

BORDER VIOLENCE, MIGRANT RESISTANCE, AND ACTS OF SOLIDARITY AT INDIVIDUAL, COLLECTIVE AND COMMUNITY LEVELS: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS FROM A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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In a global scenario of increasing criminalisation of transnational human mobility, this special issue brings into dialogue different voices and experiences of migration, borders and border crossing. It does so by examining the present and historical socio-political structures of inequality in home, transit, and host societies. As we argue in this introduction, these structural realities shape individual and collective decisions and experiences of migration. At the same time, the relation between people and the power matrices that affect their lives is not smooth, but rather marked by shades of opposition. In taking this dual perspective, on both violence and resistance, the contributions in this special issue offer original insights to challenge individual-centred perspectives that have largely dominated psychological research on migration. These perspectives have ultimately contributed to de-historicise, de-contextualize and de-politicise people's experiences. In this introduction, we provide a brief history of how this special issue was developed and illustrate the main takeaways lessons from each paper. We conclude by providing some reflections on how community psychology scholars, and overall psychology as a discipline, can support the struggles of those who are confronting border violence and contribute to a transformative change in this field.

Keywords: migration, border violence, resistance, solidarity, community psychology

1. Introduction

I think people are people and we should trust in humanity and rely on each other.
(Behrouz Boochani, in O. Tofighian, 2020)

In an era of increasing border control presented through the logic of 'national security', a widespread call has been raised, particularly by critical scholars, to hear and understand people's voices with respect to mobility, borders and border crossings. Too often, indeed, these voices have been silenced and homogenizing labels, such as 'clandestine aliens', have been used to create a 'single story' (Ngozi Adichie, 2009) for most *people on the move*. Notably, this story portrays

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people who are crossing transnational borders as either ‘criminals’ or ‘victims in need’ (Esposito, Ornelas, Scirocchi, & Arcidiacono, 2019b), while also encapsulating them in arbitrary categories such as ‘refugee’, ‘asylum seeker’ or ‘economic migrant’. Overall, by purporting to separate the ‘guilty’ from the ‘innocent’, the ‘risky’ from the ‘at risk’, the focus is centred on individuals and their choices. This is regardless of any consideration of structural processes and histories of inequality that contour their movements and lives. Yet, at a closer look, the story is more complex and uncomfortable.

At the time of writing, news is announced of charter flights deporting people from countries where they have been living for all (or most of) their lives (Taylor, 2020a); of men, women, transgender and gender non conforming people who struggle for psychological and physical survival in detention centres where they had been locked up solely for reasons related to their immigration status (Taylor, 2020b); of women who are not given the protection they deserve for the multiple violence they endured and survived (Beretta et al., 2020); and, of governments that dismiss their responsibility in safeguarding human rights, bargaining over people’s lives (Rankin, Smith, Connolly, & McKernan, 2020).

While this happens politicians, journalists, and even scholars, claim that Europe is facing an unprecedented ‘migration crisis’, recalling colonial tropes of ‘barbaric invasions’ of people coming from the resource-constrained global South to the resource-rich global North. In other words, and as Gurinder Bhambra (2017) argues, instead of pointing to the violence that these persons endured both in their countries of origin and/or while crossing transnational borders, the mainstream public discourse focuses mainly on ‘the crisis *facing Europe*’ (Bhambra, 2017, p. 395) in receiving them. Yet, looking at the ‘migration phenomenon’ from a historical perspective, the evidence contradicts this mainstream narrative.

Arguably, it is not the first time in the history that Europe is called to receive large numbers of people seeking refuge from wars and persecutions. In 1992, when Member States were even fewer in number than now, the EU received 696,500 refugee applications. This was a higher number of refugee applications per state pro rata compared to the present (Jubilut, 2017). It is also noteworthy that the majority of people that are currently moving are internally displaced people (IDPs)¹, and that the countries with the highest refugee population relative to their national population are all non-Western countries² (UNHCR, 2019). So, according to these figures, what seems to be at stake is something else from what is presented ~~in~~by the mainstream discourse. As Francesca Tessitore and Giorgia Margherita underline in their contribution to this issue, the widespread use of the term ‘crisis’ associated to transnational movements of people from the global South towards the global North has, above all, a socio-political and symbolic function. It calls upon Western citizens to emotionally signify the relationship with those seen as ‘foreigner Others,’ i.e., those who do not belong (and consequently do not have rights), as a relationship based on ‘danger’ and ‘threat’ to our nation-based societies. In other words, it calls upon us to reinforce existing racial divides and nationality-based segmentations in our communities, and to reduce our capacity to forge emphatic bonds across axes of difference.

Notably, state-sponsored hostility towards those considered ‘not to belong’ begins well before the so-called ‘European migration crisis’. Hostile environment policies³, designed to limit people’s rights and deter them from accessing essential services (e.g., housing, healthcare, education) have operated for decades in Western countries (e.g., Corporate Watch, 2018). In particular, as post-

¹ For instance, in 2018, the largest number of IDPs were Ethiopians who were forced to move within their own country (UNHCR, 2019).

² Namely, the first six countries are Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Chad, Uganda and Sudan (UNHCR, 2019).

³ The term ‘hostile environment’, as Boochani and colleagues remind in their contribution to this issue, was first used by the politician Theresa May, who as UK Home Secretary in 2012, introduced a new approach towards immigration that aimed to make life so difficult for people who don’t have the ‘correct’ documents that it would force them to leave the UK. In her own words: “The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants” (Kirup & Winnett, 2012).

colonial scholars have argued, hostility towards racialised and foreign others is rooted in European colonial history and imaginary. As such, it can only be understood through the prism of this genealogy of violence and its intersection with other forms of domination (Giuliani, 2018; Tofighian, 2020). ~~Therefore, H~~historical lenses are essential to acknowledge that border violence have impacted people for generations, and that is embedded in pervasive racial, class-based and gendered structures of power that perpetuate the displacement, dispossession, and repression of particular populations (Tofighian, 2020). At the same time, it is also important to look at the multiple psychosocial consequences of Western hostile environments as they are felt by individuals, families, and communities at large (Langhout et al., 2018).

Yet, for a long time most of the psychological research in the area of migration has been characterised by an individual-centric perspective, in line with the trends dominating in psychology (Sládková & Bond, 2011). As a consequence, individual-level factors have often been used by scholars to explain differences in the wellbeing of migrants, underestimating processes operating at interpersonal, organizational, institutional, policy, and structural levels (Thurston & Verhoef, 2003; Thurston & Vissandjée, 2005; Tseng & Yoshikawa, 2008). This stream of psychological research in most cases has also adopted a 'deficit view', focusing on the assessment of migrants' trauma and mental health (Brabeck, Porterfield, & Loughry, 2015; Esposito, Ornelas, & Arcidiacono, 2015; Tessitore & Margherita, 2017; Tessitore, Glovi & Margherita, 2019). Although important to demonstrate the harm caused by immigration enforcement systems, these studies have largely overshadowed people's strengths, resilience and resistance. In doing so, they have ultimately lent support to a 'pathological narrative' that, by being rooted in Western nosologies, portrays migrants as 'problematic' or 'sick' subjects (on this point see Boochani and colleagues in this issue).

In contrast to this approach, recently scholars in the field of social and political psychology have started to emphasise the role of socio-political factors on the health and well-being of migrants, as well as the collective strategies that these protagonists adopt to challenge their circumstances and improve their conditions (Goodman & Narang, 2019; Kellezi, [Bowe, Wakefield, McNamara & Bosworth, et al](#) 2019a; Smeekes, Verkuyten, Celebi, Acaturk, & Onkun, 2017). In the same line of thinking, some community psychology scholars have reframed migrant well-being as a "multilevel, interactive, and value dependent phenomenon" (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 359), emphasizing the complex and dynamic interaction of the multiple factors involved in the relationship between host and migrant communities as well as the key role of social justice (Lykes, 2013; Lykes & Hershberg, 2015; Esposito et al., 2015; Esposito, Ornelas, Briozzo, & Arcidiacono, 2019a).

In particular, the study of migration in community psychology has been guided by an ecological paradigm (Kelly, 2006), which involves the acknowledgment of the multiple contexts (individual, family/relational, organizational/institutional, and communal/societal) and forces (historical, cultural, social, economic, and political) that shape the lived experiences of migrants (Birman & Bray, 2017; Esposito et al., 2015; Sládková & Bond, 2011). In this perspective migration is understood not as an individual choice, but rather as a structurally generated decision that stems largely from systemic inequalities embedded in historical geopolitical relations among countries (global North vs. global South). In considering the historical and socio-political contexts as central to the meanings that people give to their experience of mobility and border crossing, our gaze opens up to grasp the linkages between historical and contemporary stories of state-sponsored violence and human rights violations (Lykes & Hershberg, 2015).

Another feature of a community psychology vision, in contrast to traditional individualistic psychological approaches, is the focus on people's strengths and their capacity to cope with and resist the multiple oppressions they endure (Esposito et al., 2019b). By acknowledging people's agency in the face of complex suffering and their capacity to resist oppression, community psychology scholars aim to challenge the representation of migrants as 'poor victims' to be compassionately assisted, or alternatively as 'dangerous criminal' to be punished and repressed. This perspective is completed by the adoption of an intersectional lens of analysis that, drawing on gender and 'race' among other structural factors, seeks to reveal the variety of realities that migrants

experience based on their different emotional and structural positioning (on intersectionality see Cole, 2009; Collins, 2009).

Finally, at a methodological level, a community psychology approach to migration calls for the adoption of reflexive and collaborative action-research approaches in order to prioritise the voices and lived experiences of those struggling against border violence, and support their active participation in the process of service delivery, advocacy and policy development. In essence, the idea is to engage migration ‘from the bottom up’, as Lykes, Távara, Sibley and Ferreira van Leer argue in their paper. In this regard, individual and community narratives are privileged methods, as they are the most suitable tools to provide a platform for migrants’ marginalised voices – and the rich psychosocial insights they provide – to be amplified, and so to challenge the de-personalized, criminalizing, and patronising accounts produced ‘about them (migrants)’, but always ‘without them’ (Sládková, 2014).

Based on these considerations, the question that guide this special issue is: ‘What contribution psychology, and community psychology in particular, can provide to tackle anti-immigration global policies and practices, and support the struggles of those who are confronting border violence?’ In doing so, our focus is twofold. While we aim to unravel the intersecting forms of violence and oppression experienced by those displaced and exiled⁴, we also want to provide a space to amplify the strategies of survival and resistance used by these protagonists in their daily struggles against borders, as well as the acts of solidarity performed at individual, collective and community levels. This is the reason why we are particularly happy to welcome, among our contributors, people who have been directly affected by border violence and whom, taking their lived experiences as a starting point, provide thorough and unique analyses of this complex system of oppression (see, in particular, the papers by Rebelo, Abdullah, & Hussein, and Boochani and colleagues).

This introductory piece proceeds by sketching a brief history of how this special issue was conceived and developed. We then analyse and discuss the main takeaways from the contributions that compose the issue. Finally, we conclude by providing some reflections on how community psychology scholars, and overall psychology as a discipline, can support the struggles of those who are confronting border violence and contribute to a transformative change in this field.

2. The story of this Special Issue

The discussion on what is the role of a psychology committed to migrant justice, which is at the core of this special issue, is rooted in our personal background as activist scholars and women with experience of migration ourselves. It is then from both personal and professional experience that we approach this topic.

We speak ~~six~~-seven languages between us and, throughout our lives, we have travelled and lived in several countries, some of which we came to call ‘home’. Francesca was born in Italy and she had her first experience of migration, from her hometown to London, back in 2002. The driver for her mobility, at that time, was the desire to explore new life choices. After that, Francesca migrated three other times – back to Italy, and then ~~onto~~ Portugal before finally moving ~~onto~~ the UK – in search of educational and work opportunities to progress in her life. Francesca’s journey was facilitated by her European citizenship status. Blerina was born in Albania and she first migrated from her hometown to Italy, in 1998. In 2001, she left Albania again, in what would become a longer migration journey to the UK for educational and working opportunities. Blerina’s journey out of Albania was subject to immigration restrictions for the first 12 years, as she navigated through student and work permits.

Both of us have been lucky enough to study, find employment and participate in community life in meaningful ways. We have sometimes experienced prejudices and discrimination, as women and

⁴ Interesting, at this respect, the concept of ‘kyriarchal system’ (*system-e hākem*) introduced by Boochani (2018).

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foreign-non-nationals, but solidarity and support have been predominant in our stories of mobility]. Yet, we know that that our experiences are very much shaped by our privilege – based on our nationality (for Francesca), skin colour, and social class background – and that the migration trajectories of many other people, especially women, who come from the global South are not as easy as ours. It is the awareness of these intersectional injustices, grounded in our own lived experiences of mobility, which helped us to connect with the struggle of migrants reported in this special issue. Furthermore, it is probably due to this awareness that we both ended up working with people who experienced the violence of borders.

In particular, we have both been working with migrants, especially migrant women, affected by migration-related detention (Esposito et al., 2019b; Esposito, Quinto, De Masi, Gargano, & Costa, 2016; Matos & Esposito, 2019; Kellezi & Bosworth, 2016; 2017), and we have dedicated our last ten years to studying, researching and advocating for justice in this field (Esposito, 2017; Kellezi, et al 2019a; Langhout et al., 2018). It is in the course of this work that we met.

Both being struck by the lack of space in academia for the voices of the people confined in these sites, that Boochani (2018) calls ‘prisons’, as well as by the lack of a psychological debate engaging critically, and in a more systemic way, with borders and migration, we decided to propose a roundtable entitled ‘Experiences and Narratives of the Border’ at the 2017 ECPA Congress of Community Psychology in Newcastle (UK). This roundtable, that for the first time introduced the topic of migration-related detention and border control in a European Community Psychology Conference, was focused both on the perspectives of people affected by these practices and of psychologists and other community advocates working in solidarity with them. We believed that there was much to learn from these empirically-grounded perspectives, and from their critical dialogue, in order to rethink psychological approaches in this field and, ideally, create a ‘psychology of the border’ able to address issues of migration, migration control, proliferation of borders and processes of categorisation and illegalisation with the focus on supporting different forms of anti-border resistance enacted at individual, collective, and community levels.

This roundtable, in which we discussed the arbitrary realities of migration control in different national contexts (i.e. Italy, Portugal, Spain, the UK, and the US) from a critical reflexive standpoint, was the first step towards the realisation of this special issue. In fact, we felt the need to expand our conversation beyond the conference walls. Then, Caterina Arcidiacono, a member of the editorial board of *Community Psychology in Global Perspective* suggested that we submit something to the journal. After several Skype discussions among the young scholars – all women – who participated in the Newcastle roundtable (Blerina Kellezi, Emilia Bianco, Francesca Esposito, Francesca Tessitore, and Silvia Scirocchi) we decided that it would be appropriate to launch a special issue. Our desire was (and is) that this special issue could serve as a springboard for the topic and for other people, community psychologists, but not exclusive to them alone, interested in engaging and discussing our possible contributions for a borderless world. Two and a half years after the ECPA Congress we firmly believe that today, more than ever, we urgently need discussions like this within community psychology, psychology and academia in general.

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3. The special issue’s contributions: An overview of contexts, topics and protagonists’ voices

This special issue brings together a number of papers analysing a range of different contexts of migration and migrants’ reception across Europe (i.e., Italy, Portugal, Greece, and the UK⁵) and abroad (Australia, Guatemala, and the US). The articles cover topics such as the obstacles and challenges migrants face while journeying North; the conditions they experience in transitional contexts like refugee camps and shelters; the structural constraints and marginalisation they deal

⁵ At the moment of writing, the UK is in the process of exiting the European Union.

with in Western societies; and, finally, the effects that transborder migration has on families and communities left behind. In line with the special issue's call, some contributions pay attention to the different forms of dispossession migrants face, as well as to the everyday practices used at individual and collective level to confront these scenarios of institutional and structural violence (see, for instance, Boochani and colleagues). In this way, they shed light on the complex and uneasy relationship between violence/victimisation and agency/resistance, while also providing a platform to acknowledge people's protagonism in the face of complex suffering.

Taking a look at the contributions as a whole, it is worth noting that they vary in terms of backgrounds and positionality of their authors. In addition to community and critical social psychology, contributors have their backgrounds in psychodynamics, psychology of peace and human rights, education, anthropology, philosophy, and political science. Some of them are academic-based scholars, while others are researchers and activists engaged in solidarity work in the community. Also, while most authors engage in their research from the privilege of their full citizenship entitlements, others have been – or still are – struggling to get a permanent 'legal status' while they take part in intellectual and grassroots work.

Yet, in the midst of their differences, these papers also share some common features. In particular, they all underline the importance for academic work to attend to the voices and stories of people with lived experience of migration and border violence – including both those who move across borders in search of safety and a better life, as well as their family and community members who remain in the countries of origin.

For Mazzaresse, Guidi, Cecchini, and Meringolo this meant highlighting the strength and weaknesses of the Italian reception system for people seeking asylum by relying on the first-hand experiential accounts shared by migrants but also by professionals working in reception centres ~~in~~ Tuscany. While focusing on a particular regional experience, the so-called 'Tuscan model for widespread reception', the authors highlight a range of aspects that are of national (and international) relevance, such as the detrimental impact of long asylum assessment procedures for migrants' wellbeing and community integration; as well as the importance of maximising opportunities for social exchange with local inhabitants through small-scale reception services scattered in the community. Along a similar line, Tessitore and Margherita adopt a narrative approach to shed light on the subjective meanings that a group of men seeking asylum in Italy, and accommodated in 'extraordinary reception centres' (CAS) in the Campania region, attributed to their pre-migratory, migratory and post-migratory experiences, with a particular focus on the "daily micro-traumatisms" that the institutional reception system produces and which heighten migrants' vulnerabilities.

Moreira, Barbosa, Maia, Veiga, Martins and Santos' paper reports on life in refugee camps in Lesbos and use interviews and participant observations to foreground migrants' description and analysis of the abandonment and deprivation they experience in these 'transitional contexts', as well as the detrimental impact that these adversities have on their wellbeing. Using a protagonist's words, in these sites "they feel their 'lives (being) on hold'". Lykes, Távora, Sibley and Ferreira van Leer, for their part, provide a holistic examination of the effects of transnational migration on rural Mayan individuals, sending families and communities in post-genocidal Guatemala. Through a mixed-method study, part of a long-standing participatory and action research project, the authors offer a thick description 'from the ground up' of the experiences of one Mayan sending community (El Tablón) deeply affected by intergenerational migration, and of the multiple meanings that these protagonists make of family, work and wellbeing in the context of their transborder families.

Rebelo, Abdullah, and Hussein's contribution presents critical insights resulting by a long-standing collaborative community-based advocacy work, which combines shared moments of reflection and community action. In doing so, they highlights the everyday barriers that people seeking asylum in Portugal face in getting access to community services (e.g., healthcare and education) and basic rights (e.g., right to work), what they frame as a form of 'slow violence' (Nixon, 2014). The authors also, as well as illustrate the grassroots strategies of resisting and

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negotiating power in host societies. Finally, Boochani and colleagues document the pains of migrant detention, but also the experiences of resilience, resistance, and transformation of those affected by it. In doing so, they present a critical polyphonic dialogue between actors in different geographical and social locations. Inspired by Boochani's book *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (2018), and his film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017, co-directed with Arash Kamali Sarvestani), the authors ~~analyse, from~~ adopt a transnational perspective ~~to analyse, the intricacies of the detention regime—and of the border-industrial complex, more broadly~~—as well as the strategies we can adopt to challenge and dismantle it.

Although, as mentioned above, all contributions highlight the importance of attending migrants' voices in academic work, they reflect different ways of engaging with these voices and integrating their insights into the process of knowledge production. The first three papers are the outcome of research projects carried out by European scholars, with a non-~~refugee-migrant~~ background, who dedicated their time and energy to get access to ~~migrants~~ reception contexts, like shelters and camps, to understand migrants' perspectives and lived experiences. These studies were carried out during a time-limited period and, in all cases, the researchers were outsiders of the ~~study~~ contexts ~~they studied~~ and had no previous relationships with their migrant protagonists.

The study from Lykes and colleagues, in turn, ~~was-is~~ part of a decade-long transnational partnership built between US-based activist scholars and K'iche' Maya and ladinx in Zacualpa and its villages in order to provide 'psychosocial accompaniment' to migrant sending communities and document the multiple ways they ~~affected by, and~~ make sense ~~and are of, affected by~~ transnational migration. As a reflection of the participatory and action research (PAR) approach informing this partnership, the study was developed in close collaboration with local co-researchers and included the training of a group of young people from Zacualpa to be employed in the survey data collection. The research findings were also presented and discussed with local communities members who participated ~~in~~ the study, thus leading to the integration of new insights into the PAR process as well as to the planning of new related courses of action.

Along similar lines, the contribution by Rebelo, Abdullah, and Hussein is the output of the long-standing collaboration between a Portuguese scholar and two refugee activists at the forefront of an association advocating for refugees' rights in Portugal. The authors' work is based on a vision of knowledge production as an ecologically driven collaborative endeavour, in which the authors engage from a field they define as 'translocality'. Finally, the last paper from Boochani and colleagues interweaves critical analysis, responses, questions and answers from a series of academic events held across the UK. In doing so, it involves a wide range of people – including academics, activists and community advocates, ~~and as well as~~ people with lived experience ~~of border violence~~ – as protagonists and co-authors. This original contribution is rooted in the notion of 'shared philosophical activity' (Tofighian, 2018), which represents a decolonial way of thinking of, and engaging in, knowledge production. In our Western societies, migrants have been marginalised and often physically removed from our communities (being taken to remote detention sites). At the same time, as Tofighian observes "they have also been denied entry into communities of thinkers and planners and are only able to function in limited roles when working towards their liberation" (2018, p. 363). This process of intellectual undermining of migrants, and more generally of racialised subjects, and their exclusion from traditional circuits of knowledge production (particularly academia), is rooted in conservative and colonial ways of thinking: its ultimate aim is to maintain the *status quo* by excluding oppressed people to take part in conversations that actually 'pertain to them' (Tofighian, 2018). So, creating a space for the voices of people affected by border politics, and the critical theoretical insights they bring with them, to be valued and amplified (as ~~this article~~ the article by Boochani and colleagues does), represents a strategy to decolonise academia. It is also a way to challenge the violence of the border industrial complex, and the epistemic injustice on which it is based and that actively reproduces.

In the next section we outline some of the main takeaways from the contributions that compose this special issue.

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4. Key takeaways from the special issue

The papers of this special issue offer diverse and innovative ways of understanding the experiences of migration from the point of view of those directly concerned. In doing so, they also look at rarely examined and hard to reach contexts, such as refugee camps and detention centres. Overall, we believe that the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted by the authors reflect the complexity of the experiences and perspectives of the protagonists involved in each project. They also demonstrate the need for more critical and experience-led representation in psychological studies in this field. Below we illustrate some of the key contributions provided by the articles.

4.1 *Structural contexts of migration and their multiple impacts at individual, family, and community level*

Lykes, Tavera, Sibley and van Leer shed light on the effects of transnational migration on rural Mayan individuals, sending families, and communities in post-genocidal Guatemala. Nearly one in four adults in the community researched had migrated, which included amongst the most educated in a context of high illiteracy. The research evidences the role of historical and socio-political contexts in shaping contemporary experiences of mobility and border crossing. The authors highlight how these contexts, which include centuries of colonialism and Indigenous oppression, combined with recent genocidal trauma, contribute to Guatemala's contemporary social-political challenges (e.g., violence, poverty, lack of employment and labour exploitation). ~~In doing so,~~ Ultimately they ~~ultimately~~ also influence people's decision to migrate.

In the Mayan community the authors worked with, migration was considered to a great extent a family decision and a family responsibility. As a consequence, it was usually pursued through household debt with substantial interest rates. Such circumstances, combined with the stress of separation and the dangers of underground migration, created a great strain to migrants and their families. Furthermore, the loss of valuable and skilful members affected communities too, depriving them of crucial resources for their development. Similarly, the benefits and success of migration were perceived by local community members to extend beyond the individual to enable families to pursue a life of dignity and respect, as well as to constitute an investment for future generations. Thus, the unique contribution of Lykes and colleagues' study is to shed light on the costs, as well as the benefits, of migration on families and communities left behind, while also framing this cost-benefits relation in the context of historical and socio-political realities of border crossing characterising the local community they worked with.

Tessitore and Margherita, in their study, also explored the structural contexts of migration ~~of experienced by~~ their protagonists, as well as how these influenced their ~~experiences and~~ trajectories. For instance, they found that individual and collective experiences of violence and persecution, which included political and religious oppression, as well as extreme poverty (caused by centuries of Western exploitation of resources-rich African lands) were the main reasons for their protagonists' ~~migration~~ mobility. These structural conditions, as well as people's forced migration experience itself, also deeply affected family and community relationships, 'infecting' them with violence. This violence had such a disrupting impact in people's life that the protagonists of this study struggled to narrate and weave connections between their past and current life in the country of destination (~~i.e.,~~ Italy), thus evidencing the pervasive trauma they endured. This trauma was also compounded by the human rights violations that all the migrants interviewed had experienced during their journeys ~~North,~~ and particularly as they transited Libya and crossed the Mediterranean Sea. For instance, the extreme violence and dispossession that this group of African asylum seeking

men experienced in Libya, a form of racialised (anti-Black) oppression, motivated the authors to define the related cluster as ‘Not a human place’, to underline the dehumanisation inherent in protagonists’ experiences in this transit country. As the authors argue, these accounts ultimately show the complex and multi-temporal nature of migrants’ traumatic experiences, which are structurally originated, ~~and as well as their~~ multiple ~~impacts that these experiences have at~~ individual, ~~family/relational~~, and community ~~impacts/levels~~.

4.2 Systemic violence affecting migrants in ~~destination countries~~ host societies

The majority of contributions in this issue documents the systemic mechanisms by which migrants continue to be exposed to violence even in the countries of destination. As Rebelo, Abdullah, and Hussein argue in their paper, this “process of subtle suffering that affects individuals in their process of integration into an unequal society where they are at social disadvantage” can be defined as ‘slow violence’ (Nixon, 2014). In particular, the authors rely on this notion to discuss the difficulties faced by refugees in accessing fundamental services and rights in Portugal, these latter including housing, healthcare, education, and livelihood. In doing so, they also show how refugees’ subjectivity and agency are undermined by an institutional reception system that opts to ‘inform’ refugees about the decisions concerning their lives rather than ‘discuss’ these decisions with them (thus negating their resilience and survival strategies). Through their contribution the authors ultimately challenge the epistemic violence enacted by a state narrative of refugees’ ‘successful integration’ - a narrative that purposefully neglects the experiences of many people who are struggling to rebuild their lives in a ~~new~~ country that does not fully acknowledge them.

Along a similar line, the research by Moreira, Barbosa, Maia, Veiga, Martins and Santos documents the challenges faced by individuals and families who are forced to reside in poorly resourced camps in European bordering countries like Greece, while awaiting the adjudication of their ~~asylum claims/refugee status~~. Particularly, the authors illustrate the precarious living conditions endured in these sites, where people’s expectations and desires for safety and a better life meet the harsh reality of the European reception system. As their analysis reveals, the migrants at the camps they researched, and particularly in Moria (Lesvos), voiced concerns about overcrowding and inadequacy of the facilities, poor quality and quantity of food, and lack of basic sanitary conditions. This scenario, and the general abandonment in which people felt to live in, enhanced the risk for the development and exacerbation of health problems, while also contributing to increased levels of interpersonal violence among camp residents. Some participants defined these adverse circumstances as a form of ‘psychological torture’. Others, instead, compared their experiences and distress to the ones they lived in their war-affected home countries (e.g., Syria). Despite this reality, healthcare and psychological support services in the camps were very limited. More importantly, the way authorities managed the asylum claiming process – which included lack of information, arbitrariness, and extreme slow bureaucratic procedures – put a strain on people’s capacity to cope with such deprived conditions and with the overall uncertainty regarding their future (including the time they had to wait in the camps).

Similar findings are reported by Tessitore and Margherita as well as by Mazzaresse, Guidi, Cecchini, and Meringolo in their studies on the Italian contexts of asylum seekers’ reception. Both these contributions highlight the absence of information regarding asylum procedures and the slowness of the system of asylum adjudication, as well as the lack of alternative pathways for migrant legalisation. These issues, as the authors show, had a great impact on migrants’ psychological well-being, inducing a sense of uncertainty and a feeling of being stuck in life. Furthermore, both studies evidence how these structural difficulties led, in the vast majority of cases, to a condition of protracted undocumentedness in which migrants found themselves swamped in. This condition was characterised by the impossibility to work, earn a salary, rent a house, and make any meaningful progress in life. In their data, the authors ultimately identify the systemic

violence affecting migrants in destination countries as a high-risk factor for their health and well-being. This violence, indeed, threatens people's ability to preserve a sense of self and meaning for their lives, while also perpetrating the experience of dehumanisation most migrants previously lived.

Overall, these contributions, as well as the one provided by Boochani and colleagues, shed light on the structural dynamics of the reception contexts and on their intrinsic 'hostility' towards ~~migrants~~ people with migration background. This last paper, in particular, illustrates the challenges faced by migrants in different transnational contexts, including experiences of destitution, exclusion from rights and imprisonment for reasons related solely to immigration status. The authors, some of whom with lived experiences of border violence themselves, also emphasise the role played by various actors (including psychologists and community practitioners), in maintaining these oppressive systems and in aggravating migrants' structurally generated vulnerabilities. The paper ultimately highlights the continuity of border violence inside and outside border zones and detention sites.

4.3 *The importance of building meaningful community bonds and social capital*

One of the current global challenges and threats to wellbeing is social isolation, lack of meaningful activities, and experiences of marginalisation and exclusion (Kellezi et al 2019b). Moreira, Barbosa, Maia, Veiga, Martins and Santos document the negative psychological impact deriving from absence of meaningful activities and social interactions in refugee camps. The authors report that where social contact was present it was fraught with concerns about safety and potential conflict. Based on their data, they strongly recommend addressing material deprivation and introducing meaningful activities for people in refugee camps. These measures would help by reducing distress and addressing some of the concerns that their protagonists reported in relation to feeling unsafe and dealing with the uncertainty of their immigration status (Kellezi et al., 2019a).

What is missing in refugee camps in Greece, however, is the individualised approach adopted in small-scale community based services. Mazzarese, Guidi, Cechini and Meringolo describe the experience of the 'Tuscan model for widespread reception' for asylum seekers and the community-oriented approach to integration on which this is rooted. Their research illustrates the value of activities and community engagement that are informed and 'done with' the migrants, and not 'for' them. Such an approach involves a direct collaboration with local community members, and ultimately relies on the idea of promoting social inclusion and autonomy through maximising existing social contact and capital. Operationally it consists in the implementation of ~~vocational~~ training and internships as part of existing community activities. The ultimate aim of this approach is to enable migrants' meaningful participation into host communities, whilst allowing for their development of new resources and connections. However, the authors also identify issues with this approach. As many of the activities in their ~~context of study~~ they researched relied on voluntarism, this reduced the opportunities for paid employment, which is essential for migrants' autonomous survival. In other words, this voluntarism could come at the expense of financial opportunities of an already marginalised population. Furthermore, while identifying the benefits of smaller community reception services, the migrants interviewed reported experiences of prejudice, discrimination, financial distress, and prolonged legal uncertainty. ~~Despite this evidence~~ Based on their findings, Mazzarese and colleagues argue that the this model of small-scale community reception services that adopt an individualised model of intervention, that is and encourage the participation of people in part of existing community activities, is more suitable for -favour the creation-development of social capital, which, in turn, has a positive impact for migrants' wellbeing and future quality of life.

4.4 Agency and ~~r~~Resistance in the ~~f~~Face of ~~c~~Complex ~~h~~Histories of ~~d~~Domination

In this issue, Lykes, Tavara, Sibley and van Leer found that the collective and shared memories of trauma among Mayan communities were ever-present, ~~these latter~~ including both suffering and frustration (with peace processes, genocidal violence and the consequent forced displacement), as well as resistance. The authors argue that Maya's persistent migration across militarised borders represents in itself an act of resistance against contemporary neoliberal capitalism and the long-lasting histories of oppression in which this is rooted. Indeed, ~~their~~ Maya's mobility can be understood as a reaction against the historical and continuous dispossession of their communities' wealth through centuries of colonisation, militarism, and racism. Furthermore, through their transborder movements, these protagonists challenge nation-states to rethink national and supranational repressive regulations that control human mobility, as well as the biopolitical *dispositif* (Foucault, 2003) of the border itself. While doing so, they reclaim the right of a dignified life, both in Guatemala and abroad. As the authors argue: "Writ large, these Maya take actions in the wake of historical and persistent genocidal violence and re-affirm their life project, their *buen vivir*. They respond through civil disobeying border regulations that reduce them to political-economic migrants without the rights of currently recognized asylum seekers, seeking to traverse bordered nations in ways that affirm interdependence driven from and in benefit of those, like themselves, living on the margins." In light of this, Lykes and colleagues argue, such migrations can be understood as 'decolonization strategies', whose ultimate goal is to transform oppressive colonial socio-political structures and design new and fairer forms of wealth redistribution.

Rebelo, Abdullah, and Hussein's research also challenges the dominant rhetoric of refugees as resource-poor subjects who can only be passive (and docile) recipient of Western White benevolent assistance. They do so, by putting the focus on their own work as refugee activists (Abdullah and Hussein), and citizens, at the forefront of a refugee solidarity organisation in Portugal. Their participatory action research illustrates the importance of grassroots solidary networks in supporting those who live under subjugated conditions; ~~in~~ challenging the structural violence enacted by state reception systems; and ~~in~~ facilitating the expression of refugees' subjectivities. These networks have the crucial function of creating alternative narratives about refugees, by offering a counterpart to the ~~public-state-sponsored~~ story of 'refugees' 'successful integration' ~~in the country-promoted by the state~~. The authors conclude by arguing the urgent need to transform Portuguese asylum policies and practices, whose gaps are too often filled by grassroots solidarity organisations, like the authors' one. ~~These organisations are indeed the main sources of~~ ~~that provide~~ informative, material and emotional support ~~to~~ ~~for~~ newly arrived refugees. Above all, based on their findings, the ~~authors~~ argue that such a transformative change can only be pursued through the active participation and leadership of refugees themselves; ~~that protagonists who must first need to be~~ acknowledged in their agency and ~~in their~~ right to self-determination and autonomy (including resource control).

Finally, Boochani and colleagues' contribution in this issue emerges from an act of resistance ~~in~~ ~~terms of~~ ~~aimed at~~ challenging and dismantling border narratives. By engaging in an exercise of collaborative writing, ~~that they described~~ ~~described~~ as a 'shared philosophical activity', the authors discuss different strategies of resistance and solidarity deployed by activists, including people with lived experiences, against the border industrial complex. Their discussion focuses ~~in particular~~ on the role of art, literature, and cinema in conveying transformative narratives and enabling the creation of transnational communities of resistance. The authors identify the act of challenging the underlying narrative ~~driving that drives~~ border politics, which they define as the "soul of Manus Prison", as the first and necessary step for dismantling the border industrial complex. Their argument, on which their experimental contribution is rooted, is that in order to succeed in disrupting and transforming the material conditions that allow the existence of border zones and detention centres, "we need to produce some form of epistemic resistance which involves intellectual work in combination with art". Their work ultimately represents an example of this

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form of epistemic resistance, and involves the redefinition of people affected by border violence from ‘victims’ to ‘active survivors’.

5. Concluding remarks: Envisioning a Community Psychology for a borderless world

This special issue highlights the need to understand and address migrants’ voices and struggles within the broader social-political contexts that contour them. This means looking at the complex links between individual and collective experiences of suffering and resistance, as well as at the historical, socio-political, and cultural contexts that contour them. As argued in several contributions, people’s mobility is originated by, and embedded in, long-lasting histories of domination such as colonialism and patriarchy. These histories, and the existential inequalities that derive from them, are central to the meaning people give to their experiences of crossing borders, but also to immigration policies and practices implemented by host societies. Through their decision to cross borders and seek a better life in resource-rich countries that have played (and continue to play) a role in exploiting the wealth of their communities, migrants are also defying and resisting these same histories of oppression (see Lykes, Tavera, Sibley & van Leer in this issue).

According to its tradition, psychology has mostly taken a non-critical, individualistic and homogenous view of mobility, border and border crossing. By focusing on individual trauma and its consequences, this stream of psychological research has overlooked structural factors and their interlocking effects on peoples’ lives, while also failing to understand and address resulting socio-political, cultural, and economic inequalities (Patel, [Kellezi & Williams-et al](#), 2014; Esposito et al., 2015; Tessitore & Margherita, 2017). This scholarship has also largely neglected the position of power from which psychologists speak and act. As a consequence, the ‘expert-subject’ approach adopted in most research and practice has contributed to the systematic undermining of migrants’ voices and insights, as well as the medicalization of their experiences.

The contributions in this issue recognise the limitation and problems of this approach and provide possible tools and evidence for an epistemological shift. In doing so, they also envision possible strategies of solidarity, resistance, and transformative change which are rooted in the values of diversity, justice, empowerment, and liberation. Based on the critical insights provided by the different articles, as well as on the knowledge generated during our own activist research work, we would like to conclude by highlighting some of the main challenges for community psychologists, and psychologists more generally, who want to contribute to a borderless world. Namely these are:

First, there must be a shift in the language and discourses used by psychologists, and in general by all scholars and practitioners who work in this field. Naming is a creative act that is both political and epistemic (Tofighian, 2019). Therefore, a first step for any action envisioning a transformative change is to reject the language of violence and dispossession. For instance, the focus on a ‘migration crisis’ shifts the discourse from the needs and experiences of those on the move to the priorities and concerns of Western countries. This ignores also the historical and current socio-political contexts that define people’s experiences of migration, while also determining their structurally generated decisions and vulnerabilities.

Second, the implications of de-personalized, belittling, and criminalizing accounts should be better understood and addressed. The symbolic representation of migrants as ‘threats’ not only creates racial and nationality-based divisions within our communities, but it also acts as a support for the perpetration of hostile environment policies that limit migrants’ access to rights and resources.

Third, by taking an individualistic view, current psychological research tends to pathologise the response of migrants to the structural and direct violence they experience and does not capture the

active strategies used by these protagonists to challenge their current status and survive (Drury, 2018). Community psychologists, and psychologists more generally, who want to contribute to a borderless world need to put individuals and communities' agency and resistance in the face of complex suffering at the centre of their analysis. Instead of focusing on the vulnerability of migrants, as much psychological research does, it is necessary to ~~study and~~ illuminate the intersecting structural mechanisms that originate it. In doing so, it is also important to acknowledge the different ways in which people are affected by these mechanisms that act differently along lines of gender, sexuality, 'race', class, and disability (among other factors).

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Fourth, as argued by some of our contributors, "solidarity is about doing things with people, rather than 'for' people" (Boochani and colleagues, in this issue). This means that community psychologists, and all those with the privilege of a secure immigration status, can contribute to the formation of spaces dedicated to amplifying the voices and insights of people affected by border violence. This is not about mediating their voices, which can ~~be~~ ultimately ~~be~~ a way of speaking for them, but rather creating conditions for them to be heard, accessing platforms, getting resources, and defining their own agendas in terms of political change. Community psychologists (~~and all other psychologists~~) should stand alongside these protagonists and offer their power and privilege to build strategies of resistance, support, and transformative action.

Fifth, in order to contribute to a borderless world there is a need for psychologists to adopt a radical, rather than reformist, stance. Border violence is structural in its nature and originated by the intersection of different systems of power. Therefore, it is only through a radical critique of these ~~structures of powersystems~~ that a transformative change can be brought about. Psychologists who put their energies into trying to mitigate the effects of border politics, such as those working in detention centres, inevitably face the failure of their efforts ~~despite their~~ ~~regardless of their~~ ~~often~~ genuine intentions. Without the power to shape institutional and socio-political conditions that generate individuals' suffering, as Behrouz Boochani points out, ~~these practitioners~~ ultimately end up contributing to the maintenance and legitimisation of that conditions and the violence ~~they impinge on people's lives~~ ~~they generate~~.

Community psychologists can play a role to support not only those who leave their countries and struggle against the violence of border regimes, but also the families and communities left behind. In creating conditions for the autonomous use of community wealth and social capital (Haslam, Jetten, & Haslam, 2012; Stevenson et al., 2019) psychologists, as Lykes and colleagues argue, can work toward a "right to remain" as a complement of people's "right to migrate". Finally, we believe that there are several steps that can be undertaken to change academia. Community psychologists endowed with the privilege of academic affiliations have the responsibility to create spaces and opportunities for migrants' voices, and their embodied wisdom, to be heard and inform knowledge production. There is a need to disrupt and transform hegemonic ideologies at the roots of academic work. These ideologies are indeed informed by, and in turn reproduce, long-lasting histories of domination and subjugation. In doing so, community psychologists need to envision new alternative and creative forms of knowledge sharing and production.

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These challenges outline a long path to traverse. We hope this special issue can represent a small step in this direction.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the reviewers who generously reviewed the various submissions that we received for the special issue and the Journal's editor, Terri Mannarini, for her support throughout the process. We would also like to thank our colleagues Emilia Bianco, Francesca Tessitore, and Silvia Scirocchi who participated in the Newcastle roundtable that gave origin to this project, as well as Caterina Arcidiacono who first encouraged us to put together this special issue.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge all of those who are struggling against the violence of borders, and share our empathy and solidarity with them.

Funding Details

Francesca Esposito work was supported by the British Academy through the Newton International Fellowship Scheme [reference: NIF\R1\181103].

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