

## Migration as an ongoing maturational process

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, maturation is defined as the emergence of personal and behavioural characteristics through growth processes. In this brief reflection, I would like to stress two main ideas: the first is that migration is a process and is part of life and second, that migration is an ongoing maturational process. I will also refer to the interesting idea that Bruno Calatano illustrate in his series 'le Voyageurs'.

Everyday life confronts us with different levels of migration. We might migrate from one neighbourhood to another, from pre-school to primary school, then to high school and to university, we can even migrate from one group of friends to another, from one job to the next promotion or to one city to another city within the same country or to another. The word emigration refers particularly to this last situation: 'to leave one's place of residence or country to live elsewhere' (Merriam-Webster dictionary).

In my opinion, what is different in the experience of migrating are the levels of migration. What remains stable and familiar Vs what is lost and is left behind. In Calatano's sculptures you can see 4 elements that seems to be interacting with each other to represent the experience of migration:

1) The subject. Represents the individual's psychic and physical resources, 2) The suitcase. Represents the belongings that are kept and migrate with you, 3) the empty space in the body, representing the loss and 4) The public space. The place where the sculpture is settled representing the new environment that is interacting and receiving, welcoming or not, the individual in the relocation.

As psychoanalysts we know that losing is not only inevitable but also necessary as part of development. The dynamic between keeping and losing will be experienced in different ways. The more you need to leave behind (your home, family, name and identity, friends, job, city, language, routines etc) the bigger the experience of loss. In Calatano's idea: The smaller the suitcase, the bigger the emptiness.

Realizing that you are no longer a local is painful and can be very scary. You will need to learn again how to move in the new place, how to interact with the new culture and people and learn many new explicit or implicit codes of social and emotional interaction, new ways of doing things, new routines, new language, new climate and the need to validate your titles and prove to authorities and colleagues that you are fit to work.

Many of what was once achieved won't be present in the relocation. Must accept the loss, the diminished autonomy, the vulnerability and the pain. Grieving who you used to be is now critical and necessary.

In this sense, emigrating is a major challenge to the sense of one's identity and security. Who am I, NOW and HERE?

I found Peter Blos (1968)<sup>1</sup> concept, regression in the service of development in character formation in adolescence, very useful to understand how regression brings the ego in contact with infantile drive positions, early object relations and solutions to central conflicts that re-emerge with the emigration and the relocation. This regression will facilitate the working through of these conflicts (in adolescence or emigration) so the individual can continue forming the new identity and develop new capacities for the new life.

As we know, the quality of the receiving environment is very important as well. The more 'good enough' it is, will facilitate for you to use your internal and external resources and reduce the experience of loss and will allow you to express your true self. On the contrary, the more unwelcoming the environment, the bigger the emptiness and the difficulty to develop, to cope with the hazards and the obstacles.

Regarding the suitcase, I would like to stress how important has been to bring in my suitcase my IPA and my Society's membership as part of my belongings. To be part of a psychoanalytic community, the colleagues and friends, have helped me to maintain to some extent a sense of identity and belonging when many other aspects of my life were challenged by the relocation.

With all this in mind, PERC was created to accompany IPA psychoanalyst and candidates in this process of emigration and relocation and also the recipient societies because we know that emigrating involves much more than just changing address or receiving a guest.

Thank you.



---

<sup>1</sup> Blos, P (1968) Character formation in adolescence. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 23:245-263