

FIELDWORK REPORT

I completed my field work in Milan for the association *Fondazione Progetto Arca*, which for years has been working in the area with communities at risk, such as homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, whose number in Italy is exponentially increasing every year.

My field work begun in a *Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria – CAS* – for female asylum seekers, whose project provides psycho-social music interventions in a multicultural context of African women from Nigeria, Congo, Ivory Coast, Chad, Somalia and more.

The project was born to support a nursing home for homeless with addictions, and it has developed over the years to provide its services to vulnerable individuals and families, migrants and asylum seekers. The centres – CAS – are supposed to compensate the lack of placements in ordinary reception facilities in case of consistent and close-range migrant landings.

This particular centre was previously used as a senior living facility for local elders, and the introduction of hundreds of individuals of different cultures, religions, languages and ages created a unique social context which brought positive results for both of the parties: the Italian elders and the asylum seekers were indeed peacefully – even if forcedly – coexisting under the same roof despite the cultural differences, breaking down ethnocentric prejudices and barriers.

Our bias are like coloured-filtering lenses which change our way of seeing the world. Being aware of this and understanding how our ethnic positions changes interactions with the others is essential. The group of beneficiaries that I worked with was made of eight girls from 18 to 25 years old. It was a heterogeneous group characterized by cultural, religious and linguistic differences, where six girls from Nigeria, one from Chad and one from Somalia were speaking their own languages, Arabic, French and English.

The goals of the intervention were:

- Encourage emotional and artistic expression in the most spontaneous way
- Protect individuals from multiple emerging risk factors typical in vulnerable community, characterized by high levels of chronic stress and PTSD
- Strengthen self-consciousness, self-esteem and the ability to manage their affections and personal growth
- Enable to express thoughts and feelings concerning past experiences
- Face memories
- Promote resilient actions

A psycho-social music intervention may embrace different expressive activities such as dancing, panting and story-telling, which promote self-esteem and psychological well-being through self-expression and the development of the sense of beauty, fostering at the same time social bonds and social integration.

While dealing with communities at risk, it is essential to stimulate the resilience process through expressive-symbolic and creative activities. In this regard, Muhammad's laboratory *Blindfold Rope Game* led me to reflect on the refugee status, investigating personal and community space based on a relationship of trust (therapeutic alliance). *Inclusive listening* allows to grasp the words of the *others* with an attitude of non-judgmental acceptance, which derives from the *active listen* of facts and experiences.

Resilience is linked to a mental mechanism involved in the creative process: an individual who faces a traumatic situation or event relies on the inner creativity to find a way for overcoming, and a real change requires the identification of satisfactory alternatives deriving from imagination and inventiveness.

Psycho-social music intervention which supports resilience, is a creative channel that embraces the practical aspects of life and existential meanings.

Through music, understood as emotive-cognitive and socializing experience, it's possible to express feelings and sorrow.

Within emergency situations, it is essential to design psycho-social interventions which use art as a therapy. CAS musical experience was allowing refugees to remember and face their stories and past, their origins and their backgrounds.

The internship lasted from October to January for a total duration of 12 meetings, carried out once a week and lasted one hour each.

The meetings were structured in four main moments divided as follows:

- Initial ritual of presentation and greetings
- Laboratory
- Musical improvisation
- Closing ritual and final greetings

Since many of these girls were pregnant women and single mothers, my original plan was to use songs like lullabies, sing-songs and nursery rhymes that they had in their own musical background, in order to investigate their motherhood condition and discover their world of sounds. The project changed when I realized that their musical background was characterized by different types of music, such as Gospel.

The theme underlying each session was: *a song that I bring to my heart wherever I go.*

This allowed the migrants to share previous memories of different nature (melancholy, joy, trauma...) and the sharing moment was the significant part itself: to feel close to someone who has lived similar dramatic experiences such as abuse, mourning and under-aged maternity, it makes the individual feel less alone. Weekly meetings and the involvement in musical activities created a strong sense of community and care within the participants. The most common themes which were faced during the musical improvisation were religion, slavery, motherhood and the water topic – related to the Mediterranean cross.

When I started my internship I was tempted to lead by myself a group of 8 post-adolescent asylum seekers with an unknown and scary experience behind them. The multiculturalism of the group had a positive as well as a problematic side from a facilitator point of view. My perception was as if they were living suspended between the past and the present.

A psycho-social music intervention allows to move the focus on sorrow to the need of facing the sorrow itself through a creative and unconventional way of talking about traumatic events.

One of the biggest challenge was to be able to make the sessions inclusive for all the participants, considering the wide differences and needs which may derive from such a multicultural group.

Another tough challenge that I had to face was to limit and hold emotions and feelings arising from the stories shared during the sessions. Lying on the contrast between the vitality and the positive energy on one hand, and anxiety and depression thoughts on the other, was real and evident, and not easy to manage.

With the time passing by, I observed raising feelings of affection and trust towards myself. I felt honoured to work with and for such resilient women, and it was a real enriching experience from the professional as well as from the human point of view.

The music played together has become themselves *a song that I bring to my heart wherever I go.*



Baby Joy

Claudia Cesana