

# heteroglossia



QUADERNI DI LINGUAGGI E INTERDISCIPLINARITÀ.  
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE POLITICHE, DELLA  
COMUNICAZIONE E DELLE RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI.





Heteroglossia n. 15

Percezione ed esperienza del confine

a cura di Hans-Georg Grüning e Mathilde Anquetil

eum

Università degli Studi di Macerata

Heteroglossia n. 15

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Isabella Crespi, Claudia Santoni, Maria Letizia Zanier\*

## Between Genders and Generations: Migration and Families in Contemporary Italy

### *Abstract*

In a worldwide context of growing migration, many studies confirm the central role played by the family in the migration plans and strategies of individuals, that is, the decision to emigrate and how. The family also takes on considerable importance in defining subsequent modifications, such as the length and development of the plan to emigrate. According to the literature and recent studies, we find that the migration experience changes social relationships by especially altering intergenerational and gender roles. The change may be limited to family rules, or be extended to affective gender and generation bonds. The family care function takes place in a new social and cultural environment and family bonds must be reconsidered, in light of the cultural, social and economic features of the hosting country. In this regards, Italy is quite an interesting case because of its long history of migration and its recent role as immigration country. These features are discussed, with particular attention to domestic and care work, and women's (and men's) roles when participating in Italy's labour market. The aim is to focus on the Italian situation in light of the literature and recent sociological research in reference to policies and practices.

### *Riassunto*

In un contesto globale in cui i flussi migratori sono in costante incremento, molti studi confermano il ruolo decisivo svolto dalla famiglia nel decidere i progetti e le strategie individuali, e cioè come e dove migrare. La famiglia assume notevole rilievo anche nella definizione della durata e dell'evoluzione successiva dei progetti migratori. Come mostrano la letteratura tematica e le ricerche recenti, l'esperienza migratoria contribuisce a plasmare le relazioni

\* The three authors conceived of the idea, collected the literature and the references, collected the data, and wrote the paper together. In particular, Isabella Crespi wrote paragraph number 2, Claudia Santoni wrote number 3 and Maria Letizia Zanier number 4. Introduction and conclusions are written together.



sociali, in particolare i rapporti tra le generazioni e i ruoli di genere; tale cambiamento può essere circoscritto alla vita familiare o estendersi ai legami affettivi di genere e intergenerazionali. Poiché le funzioni di cura in famiglia hanno luogo in un ambiente sociale e culturale nuovo, i vincoli familiari devono essere riconsiderati alla luce delle caratteristiche culturali, sociali ed economiche del paese ospitante. L'Italia è un caso di studio interessante per la sua lunga storia di emigrazioni, oltre che per il più recente ruolo assunto come paese di destinazione. Il saggio analizza e discute questi aspetti con una speciale attenzione per il lavoro domestico e di cura e, in generale, per gli effetti della partecipazione delle donne (e degli uomini) al mercato del lavoro autoctono. L'obiettivo è quello di gettare luce sulla situazione italiana nel quadro della letteratura e della ricerca sociologica in tema di migrazioni, politiche e prassi sociali.

### *Introduction*

Family migration has been neglected for a long time by the scientific literature on this topic, since the migration studies put more emphasis on individuals as the object of research, hence giving more importance to economic aspects of migration (Kofman 2004). In contrast, migrations today tend to involve more social, individual and collective actors in a complex system of multi-directional relationships, with multiple places of provenance and destination. Recent studies acknowledge the fact that migration has always been a family project too and that marriage migration constitutes one of the subtypes of family-led-migration (Kofman 2004; Beck-Gernsheim 2007). The family is one of the main integration channels, due to its function of preserving and transmitting cultural and social values. In globalised times, it is also the context in which cultural flexibility, dialogue and negotiation can be expressed (Williams 2010). Therefore, migration should be understood in the frame of family networks and kinship ties (Beck-Gernsheim 2007), since migrant family spaces make it possible for marriage migration to take place. In this sense, family migration can even be seen as a type of chain migration (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2011), or in more up to date terms as a network migration (Williams 2010). Studies of migration to Italy confirm the central role played by the family in the migration plans and strategies of individuals in Italy

(Gozzoli, Regalia 2005; Donati 2007; Zanfrini 2007a, Scabini, Rossi 2008). That is, the decision to emigrate and which family members must, or can, do so. The family takes on considerable importance in defining possible subsequent modifications, such as the length and development of the plan to emigrate. The natural transition process undergone by the family is accelerated: emigration alters marriage and couples' models, ways of living together and forms of cohabitation (Ambrosini, Abbatecola 2010; Crespi 2014). The experience of migration, with its cultural and emotional break-ups, involves the redefinition and reorganisation of networks and relational dynamics, particularly between men and women, mother and father, husband and wife, father and children, mother and children (Monacelli, Mancini 2005; Tognetti Bordogna 2005; Zanfrini 2007b).

Nowadays, is the destination of large migration flows. According to the literature and the recent studies on migration in Italy, we find that the migration experience changes social relationships by altering intergenerational and gender roles. Since family care functions take place in a new social and cultural environment, family bonds must be reconsidered, in light of the cultural, social and economic features of the hosting country. In these terms, Italy is quite an interesting case because of its long history of migration and its recent one as an immigration country. The results of a number of long-term plans to promote integration policies and a multicultural society have so far fallen short. In fact, this country has never had a definite immigration strategy, apart from the attempt to assess the entity of the flows of economic migration and the amnesties to these types of migrants based on the workforce required in the different areas of the labour market (Cesareo 2014; Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS 2015). The changes in relationships may be limited to family roles, or be extended to affective gender and generation bonds. At the same time, increasing transnational family migrations and mixed couples prompt a rethinking of the receiving country's hosting policies and the way its welfare systems are run. In Italy, restrictive immigration laws, along with major limitations on welfare resources, inhibit immigrant families' and particularly women's chances to do better. Gender and intergenerational

differences are the most important aspects (Fouron, Glick Schiller 2001; Pessar, Mahler 2003) that will be discussed in this paper concerning family migration and the influence on gender and generation relationships.

Whether the migrant is a man or a woman makes a great difference in terms of the reconfiguration of family roles and forms, power dynamics and strategies put in place to maximize the benefits of mobility (Yeoh *et al.* 2005). Since gender differences affect not only the migrants, but also have repercussions on the members of the family who are left behind, we will further discuss it in the paper, drawing from recent research. For instance, a wife left behind may have to go live with her in-laws and her husband's extended family, thus setting up a new family form where roles and power dynamics are readjusted (OECD 2008). In other cases, following the migration of their husbands, women left behind start heading their household, with greater responsibilities and a higher vulnerability, yet enjoying more freedom than before.

Another important feature at the individual-subjective level is the shifting power balance in gender relations both in the host and sending country (Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Kofman 2004). But this shift in power balance regarding gender relations turns out to have different outcomes for both sexes. Whereas for the men marrying a woman from the country of origin it might mean a strategy to secure that the accustomed traditional gender roles will not be challenged by the liberal culture of the host country, and they can maintain their traditional (patriarchal) superior position *vis-à-vis* their wives; while for the women, importing a partner from the country of origin is rather related to the hope of acquiring more freedom and power in their marriage, and in some cases it means even a chance of emancipation.

Intergenerational relations will also be taken into consideration in this paper. A growing number of women migrate and leave their older parents and children behind, especially when the destination country does not allow family reunification or when the job that they will take on in the new country (i.e. domestic workers) makes it difficult to have their dependent relatives with them. Typically, these women entrust their children to other women of the extended family who will remain in the country

of origin. The welfare of the members of the families left behind, especially children, calls for a reflection as most migrating mothers usually end up performing vicarious family caretaking duties, while leaving behind vulnerable families. Consequently, another important aspect that characterizes migrant families is the family/work balance in the arrival countries.

This essay intends to review the most recent literature on these aspects regarding the Italian context. After a general overview of the Italian national data regarding migrants, migrant families and gender differences, we then look at the intergenerational 'gendered' ties within the migrant families and in particular the relationship between mothers and daughters that experienced migration. Third, we will focus on a specific aspect of the well-known work-family balance by looking at the daily experience of migrant families in their host countries.

### *1. Migrant Families and Gender Dynamics in Italy: Data, Processes and Trends*

The growing presence of foreigners<sup>1</sup> (ISTAT 2014a), who are often accompanied by their family members, demands a reflection on the family's influence on the process of settling in the host country, and poses crucial challenges as to their reception by, and relationship with, the local population.

Tab. 1. Foreigners (regular and resident) in Italy, men and women, 1981-2016 (Source: ISTAT, various years)

	Men	Women	Total
1981	155,320	165,680	321,000
1991	188,419	660,694	356,159
2001	167,740	674,194	1,334,889
2006	1,350,588	1,319,926	2,670,514
2011	2,201,211	2,369,106	4,570,317
2016	2,381,487	2,644,666	5,026,153

<sup>1</sup> Foreign citizens are considered non-Italian persons having their usual residence in Italy.

There were more than 5 million foreigners living in Italy on 1 January, 2016, that is, 8.3% of the total resident population (ISTAT 2016). The number of resident foreigners since 1981 has increased especially because of immigration (Tab. 1). This category includes all non-EU foreign nationals with a valid residency permit, as well as any under-age children registered on adults' permits. ISTAT expected immigration to reach the conservative figure of about 250,000 a year. However, recently the number of immigrants has grown to between 300,000 and 400,000 a year, suggesting that by 2030 it could be 8,5 million, and that in 2050 the number of immigrants may exceed the 12 million forecast by ISTAT (2011 and 2016).

Tab. 2. Foreigners in Italy by geographical area of origin and gender, 2006-2016

	2006				2016			
	Men	Women	Total	%	Men	Women	Total	%
Europe	575,135	686,829	1,261,964	47.26%	1,080,827	1,539,874	2,620,701	52.14%
Asia	249,943	204,850	454,793	17.03%	540,242	449,196	989,438	19.69%
America	91,599	164,062	255,661	9.57%	143,205	233,351	376,556	7.49%
Africa	432,575	262,413	694,988	26.02%	615,982	420,671	1,036,653	20.63%
Oceania	1,003	1,483	2,486	0.09%	849	1,255	2,104	0.04%
Stateless	333	289	622	0.02%	382	319	701	0.01%

Source: ISTAT 2006-2016, own calculation.

The migration and inclusion models followed by both the different migrant and immigrant communities are based on citizenship and settlement area. As to the latter, in some Northern and Central Italian provinces the foreign presence is well established: there are large numbers of long-term residents, under-age children and people holding family-motivated residence visa. In another group of provinces, especially in the South, there are high quotas of new arrivals compared with the total of regular residents, and a strong presence of women. It thus seems that in many provinces in North-Central Italy a stabilisation process of immigrants has already started, while a fluctuating situation in the South makes (traditional forms of) settlement hard to detect.

Tab. 3. Foreigners in Italy by age and gender, 2006-2016

	2006	2016							
	Men	Women	Total	%	Men	Women	Total	%	Variation
Minors (0-19)	337,222	307,425	644,647	24.14%	608,160	554,110	1,162,270	23.12%	-1.01%
Young (20-34)	463,032	472,047	935,079	35.01%	684,872	705,415	1,390,287	27.66%	-7.35%
Adults (35-64)	526,379	508,530	1,034,909	38.75%	1,028,055	1,277,345	2,305,400	45.87%	7.11%
Old people (65-100+)	23,955	31,924	55,879	2.09%	60,400	107,796	168,196	3.35%	1.25%
Total	1,350,588	1,319,926	2,670,514	100%	2,381,487	2,644,666	5,026,153	100%	

Source: ISTAT 2006-2016, own calculation.

As you can see from Table 3, the numbers of foreigners by age and gender shows that there is a settlement of people and the older generations are increasing more than the younger in the last ten years.

Regarding citizenship, on 1 January, 2011, there were 1 million resident Rumanian citizens (9.1% more than the previous year) making up the largest foreign community in Italy (22% of the total number of foreigners), followed by Albanians (9.3%), Moroccans (8.7%) and Chinese (5.4%) (ISTAT 2016). The number of foreign families in Italy has considerably grown in the last 20 years, which indicates a prevailing family reunion model and/or progressive integration into Italian society. In fact, in 1991 there were 127,000 families entirely consisting of foreigners, which rose to 416,000 in 2001 and 1,617,000 in 2011; when adding mixed families, the total number of families including at least one foreigner is over 2 million. The incidence of mixed families on the total families with a foreign reference person is an important indicator of the level of integration with the local community (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4. Marriages in Italy by geographical distribution and type, year 2013

Geographical distribution	Marriages entirely consisting of Italians	Marriages entirely consisting of foreigners (a)	Mixed marriages (one spouse Italian and one foreign) (b)	Marriages with at least one foreign spouse (a+b)	Total
North-west	37,028	1,981	5,490	7,471	44,499
North-east	26,887	2,357	4,134	6,491	33,378
Center	29,818	2,071	4,536	6,607	36,425
South	50,260	1,066	2,736	3,802	54,062
Islands	23,984	332	1,377	1,709	25,693
Italy	167,977	7,807	18,273	26,080	194,057

Source: IDOS 2015.

Regarding marriages in 2013, there were 18,273 mixed marriages (one Italian, one foreign spouse) in 2013. These represent the majority of marriages (68%). Among mixed couples, the most common were an Italian husband and a foreign wife, forming 78% of the mixed couple marriages (14,783 weddings celebrated in 2013) and 10% of these marriages were celebrated in the North (ISTAT 2014b; Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS 2015).

By analysing the relevant literature (Favaro 2002; Tognetti Bordogna 2004; Scabini *et al.* 2007) it is possible to identify the family migration types found in Italy in relation to reunion strategies and gender roles. Family reunification and its consequences vary according to the family member who is reunified: husband, wife, children or other family members. In this vein, the study of migrants' social networks in general, and the study of transnational family networks and kinship ties in particular, is of major importance.

According to the traditional (male) reunion pathway, the first migrant in a family is the male head of the household, who later organises the arrival of his wife and children. Thus the family reunion takes place under conditions that include its legality in the host country, the immigrant's improved work situation, and the availability of adequate accommodation. Subjective factors that may also influence the decision of reuniting the family include the fear of weakening family bonds

and a need to re-establish roles and relationships – and, with them, the family's equilibrium. This traditional pathway is the most common, in Italy as elsewhere, and is typically found between North-African and Eastern European (especially Albanian), immigrants.

However, in the female reunion pathway the woman is the first to emigrate, and will later organise the arrival of her family in the host country. One difference from the male-managed reunion is that women tend to be better organisers, trying preventive solutions to problems such as children's schooling, their care, learning the new language, etc.: mothers, in fact, tend to get more information, in advance, on the available services. There can also be the issue of a man come to join his wife, who may be unhappy with having to depend on her (at least initially) in the job search, with communication in the foreign language and the experience of the new environment. This female migration pathway is particularly common in Italy, where considerable numbers of female domestic workers have been coming for many years from the Philippines, Cape Verde, Eritrea and Latin America. The formation of a new family unit in the host Country occurs with young, unmarried male immigrants who intend to get back after four or five years.

As the initial plan turns long-term, they become keener to start a family. The men then return home for a short period and marry women usually selected by their relatives. In such cases, the brides have to face the double challenge of taking up new roles in a foreign country, in a context of isolation and loneliness, and overcoming their diffidence towards a husband, they know so little. Because of the hardships of migration, couples seldom arrive together: in fact, only the families forced to emigrate to escape wars, persecutions or natural disasters tend to arrive simultaneously. The typologies described above are bound to produce different integration processes that are, nevertheless, linked to age, ethnic group and gender, as discussed in the next sections.

Job opportunities for women are scarcer than compared with those offered to men; not so much because of gender discrimination in institutional apprenticeship schemes, rather, because women



seem to find it more difficult to participate in training courses. In most cases, therefore, their linguistic and professional skills do not meet work requirements. Thus, women tend to be employed within the domestic sphere. This work environment is obviously less stimulating than that experienced by men, so the women's integration process and proficiency in the Italian language and culture turn out to be slower or non-existent. This accentuates gender differentiation, which, in some cases, means a woman's total submission to her husband. The complementarity of male and female roles, especially if assumed by tradition rather than deliberately chosen, does not create conflict, except in families with second-generation under-age children—in which case, especially if the child is female, the traditional subordination of the mother to the father can cause antagonism between mother/father and daughter. In fact, the girl, who has assumed the Italian culture of equality and self-determination through schooling and peer relationships, may misunderstand her mother's 'choice' and go as far as to totally reject her family's culture of origin. This may cause uneasiness about her own identity and open conflicts with male authority, sometimes with tragic consequences (Favaro 2002; Besozzi *et al.* 2009).

Another interesting aspect is the fact that participation in the life of the host community is profoundly affected by gender differences. Men, in fact, participate in the active life of the host country especially through work, and prefer to spend their leisure time with informal male peer groups of the same ethnic origin (Ambrosini, Abbatecola 2010; Caritas-Migrantes 2013). Women, on the contrary, tend to overcome their initial reluctance and take part in groups or associations run by volunteers and social educators directly connected with the local Social Services. Such associations guarantee a protected, multi-ethnic environment that women first approach with diffidence and circumspection; later, though, these contacts become significant in activating their integration process. These centers help the women acquire the Italian language and culture, thus offering them the opportunity to emerge from the limited environment of the home and look towards the world outside. They also provide creative workshops in which women from different ethnic backgrounds learn to

dialogue with one another, thus gradually achieving self-esteem and autonomy (Andolfi 2003; Di Rosa 2005).

The settlement of individuals in the host country and their changing migration plans and strategies follow multiple pathways: transnational families, family reunions, mixed marriages, correspondence brides, nuclear families and childless couples. This process could highlight some conflicts and differences between the family models in the host country and the new ones from other countries: this could also happen among partners or generations in mixed families (Gritti 2004; Fenaroli, Panari 2006; Crespi 2015).

## *2. Between Mother and Daughter: Intergenerational Changes and Emancipatory Mechanisms of Migrants in Italy*

As already mentioned, the theme of migration as a family event has become pivotal in the literature, with the result that a number of aspects hitherto only implicit in the general interpretation of migratory trends have now emerged. These are changes in parenthood, old and new parental bonds, the education of children and the cultural dimension, as well as affective and gender relationships within the migrant couple. Out of this wide spectrum, we would like to stress here the implications of migration in redefining the roles of first and second-generation women within the family. In fact, the intergenerational and gender relationship between mother and daughter appears to be crucial to the identity negotiations involved in migration.

Italian studies on migration have been slow to approach a gender perspective and for years have only produced descriptive and generic research promoting easy labelling (Tognetti Bordogna 2012). More careful research on micro and meso dimension of family migration – cultural and parental belongings – (Ambrosini, Molina 2004; Zanfrini 2004; Decimo 2005; Cordisco *et al.* 2014) have allowed for the understanding of the intra-family gender dynamics. The family dimension is central to the study of changes in gender roles following the event of migration, especially for the role of mother and daughter. The family reunions activate changes in migration strategies and

favour individual identity changes, in particular identity changes in women.

The gender perspective therefore helps understand the main criticalities of female migrants, both mothers and daughters. The latter tend to be the targets of restraint and social control strategies affirming traditional role expectations. Sometimes, rules on the girls' freedom of action and movement may be stricter than those affecting their contemporaries in the country of origin: forced segregation at home from pre-adolescence; early preparation for marriage and motherhood; restrictions on the frequentation of boys not belonging to the ethnic group of origin; and enhanced social control through male parent figures (fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins) within the immigrant community (Spedicato Lengo *et al.* 2014).

On the other hand, there are many cultural and context variables granting second-generation girls the possibility of an alternative biographical trajectory: the choice of a school and, later, a profession; the relationship with one's ethnic community; a wide friends' network; and the development and change taking place in the country of origin. This frequently neglected aspect (changes in the country of origin) can actually be crucial: the link with the country of origin can in fact enable boys and girls to seek information and to confront themselves with the models proposed in the different contact societies, where gender is regarded as a relevant aspect (Colombo 2010; Tognetti Bordogna 2012).

One of the changes displayed by second-generation women is their higher level of education. In many emigration countries, especially Bangladesh and Pakistan, educational opportunities for girls are limited and their access is very difficult. Second-generation girls in Italy spend more time in education, scoring higher than boys. These girls show a high individual potential and are ready to take any opportunities for improvement as are afforded for upward school mobility (Attias-Donfut 2012; Torrioni 2012). In fact, thanks to their educational progress, the second-generation girls can be expected to access types of employment denied to the previous generation of women, because of constraints in both the structure of the Italian labour market and the culture of their own community. Encouraged by bilingualism and higher

educational qualifications, second-generation girls can aspire to employment outside care work in order to acquire greater social recognition and financial independence. Therefore, it is very important to fight school disparities of foreign students. These disparities act on two levels: a vertical level— levels of education achieved by individuals from different social and cultural origins – and a horizontal level – formative concerns chosen at the same conditions of level of education. On this latter aspect, the Immigration Statistical Dossier 2015 denounces the high figure of foreign-born adolescents enrolled in professional schools. During the 2014/15 school year, the national average was 36.9% of foreign students enrolled. A worrying fact because of the low possibility for social advancement that this school permits in Italy. Changes in life expectancy among parents and children in the country of emigration, especially between mothers and daughters, start directly from educational levels. Among the first-generation of women, there are still high levels of professional inactivity rates. Their daughters can facilitate, with a prolonged school socialization, social inclusion mechanisms and aspire to greater autonomy.

Within the social inclusion process of first and second-generation women (that is, respectively, mothers and daughters), an important role is played by the linguistic cultural capital (before and after migration). Learning a second-language can facilitate the inclusion process of first-generation women. In fact, whilst second-generation women enjoy the advantage of prolonged school socialization, their older counterparts can benefit from specific, secondary circuits, which are now numerous, yet not diffusely present throughout Italy. Second-language learning, especially when accompanied by teaching methods involving self-narration, can be key to developing communication and self-expression (Cognigni, Santoni 2015). It is crucial for migrant women to find learning spaces to construct an identity that may accommodate what they used to be and what is expected of them (Minuz 2005; Favaro 2015).

In fact, for first generation women learning the second-language and its experimentation break the relational isolation. In particular, recent studies on Asian immigrants in Italy (ORIM

2012) have highlighted the presence of a vast female world, first generation women reunified of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin, who live long, social and relational isolation. For these women, the home is the only life and social space. Their poor knowledge of Italian, (acquired both late and discontinuously), low educational level, lack of professional qualifications, as well as the fact that their close relational networks are limited to generating interethnic solidarity, are all factors inhibiting their social participation in the host country.

To break this isolation, seeking new social contacts and re-processing the detachment from one's roots are essential stages for first-generation women seeking inclusion. They must often adapt to a Western female model that is profoundly different from that of their society of origin, without any confrontation or interchange, and this may hinder their identity change; this particularly affects Asian first generation women (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS 2013). When thinking of integration policies, local institutions must consider that all actions aimed towards including migrant women involve boosting their role as mediators between the second-generation and socialization agencies (Tognetti Bordogna 2005 and 2012). In order to fully perform this function, they would have to share citizenship spaces and practices in which to express themselves and their culture. Living in a multicultural environment stresses the need for one's identity to be acknowledged – a need shared by all women, whether immigrant or native (Parreñas Salazar 2001a). The interchange and the confrontation between Italian and foreign women more fully reflects social inclusion and equal opportunity processes in the host country. This is crucial to mono-ethnic migrant women who have no financial or linguistic autonomy, a case exemplified by a study on reunified Bangladeshi women in Milan (ORIM 2012).

Yet, emigrating to a Western society is not enough to trigger change, also in the emancipatory sense, for migrant women. Second generations are naturally open to change and to wanting to live according to the context in which they have reached adulthood. Their becoming adults involves a toilsome transcultural self-construction, an identity process taking place between their country of origin – present through folktales and

the family stories transmitted through the maternal line – and the host country, in an attempt to renegotiate loanable cultural models. As sexual and gender roles are influenced by the culture of the host country, second-generation girls must find a new balance thanks to which behaviour patterns can be altered whilst preserving ethnic identity (Schimmenti, D’Atena 2008). The transition from the first to the second-generation always produces an identity break-up: discontinuity with the idea of a unifying collective identity can be cognitive, behavioral and social (Demarie, Molina 2004). Gender identity and the specific nature of biographies indicate aspects of both continuity and break-up with the previous generations (Marmocchi 2014). The second generations’ cultural diversity should be valorised at school by developing more learning opportunities based on reflexivity, in order to include different cultural categories (Portera 2013) and the multiple diversities existing within different socialization contexts, structured on three levels: language, culture, gender.

Within the family, mothers’ biographies clash with their daughters’, often highlighting the contrast between past, present and future life models (Pinter 2011). The mother has to live with the pain of being removed from her original bonds and the discontinuity of her relationship with the society of origin: this detachment is emotional before it is cultural, and is often bridged through the proximity to the community of origin in the host country. This formula produces protection together with isolation, support together with control, help but also little autonomy. Migrant mothers have to face a huge educational challenge: to move in a different socio-cultural context, full of contradictions with their original one, whilst preventing this psychological and emotional condition from being interpreted by their daughters as confusion: this would in fact jeopardise the mothers’ educational authoritativeness and emotional support. The mother manages to take on the two-fold role of depositary of the family’s memory and that of *empowered parent* (Maher 2011), that is, one able to alter the traditional parental role. For example, mothers could become temporary breadwinners in their own country, while waiting for the family’s reunification, or new, more dynamic symbolic personalities in the host society

after the reunification. These aspirations suggest the importance of using innovative analytical criteria that may hold together the subjective and the family migration plans. In particular, generational changes between mothers and daughters could be understood in different perspective that includes local, national and transnational level of migration.

Migration creates a tension in family bonds, thus triggering unprecedented events that become interwoven with the traditional elements in the family's inner structure. Resisting change is fuelled by continual contact with one's country folk, a daily presence implying support, as well as control and conditioning. This situation, which seems not to apply to the younger generations, is sometimes inevitable for first-generation women, even though some of them actually leave their countries in order to escape social control. Even among the reunited, much depends on employment type, education and ethnic group (Selmi 2013).

Besides highlighting the criticalities in the issues at stake, it is also necessary to promote comprehensive analyses and studies presenting multiculturalism, a gender perspective and the extension of human rights in a globalized scenario (Moller Okin 2007). Comparing women from different parts of the world with native ones can be crucial to this research in Italy. The first generation of migrant women developed interesting strategies for integration and promotion of their own condition and for their daughters too. To favour more effective inclusion processes into Italian society, within and outside the migrants' families, an intercultural dialogue among women from different cultures must begin.

### *3. Doing Gender in Migrant Households: Gender and Parental Balance Within and Without the Family*

Women's experiences in migrations are strongly influenced by their social class, education, age, nationality and geographical area. Globalisation has made certain groups of women more vulnerable to economic and social exploitation. Although migrants rarely come from the poorest areas of the world and not necessarily from the weakest social strata, women, more

than men, tend to be economically and socially exploited in the host countries. This is due to the fact that they often work in subordinate positions: a good example is that of co-resident caregivers and domestic workers, whose situations are often irregular and insecure (Triandafyllidou 2013). In this sense, one emerging topic are the changes in the concept and management of the female roles in the arrival countries in relation to those of native women. This issue becomes even more crucial when we are faced with transnational families, where women take on the role of breadwinners.

The fact that foreign women tend to be employed in care work – where they substitute Western women – must be reconsidered in issues like family-work reconciliation, as well as parental, ethnic-cultural and gender balance within and without the family sphere (Piperno, 2007; Ambrosini *et al.* 2010). This is particularly remarkable in Italy, where a familistic welfare model imposes on families to care and assist young children, the elderly and the disabled (Catanzaro, Colombo, 2009). Migrant women provide welfare to the two sides of migration processes (Piperno, Tognetti Bordogna 2012). If analytical paradigms may differ, social scientists agree on the mutual influence of migration processes and other social phenomena in the origin and destination countries, including the incorporation process into the hosting society (Grillo, Pratt 2002). In Southern European societies, the rapid transformations in women's role and position (increased participation in paid work, birth rate decline and ageing) has proceeded further and faster than in other parts of Europe. At the same time, the inadequate development of accessible and appropriate social infrastructures caused what King and Zontini (2000) called an 'imperfect transition to gender'. From a macro-sociological perspective, migrations, including female and family ones, are defined by a number of structural aspects, such as, on the side of the countries of origin (the supply side of work), expanding capitalism, disintegrating communities, rising employment figures with a simultaneous increase in poverty, and the exploitation of natural and human resources by Western countries. To these we must add the personal, emotional and relational impoverishment suffered especially by the female



population, often removed from their children and families of origin for long stretches of time for economic reasons (but not only). As already mentioned, there is an increase in foreign women aspiring to work in the field of local care: they accept small salaries, often under irregular working conditions, co-living with employers, saving money rather consistently and sending more remittances to men, within an actual 'globalisation of care work' (Ehrenreich, Hochschild 2003; Scrinzi 2003; Lutz 2008; Ambrosini *et al.* 2010). Unlike their wealthy Western counterparts, women from poorer countries are forced to a painful choice between living with their families and sustaining them financially. In several countries (for instance, Sri Lanka, Mexico, the Philippines and others) transnational motherhood is assuming a crucial importance, as traditional gender role concepts are affected by the redistribution of domestic (care) and paid work. In the case of low-income mothers migrating from many non-Western countries, usually other women (not the men) take care of their children. This represents the, so far poorly analyzed, dark side of the care drain in developing countries by the rich West (Piperno 2007).

Observing the phenomenon from the perspective of the destination countries (the demand side), some structural features of Western societies, already partially mentioned above, attract substantial flows of foreign women. Middle class Western families depend on the care work of migrants. Western women, in fact, can emancipate themselves from domestic tasks and care work to focus on more attractive working careers outside the home by exploiting the less fortunate migrant women (Andall 2000; Anderson 2000; Parreñas Salazar 2001a). Especially in Mediterranean Europe, native women, including those in paid work, must cope with an increased workload due to inequality in the allocation of domestic tasks between partners. In addition, when there are elderly in the family welfare systems are inadequate. In Italy, this phenomenon is associated with the deep crisis facing the familistic welfare model, where resources (often scarce) are allocated to the families to independently resolve the

problem of elderly care (Scrinzi 2008; Bonizzoni, Cibeà 2009; Esping-Andersen 2009; Bonizzoni, 2013)<sup>2</sup>.

Recent studies have addressed the importance of individual and family factors through the interpretive framework of migration networks, in an attempt to overcome the concept of migrants as passive subjects. (Arango 2000; Stocchiero 2007). In contrast with the past, there are now women embarking on autonomous migratory projects, real breadwinners able to pursue social mobility paths for themselves and their families. Focusing on the case of Filipino women in the United States and in Italy, Parreñas Salazar (2001a, 2004 and 2008) shows that their migration strategies are aimed at minimising costs and maximising success expectations in globalised economies by dividing the risk between country of origin and country of destination.

There are lights and shadows in these scenarios, with migrant women seeking a difficult balance between their family of origin, personal identity and 'adoption' abroad, with caring for their children as central. Affective-emotional relationships with the locals, such as the employing families, are fraught with difficulties. Some of the carers' sense of loneliness and psychological and/or physical distress can be exacerbated by co-living with their employers. Domestic space becomes the scene of interactions and, often, disputes between natives and immigrants, thus promoting cultural stereotypes and unbalanced power relations (Zanier 2006 and 2012).

Working outside the home is also accompanied by new challenges: for most women the problem is how to balance managing domestic responsibilities and negotiating their relationships with spouses, children, and extended family members. If migrant women become the main breadwinners in their families, the gender and parental roles change. In the country of origin, transnational maternity is often experienced as the abandonment of one's children, since women are seen to abdicate their most natural and socially important female role.

<sup>2</sup> The decline of traditional models is accompanied by an evolution towards smaller family groups. A long-term demographic crisis has caused a drastic drop in fertility rates, the gradual ageing of the population and longer life expectancy, thus prompting an increase in the demand for care services.

Families tend to break up because of long absences and the change in the gender role balance (Triandafyllidou 2013). Likewise, the perception of a symbolic and normative violation may also emerge in the host country (these women are represented as irresponsible mothers in pursuit of material fulfilment). Migrant paternity, on the other hand, is never regarded as child neglect, since a man is traditionally expected to fulfil his breadwinner role. In the case of recomposed families with working mothers, it is not always easy to renegotiate the traditional gender and generation roles within the household because of the women's entering the labour market.

The question is, therefore, the perception of those roles in cross-cultural contexts and their adaptation to social change. As mentioned above, gender and generation roles and relationships in the migrants' countries of origin undergo important transformations as female migration increases. This happens especially when a woman emigrates alone and takes on a breadwinner role for her family back home. Even when she follows a man, her experiences continue to be different from the male ones. Whilst husbands prioritise economic and material functions within the household, and by these they fulfil their traditional tasks, mothers tend to emphasise the emotional, intimate side of their relationship with their children even when they work outside the home and away from their families. Therefore, transnational male and female parental role models diverge profoundly<sup>3</sup>.

If mothers emigrate alone, their newly found financial independence and resulting self-awareness can jeopardise the perception of the male authoritativeness of the fathers who have stayed at home. This is typical of patriarchal societies, such as those in countries from where many women migrate to the West. This phenomenon contributes to undermining marriage and, in many cases, encourages the women not to return to their country of origin, or to postpone family reunion in the host country. Many leave because they do not have a partner and are divorced, widowed or single mothers (Ambrosini *et al.* 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the Italian case, see for example Bonizzoni 2007; Boccagni 2008.

Transnational maternity implies a reconsideration of current parental role patterns. The ideal of an exclusive maternity, a normative model for Western middle-class women, cannot be extended to women who are poverty-stricken or coming from underprivileged societies. Therefore, a 'good mother' does not fulfil her parental roles just by her physical presence in the family and care of children but also by providing for their financial needs, from a more or less temporary distance. According to Trask (2014), female breadwinning could become, in this way, an integral aspect of the idea of maternity, thus questioning traditional resistance.

There are difficulties linked to the promotion of migration policies increasingly tending to close Western frontiers. In Italy, like in other European countries, the illegal situation forces many transnational mothers into hinders their integration, as well as the possibility of maintaining the relationship with their children and family back home (Bonizzoni 2013). Travelling home to visit relatives becomes less frequent, due to financial reasons and, especially, the risk of being exposed as illegal immigrants. Restrictive immigration laws actually limit these women's chances to 'do gender' (Zanier 2012). According to Zontini (2010), in Southern Europe reception policies are often in tension with the aim of establishing transnational motherhood and the desire to live in the destination country. In fact, policy measures mostly tend to over-simplistically see migrants as inevitably 'excluded' and in need of being 'integrated' in the local society<sup>4</sup>. Rules on family immigration have become particularly rigid which actually favours informal reunions (Carling *et al.* 2012). This causes immigrant couples to live in fear of being expelled and that, consequently, the family might be divided again<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Eg. the recent international literature on Filipinas describes them as transnational migrants condemned to a situation of 'partial citizenship' (Parreñas Salazar 2001b) and 'provisional diaspora' (Barber 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Typically, at least one of the two spouses is irregular, more often men (Ambrosini 2013; Bonizzoni 2013).

## *Conclusions*

Immigration involves different subjects and creates new demands and needs within the family unit and in the sphere of public services. The migrant family's role in its integration process can be assessed from different viewpoints. First of all, in terms of time and migration planning: the transformation from provisional to permanent takes place because of the family and for the family; in terms of space, the presence of children growing up in the new environment continually shifts the family's symbolic, emotional and financial investments from the country of origin to the host country. To talk about immigrant families as homogenous social subjects, however, is abstract and incorrect: every one of these families is a world of its own—a microcosm made of bonds and foundation stories, roles and resources, affections and events. In any case, the family is the place where internal solidarity is reorganised and priorities are redefined according to the available resources. Thanks to its natural bridging function between individual and society, the family can play the essential role of facilitating the integration of its members in the host country. One difficulty, however, has been detected in the need to harmonize the culture of origin with that of the new society.

According to the literature and the recent studies that focus on the Italian reality – currently a country of destination with large migration flows – we find that the migration experience changes social relationships by altering intergenerational (parental) and gender roles. As the family care function takes place in a new social and cultural environment, family bonds must be reconsidered, in light of the cultural, social and economic features of the hosting country. At the same time, increasing transnational family migrations and women migrating alone as breadwinners for their families prompt a rethinking of the receiving countries hosting policies and the way its welfare systems are run. In Italy, restrictive immigration laws, along with strong limitations in welfare resources, inhibit immigrant women's chances to do gender.

In terms of globalization and global policy, the interdependence between welfare systems and the consequent drain of resources

and care from emigration countries by Western Europe is increasingly emerging. The most vulnerable subjects within familiar contexts of origin are children and the elderly: figures who will most suffer from the welfare drain. However, this mechanism may be counterproductive for destination countries. In fact, it is short-sighted to pass on welfare costs to third world countries, without noting that the deterioration of social conditions in origin countries eventually affect social conditions in arrival countries.

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