of social policy, the two migrants’ “welfare communities” observed through the frames of indignation, improvisation and misunderstanding bring to light the effects of changing mechanisms of “integration” of the Stranger. On the one hand, the “political machine” “integrates” by “repression of the conflict”: the neighborhood emerges as a space of political demand and, as a result, a mechanism of vertical solidarity. On the other hand, “welfare communities” “integrate” by “manipulation of the conflict”. Do-it-yourself practices create new “ecologies of democracy” based on alternative combinations of familiarity, regular action and justification, that is, of the “pragmatic regimes of engagement with the world” formulated by Thévenot (2001). “Ecologies of democracy” are spaces of “transcultural improvisation” where *bricolage* enact forms of horizontal

¹⁰ In 2005 meetings to establish *Casa Guerrero* in North Side and the just- established Casa Michoacán in Near West Side constitute the first attempts.

solidarity which may be product of kinship ties (durkemian organic solidarity) or of functional interdependency (durkemian mechanic solidarity) but, above all, are crossed by a moral disposition towards the encounter and the equity with the Stranger. Like the *eterotopia* (Foucault, 1994), they are spaces of rupture of ordinary temporalities. Like the *territoires circulatoires* (Tarrus, 1995), they are products of three temporalities (daily life, life history, generational succession) but, unlike them, they are spaces of “contamination with the Stranger”, rather than “superimposition of the Stranger”.

Changing mechanisms of integration redefine the relationship between urban pluralism and democracy. Transnationalism, in a bottom-up perspective, looks at cities as crossroads of social relations constituted by the interactions of local, national and transnational flows where communication circuits are complex and mobile (Smith, 2001). In Chicago “encounters with the Stranger” enact unusual plots of urban democracy. Looking at social interaction through a reciprocity state/society perspective, rather than by the contraposition top-down/bottom-up, the two migrants’ “welfare communities” constitute cases of neo-liberal “society against state” where indignation doesn’t turn into do-it-yourself justice but daily encourages spaces of solidarity and multiple membership against hierarchical leadership. “Itinerant populations” (Crosta, 2007 b) act as *bricoleur* trying to create their unstable “ecological niches” as spaces of breakdown to ordinary times and to conciliate desire for protection with desire for new experiences and social recognition. In such an interactive context, boundaries of cities dissolve in “political communities” as permanently changeable associations without definite forms and where membership to different associations doesn’t conflict each other (Mouffe, 1992). The Chicago case study suggests thereby a new connection between integration and cultural autonomy for a neo-liberal welfare restructuring. “Ecologies of democracy”, as products of different trade-off between volition and observance of the law, constitute public-making processes characterized by different cycles autonomy / reciprocity / learning (Crosta,2007 a). Indignation highlights the coexistence of two components, the visceral and the cognitive, of the emotional dimension of learning and it turns from tactics for self-preservation into occasion of mutual recognition based on a collective capacity of “manipulation of the conflict”. What emerges is a controversial relationship between reciprocity, learning and autonomy. The more reciprocity society/state is perceived as negative, the less social learning processes moving from visceral to cognitive are linear and stable, the more autonomy, as capacity of balancing between the fiction of the legal Self and the desires of the multiple Self, may be identified with virtuous cycles of “political solidarity” based on the misunderstanding as the unavoidable condition to interact with the Other. In the context of a neoliberal welfare restructuring a pluralist declination of the link between protection and local

democracy should consider such an unfamiliar temporal dynamic on the extent to which it enacts responsible processes of mutual and horizontal recognition beyond the contraposition citizen/non citizen.

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