Abstract

In recent years the question of colonial psychiatry has received a growing attention (Mahone & Vaughan 2007; Keller 2007; Benevelli 2009; Ernst & Muller 2010); the history of psychiatry and the history of colonialism have intertwined and a new subject has entered the field of historiography: it is the peculiar case of a new *otherness* – the lunatic in the colonies – bearing a double “difference”, in which an *alterity* of the “native” at large, is added to a more specific, mental *alienity*.

Situating my intellectual concern of research on the broad “discourse” of colonial sciences – a very coherent one, even if consisting of different disciplines (from anthropology to city planning, from sociology to biomedicine, from linguistics to cartography) and subaltern to a global imperialistic project that had to cover in a hegemonic way every aspect of social life – I will focus on the place occupied by psychiatric theories and practices in *situation coloniale*. In the colonial context psychiatric clinical and institutional apparatus, medical literature and protagonists of the field might be studied taking into exam on the one side the forms of the psychiatric discipline and on the other the forms of colonial governmentality.

My paper will deal with the articulation of these different and connected aspects in the not yet much investigated context of the Italian colonies. It will tackle the function and the functioning of the asylum in the colonies, in its relation with the “social policy” of colonial administrations; the process of theoretic and clinical elaboration and its incorporation into the broader colonial project; but also the trajectories of the protagonists: the *trajectories* of doctors and psychiatrists operating in the colonies, as symptomatic of links and exchanges between the metropolitan centre and the overseas “peripheries” and of a peripherical circulation of paradigms and experiences at the margins of the empires; the transfers or voyages of the patients – Italian or “indigenous” – suffering from mental disorders in the colonial territories, sent to the mother country asylums before the implementation of a system of care *in loco*.

**Keywords:** Psychiatry, colonial psychiatry, asylum, colonial medicine, natives’ medecine.

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