Between Recognition And Betrayal
The Migrant Man in the Mixed Couple: The Management of Masculinity(ies)

Francesco Cerchiaro
University of Padova, Italy

Abstract:

This paper is based on the life stories of couples, of which the man is an immigrant, originally from countries with Muslim traditions, now married to an Italian woman. Such mixed couples, over-exposed to the public discourse on *difference*, give us a privileged focus on an atypical form of male migration, which breaks the endogamic rule due to a sentimental choice. The reconciliation among themes of migration, memory and parenting is framed within a further complexity. On one hand, the men try to distance themselves from the hegemonic public discourse which associates Muslim men with religious fundamentalism, sexism, and control over women; on the other hand, they must demonstrate to their families of origin and to co-nationals that they have not betrayed their culture by crossing boundaries - either geographically, through migration, or symbolically, through their union with Italian women. Focusing on two meaningful everyday scenarios, this paper highlights one of the peculiarities of the biographical trajectory of male partners, analysing their management of masculinity: the visit of couples to their partners' country of origin and their relationship with co-nationals within the context of migration. Masculinity thus appears in relational processes performed by the social actors involved in its construction. New paths of masculinity emerge: *strategic*, in their attempt to find a new balance within the family context, and at the same time *flexible*, to create new kinds of friendship networks.

Key words: Mixed marriages, Christian-Muslim couples, Muslim masculinity, migrant men.

Tanınma Ve İhanet Arasında
Karşıcins Çiftlerde Göçmen Erkek: Erkeklik(ler)in Yönetimi

Francesco Cerchiaro
Padua Üniversitesi, İtalya

Özet:

Bu yazı, erkeklerinin göçmen olduğu, aslen Müslüman geleneklerin hâkim olduğu ülkelerden geldiği ve şu an İtalyan kadınlarla evli olduğu çiftlerin yaşam hikâyelerine dayanmaktadır. Kamusal söylemlerde *farklılık* vurgusunun sıkça yapıldığı bu tür karşıcins çiftler bize duygusal tercihleri içermesi dolayısıyla içevliliği yıkan, erkek göçünün tipik olmayan bir formuna odaklanabilme olanağı sağlar. Göç, bellek ve ebeveynlik temaları arasındaki uzlaşma yeni bir karmaşa içerisinde çerçevelendirilir. Öte yandan erkekler kendilerini Müslüman erkeği dini tutuculuk, cinsiyetçilik ve kadın üzerinde tahakkümle ilişkilendiren egemen kamusal söylemlerden uzak tutmaya çalışır. Diğer taraftan geride bıraktıkları ailelerine ve vatandaşlarına sınırı geçip -coğrafi olarak- göçle veya -sembolik olarak- İtalyan bir kadınla evlenerek onlara ihanet etmediklerini kanıtlamalıdır. Bu yazı erkek partnerlerin biyografik gidişatlarındaki bu alışılmamışlığın altını, onların erkekliği yönetme biçimlerini inceleyerek çizecek ve iki anlamlı gündelik senaryoya odaklanacaktır: Çiftlerin memleketlerini partnerleriyle birlikte ziyareti ve göç bağlamında vatandaşlarıyla olan ilişkileri. Böylece erkeklik, kendi inşasına karışan toplumsal aktörler tarafından performe edilen ilişkisel bir süreç içerisinde görülmektedir. Bu da erkekliğin yeni yollarını ortaya çıkarmaktadır: aile bağlamı içerisinde bir denge kurma çabası sebebiyle *stratejik* ve aynı zamanda yeni arkadaşlık ağları kurabilmek için *esnek*.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karşıcins çiftler, Hristiyan-Müslüman Çiftler, Müslüman erkeklik, göçmen erkekler.

Introduction

This paper examines the life stories (Bertaux 1981, 1998) of couples, of which the man is an immigrant, originally from countries with Muslim traditions, now married to an Italian woman[1]. One of the essential aspects which make Christian-Muslim couples particularly interesting for sociological analysis lies in their relationship with the social context, in which the concepts of heterogamy and homogamy, endogamy and exogamy, are constructed and legitimated. The social construction of *difference* implies that cultural and religious characteristics work as boundaries between the social groups to which the partners belong. As several disciplines are involved in the concept of *mixité conjugale* - sociology, anthropology, literature, linguistics, psychology, statistics and jurisprudence - mixed marriages have become an interdisciplinary object of study. According to Varro (2003), the concept of *mixité conjugale* (marital mixedness) represents a limitation to the family sphere of the much broader concept of *mixité*, which involves the whole of society. *Mixité* refers to several concepts and enters many debates on identity and culture, integration and assimilation, citizenship, nation and nationality. Studies of mixed marriages have adopted several approaches, most of which are based on the poorly defined idea that a mixed marriage is some kind of monolithic

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[1] The paper was composed from material acquired during my PhD (2009-2012), which examined the processes of *mixité conjugal* in the life stories of 15 mixed couples. Participants' observations and qualitative interviews were the results of more than 50 meetings with families living in various parts of the Veneto region, north-east Italy. Individual interviews with their partners and sometimes also their children, and other key interviewees, such as relatives and friends, were conducted in the participants' homes. In view of the particular nature of the Muslim presence in Italy, characterised by various fragmented ethnic groups, I decided not to limit the field of study to one ethnic group, but to maintain the complexity of the identification of "being a Muslim in Italy", examining the inner complexity of Islam described in "L'Islam in Italia" (Saint Blancat 1999). In order to differentiate the groups of interviewed couples, I then examined this heterogeneity, choosing couples in which the male partner came from Morocco (6), Palestine (2), Senegal (2), Egypt (1), Lebanon (1), Kashmir (1), Syria (1) and Turkey (1).

entity[2]. Qualitative studies on these couples' everyday lives may open up new perspectives, going beyond the rigid concept of identity and religion, and exploring what multiculturalism is producing in a growing number of mixed couples and families (Barbara 1993; Froese 2008; Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; Cerchiaro et al. 2015).

A sentimental union becomes "mixed" only relatively and contextually, not objectively and autonomously, in the social context in which it originates (Bertolani 2001). The so-called Christian-Muslim couple represents an emblematic case study within the phenomenon of "mixed" couples, since it is linked to an implicit macro-dimension which assimilates differences called "strong" in the public discourse on the family social space (Saraceno 2007).

This work analyses the asymmetric relationships which couples produce and represent: migrant men and their Italian partners combine to create the macro-relation between the Italian/Veneto context and that of emigration. In this sense, studying mixed couples offers a privileged focus on an atypical kind of male migration which breaks the endogamic rule by following a sentimental choice. This paper examines the processes of masculinity construction on the part of the migrant partner, in order to throw light on his personal experience of diaspora"[3]. It also aims at understanding to what extent the relationship with a partner from a hegemonic culture influences the attribution of meanings to a man's sense of his masculinity. The macro-discourse on Muslim masculinity thus identifies an element which can significantly orient the system of partners' mutual expectations and the construction of *difference* of the couple within the Italian social context.

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[2] The concept of "mixed" has often been approached (and reified) as a single phenomenon, assuming that partners with different religious backgrounds constitute mixed marriages by definition (Kalmijn 1991; Breger and Hill 1998; Kulczycki and Lobo 2002).

[3] The concept of diaspora is linked to the capacity for managing a specific relationship with the host society and, at the same time, "distancing from the society of origin in order to choose integration strategies and the identification and socialisation criteria" (Saint Blancat 1995:17).

As Ryan and Webster (2008) pointed out: "[...] while mainstream theorizations of migration may assume a male migrant, his masculinity is simply taken for granted, rather than being a focus of analysis and research. [...] Men's relationships with women, in families, workplaces, in the host and native society are important to an understanding of how identities are formed and developed over" (ibidem: 5). The impact of migration on men and masculinities significantly contributes to extending the understanding of gender and migration issues (Kofman 2004; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Ryan and Wester 2008). Therefore, understanding the specificity of the male partner's experience means that we can frame men's studies within the analysis of masculinity construction processes within this already consolidated branch of gender studies[4]. On an international level, several empirical researches and theoretical reflections have focused on the analysis of virility and masculinity representations in relation to social and cultural changes in a given social context. These researches have also focused on the plural aspects of the "gender crisis", especially in cases when the traditional conception of male identity has suffered the strongest repercussions (Kimmel 1987; Le Mosse 1996; Hearn 1998; Levant 1997; Hopkins 2006, 2009; De Sondy 2014). Masculinity, observed both as a lens of analysis and as a context, emerges as psychic and social identity (Tosh 1996). It is neither genetic nor fixed by social structure, but is socially constructed

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[4] I use the term *men's studies* to refer to the "study of masculinities and male experiences as specific and varying social-historical-cultural formations" (Brod 1987: 40). *Men's studies* have rapidly developed, especially in the last 15 years, and have almost exceeded quantitatively *women's studies*, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon and American cultures, although they are still not widespread in Italy, with the exception of the works of Bimbi and Castellano (1993), Ventimiglia (1994), Bellassai (2004), Dell'Agnese and Ruspini (2007). *Men's studies* appeared in the US and UK in the mid-1970s, focusing on the critical literature of the male experience in Western societies. The early researches on masculinity were methodologically influenced by *women's studies*. Development and diversification gradually began during the 1980s: reflections on the body, paternity, couple relationships, male cultures in the military and sports environments, literature and mass culture, have all entered the "literature on masculinity" (Tosh 1996: 69). From the 1990s onwards, masculinity, as an interpretative category, has also significantly developed from a publishing point of view.

through the actions and resources of men in a certain social contexts (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005); masculinity becomes visible when it is perceived as a problem, challenged by the hegemonic struggle between greater cultural models (Connell 1995); it also changes from one culture to another and within the same culture, during the life of a man and among differing groups of men (Connell 1995; Kimmel and Messner 2001; Hopkins and Noble 2009).

I also analyse here narratives[5] in which masculinity construction processes emerge, considering not only recounted by men, but also by family members involved. Hence, I refer to a reflection by Pascoe (2007: 5-6), who criticises the fact that sociologists have often approached masculinity by focusing their analysis only on the male body among men. Instead, Pascoe believes that masculinity appears in the relationship with a "multiplicity of bodies, spaces and objects" (ibidem: 9) which actively define and construct it in a choral process. In order to understand masculinity, we must go beyond the bounds of the same field of analysis to which it has often been confined.

This study focuses on two particularly significant everyday scenarios which emphasise the variety of aspects linked to masculinity construction processes (unmasked men) and relationships with their original communities in the migration context (suspected of betrayal).

Masculity and Islam: the public discourse on Muslim men

Analysis of these couples' experiences is a privileged *locus* in which to understand the mechanisms of identity construction, cohabitation, alliances and common meanings created by partners. Increasing interest in the intersection of interpretative levels which combines analysis on masculinity with the themes of migration and religion has appeared in

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[5] Discussions with the 15 'mixed couples' studied here were originally transcribed in Italian. Since in many cases the immigrant men's spoken Italian was very poor, the English translation reflects the imperfections of their speech.

recent studies, filling the gap in the "under" theorisation of this new research field (Archer 2001; Ouzgane 2006; Hopkins 2006; Nilan et al. 2007; De Sondy 2014).

At the centre of the hegemonic discourse on phenomena linked to migration, there are now migrants from countries with Muslim traditions. Scholars such as Allievi (2003), Pace (2004), Guolo (2004) and Roy (2007) deconstruct the hegemonic discourse focusing on Muslims' identities perceived as a "problem" *a priori*. The permeability of "their" cultural model and relationships with the cultural and religious pluralism of the Muslim "Western" community are discussed here. Comparisons with other cultural codes emblematically include the problem of gender and, consequently, the interpretation of identity and redefinition. This complexity in particular characterises the definition of the self created by men from Muslim countries in a context which includes, on the one hand, the "Islam of the flesh" (Allievi 2002: 18), composed of varying biographical directions and, on the other, the representation of monolithic and unchangeable identities linked to that interpretation of Islam with the Koran as the sole source of rigid gender models (Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb 2000, Mernissi 2001; Ouzgane 2006; De Sondy 2014).

The strategies adopted by Muslims to face the public discourse which often represents Muslim women as passive victims of a patriarchal and fundamentalist Islam (Dwyer 1998; Mernissi 1992, 2001; Hopkins 2006; Hopkins and Noble 2009; Salih 2009), emblematically question masculinity as a key issue in understanding the life stories of these men, now married to Italian women.

Except for the work by Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb (2000), Ouzgane (2006), and De Sondy (2014) are the only scholars who have so far systematically explored Muslim masculinity, putting it at the centre of the wider discussion on Islam fragmentation and the Muslim community. According to the latter authors, this discourse often implies a monolithic concept of Muslim masculinity, opposed to the alleged and often essentialised Western masculinity.

Lahoucine Ouzgane (2006) states: "The dominant masculinity within Islam cultures has remained for a long time a non-recognised category, which maintains its power precisely in the refusal to recognise itself" (ibidem: 88). *Islamic masculinities*, by collecting multidisciplinary works all having a constructionist approach, examine the different aspects of masculinity in several Muslim societies, from Pakistan to North Africa, from Turkey to Yemen. Their works demonstrate how gender roles within Muslim cultures have been created by a mixture of components which refer more to patriarchal cultures prior to Islam, rather than to rigid interpretation of the Koran.

In his recent work, De Sondy (2014) extends the rigid concepts of masculinity inherent to the Muslim world, showing how they have generated a crisis of global Muslim communities and have been used, through a debate on God and women, to produce and reproduce rigid gender roles in the (failed) search for a "single Koranic masculinity" (ibidem: 91). Focusing on the Indian and Pakistani examples, De Sondy shows on the one hand the variety of spiritual paths inherent to Islam and, on the other, the political distortion of Islam theology which considers only one type of masculinity and femininity to be "right" or "wrong" . The same concept of "submission to God" and the religious identities of Muslims' definitions and perceptions have therefore been manipulated: "Such narrow interpretations of submission to God by some have demoralised many Muslim men and women who have been forced to accept that their spiritual existences are in some way inferior. This has led many to label themselves as secular or nonreligious Muslims [...]" (ibidem: 180).

The construction of *female* and *male*, the main irreducible difference of every couple, in this case reaches a deeper degree of complexity and self-reflection, since processes of *mixité conjugale* force partners to discuss what "*taken for granted"* means.

Unmasked men?

The visit of the couple to the husband's country of origin is emblematic of a pivotal step, in which the system of expectations of "masculinity partner" emerges. There are not only the Italian partner's expectations; there are also those of the man's family. Referring to some everyday episodes, the couple recall their lives with the interviewer, who represents the hegemonic context of migration. In these narratives, identity is clearly at stake, and the actors' performance gives it meaning. The partners show the performing aspect of identity, in which *doing gender* (West and Zimmerman 1987) emerges as role-play and a balancing of interests, created as a result of perceptions and interactions with the *alter*. As Larner (1993) noted: "Life course events and transitions usually involve a change in social roles and situations, often altering the basis for the social relationships that were formed in the context of the role" (ibidem: 182).

In this way, the symbolic struggle between the partners' cultural worlds takes place within the gender arena. In the following narration, the *alter* representations, in the performances of Mohammed and Giovanna, create a sociologically extraordinary picture. Round the kitchen table, the division of housework and expectations regarding family gender roles construct the traditional gender relationships which Giovanna refuses to accept. By behaving in this way, she breaks and changes the rituality of a "taken for granted" situation in her husband's family and country.

> Giovanna: The first time in Morocco for me was a devastating experience. Well ...I cried a lot. It was a tragedy for me. I did not expect something like this and, after all, we never spoke about these things before. It was worse than the worst of the worst...I had never imagined. [...] He has got two sisters and five brothers. The first time I went there everybody was in the house around the table for lunch. Men didn't move a finger...and when they said "I'm

thirsty"...their sisters run to bring them a glass of water. Well ... I saw women who worked very hard while men...women served men in everything. Everything. In conclusion. I did not accept what I saw.

Interviewer: Have you ever talked about these things before your journey?

Giovanna: Listen... I've always had the impression that Mohammed wanted to keep things separated...probably because he knew that to see these dynamics was dangerous for me...so I insisted at that time to meet his family in Morocco. Here you are. We stayed there for a month... and it was a traumatising month.

(Giovanna)

The narration clearly introduces us to two important aspects. Mohammed, in Giovanna's words, tends to manage cultural divergences by separating them, in order not to be obliged to face his wife's opposition. Giovanna's performance is also characterised by the claim of differentiation against the gender relationships implied in her husband's family.

In his tale, Mohammed refers to the same episode to explain his specific "suffering" as a Moroccan man married to an Italian woman. He describes how the first meeting between his wife and her family represented a conflict in the management of gender relationships taken for granted in both Italy and Morocco.

The dichotomy represented by the role interpretation of a "Moroccan man" and an "Italian woman" is explicitly interiorised and narrated to illustrate how two social interactions and masculinity models, which should not have met, are managed.

Interviewer: You often refer to difficult periods. Could you tell me more about that?

Mohammed: Yes. Especially the first time when she came to Morocco with me. It was difficult. Especially

with my parents. You know….my parents have a vision of the woman…who helps man, washes, irons, does everything in the house...Giovanna is different. She understood what my parents expected from her and she pointed it out clearly (he mimics how hard it had been)...And this thing just made me feel ..umm...feel bad. I mean, she did not have to live with my parents. She had to stay there just for that period. Got it? It did not...I did not want her to pretend to be another person. I did not want a fiction…but don't do like that. You (referring to Giovanna) know that here in Italy I am always with you…helping in hanging out the laundry, washing dishes, cooking...I've never caused problems. Those things are for women in my parents' vision…they think a man shouldn't even touch a glass. They tell me: "Stop! Sit there. There are women who can do this". But...Giovanna said in front of them "Hey...make it by yourself. Take your stuff and wash it". Got it? In front of them? My parents were scandalised. You know. I felt like...it's hard to explain what it means for a man.
(Mohammed)
(Mohammed, 47, Moroccan worker - Giovanna, 46, Italian, elementary school teacher, married for 21 years, two children)

This episode, demonstrating Mohammed's anguish in front of his relatives is an extraordinary example of the ambivalence of the gender performance between the two contexts.

Mohammed explains how he has adapted his views, so that he can do the cleaning, sort the laundry, and help his wife with the housework in various ways. Giovanna shows by her behaviour that she does not want to adapt to the role taken for granted by her husband's family; on the contrary, she subverts it. Mohammed's suffering is therefore caused by "unmasking" her in front of his family, a situation which represents his defeat as a man among his relatives. He loses his authority as the man of the house; he has become more "Westernised" and therefore, in his

parents' eyes, weaker.

Episodes of difficulty in managing the relationship and gender role in the husband's country of origin have also been reported by other Italian partners married to Moroccan men. These couples are connected by the *mixité* they have reached, when their husbands, although they defined themselves as Muslim, decided not to transmit their religion to their children[6]. This decision followed progressive estrangement from religious practices which implied attendance in the co-nationals' community and in their places of worship. In Morocco, husbands are forced by the context to re-enter a system which reflects gender roles - a thing which the wives do not accept because it is deemed degrading for women. Therefore, narratives on conflicts due to the different perception of a husband in Morocco often recur. The discrepancy in the Italian partners' narratives between "he in Italy" and "he in Morocco" shows how the process of masculinity is differently managed and performed according to the cultural context.

Below, Francesca and Claudia express their complete lack of understanding of their husbands when the two women visit their husbands' country of origin.

> Francesca: Yes, once back in Morocco, he completely disappeared. All his friends came to meet him...and I have not seen him for days. It is logical that sometimes I got crazy. Over there, culturally speaking, women cannot stay on their own, while men go elsewhere. And I did not like it. And I saw that he did not know what to do...to be what he used to be in Italy or not...
> (Francesca)
> (Francesca, 45, Italian - Hamid, 48, a Moroccan, married for 22 years, three daughters)
> Claudia: ... when I went there the first time, I had some doubts about my choice. The bad thing was that I was

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[6] On the different strategies concerning children's religious education, see article by Cerchiaro, Aupers and Houtman (2015).

bringing him back to his home country, his friends, his family. He thought I had already understood their mentality, so he left me at home, alone, with his mother and sisters, and run away from mornings to nights with his friends. He did not want to show them how he was with me. It was ugly. I felt lost in a closed room, in a foreign world ... he was back in his own world and I was not there anymore. (Claudia)

(Claudia, 39, Italian, housewife - Jamal, 46, Moroccan worker, married for 19 years, a son and a daughter)

In the couple's life together, the first visit to the husband's country of origin is described recurrently as an often disorienting and anxious moment. The gender arena transversally emerges as a place where partners' recognition and misrecognition take place. The visit turns out to be a physical and symbolical experience which tears the partners in two, showing the men in a different light. The Italian partner must also face expectations regarding gender roles which her husband's family takes for granted. This visit to his family means that the man returns home, to his context of socialisation in which he finds again (or believes he finds) habits and life styles which he had abandoned. The Italian partners' narratives of fears and tension about this "rewinding" of time, which gives rise to a new debate between the couple's identities and balances, is seen in the words: *"...he was back in his world and I wasn't there anymore"*. We therefore first see a representation of the confrontation between the man and the patriarchal culture of his country of origin; housework is what women do; consequently, the Western man becomes feminised if he is asked to undertake it. This representation refers to the situated character of masculinity. The management of the two contexts is achieved through the capacity of alternating different models of masculinity. The visit, in the wife's eyes, is narrated as a sort of "unmasking" of the man whom she can now barely recognise.

Suspected of betrayal

T he narratives of migration often imply misunderstanding, and sometimes fault and suspicion of betrayal (Sayad 1999), in relationships with co-nationals. The allusion to relationships with the co-nationals' community in Italy has not often been studied.

This topic could be better addressed in informal situations outside interviews - for example, during a chat at the local café or having a cup of tea with the recorder switched off.

The theme is sometimes introduced by other family members during collective moments of interaction. They recount an attitude of scorn and sometimes hostility, accusing the man of having been converted or subjugated by his wife ("Your wife is converting you, isn't she?", "Are you converting us now?", "Your wife is ordering you around, isn't she?") or finding difficulties in creating an expanded relationship with homogamic families. Even when the husband does not refer to any contrast or explicit disapproval with his friends concerning his marriage to his Italian partner, we can still see how these relationships are in any case significantly influenced. The men reveal a social transformation which is differently managed according to the context of interaction: they are secularised and "Westernised" when relating to an Italian interlocutor, but they become immigrants who share a condition of subordination when they talk to co-nationals.

The "fear" Sayad (1999: 157) described concerning his co-nationals' accusation of "leaving his own country", "being weak" and of "betrayal", in this case achieves an even more complex and to a certain extent radical meaning.

The suspicion of betrayal, even of apostasy (social and cultural, rather than religious) is a permanent feature which is obsessively present in considering migration as a practical form of conduct and category of thought; it is an "illegitimate" absence which requires intense, constant work of legitimacy (Sayad 1999: 171).

The conversation reported below is a clear example of how the male partner is obliged openly to manage when interacting with his family, with representations of the self which do not correspond to those the actor wishes to transmit.

Hamid, having "accepted" baptism and the catholic education of his daughters, tells us about his rare encounters with co-nationals as the consequence of these choices, mainly reduced to sporadic encounters at a coffee-shop or during leisure time, when members of this family are not present or not involved. The ambivalence in the management of these relationships therefore privileges the lack of direct contacts between the two entities: his family and his co-nationals.

Hamid feels he is under pressure, due to the direct interaction of the two worlds which co-exist within him, like two mirrors that reflect his image differently. The discussion between him, his wife Francesca and his elder daughter Lara exemplifies some of the themes previously examined:

> Interviewer: Before when you said "... when Lara was baptised ...", (the first child) you affirmed that the problem was "other Moroccans" ... what will they think…
>
> Francesca: Eh ... yes
>
> Hamid: There is still but less now...
>
> Francesca: Mah ...
>
> Hamid: Yes, it is still present but not like in the past. Many Moroccans know that my children are ... are…baptised.
>
> Lara: But dad ... But you argued with Amira (the second daughter) until few years ago ...
>
> Hamid: But no ...
>
> Francesca: And how. "If you go to church, do not pass in front of the Moroccans' bar", "put your headscarf on".
>
> Hamid: How many years ago? Well, Francesca, Lara ... what do you say?
>
> Lara: It is not true. Even now you do like that.
>
> Francesca: No? no? no? Even now, Hamid.
>
> Hamid: It is not true.

Lara: Yes it is. Do not look at me as if I do not have to say these things.

Hamid: But no. I'm not like that ...

Interviewer: And your mom, Hamid, does she know that your daughters are baptised?

Hamid: No. My mother does not know it ... because she doesn't understand these things, these discussions. She wouldn't understand. I told it to my sisters and they understood ... my older sister less. They always say ... "do you want to baptise us now?" ... But I told them ...

(Discussion while having tea with Francesca, Hamid and his daughter Lara)

The family interaction sheds light on the complex discourse on the masculinity performance which does not emerge during the individual interview. Hamid's request to his daughter to avoid Moroccan friends when they go to church, their not "masking" themselves under a headscarf, not asking his mother's advice as regards his daughters' religious education, perfectly exemplifies the suspicion of betrayal, even apostasy, to which Sayad (1999) refers. This kind of apostasy is social and cultural, rather than religious. Traces of masculinity are thus disclosed, a masculinity which becomes visible only when it is perceived in a situation of crisis, when the traditional patriarchal model is questioned and masculinity is accused of weakening *vis-à-vis* the female sex to adapt to the hegemonic masculinity of the new context of migration, betraying his father's traditions (Kimmel 1987; Le Mosse 1996; Tosh 1996; De Sondy 2014). Hamid's embarrassment during the interaction with his wife and daughter who contradict him in front of the interviewer clearly reveals the "deep acting" theorised by Hochschild (1979: 557-558), a situation in which the social actor tries to control his feelings, rather than manifest them. On the one hand, the man has to detach himself from the prevalent public discourse which associates men from Muslim countries with religious fundamentalism, *machismo* and control over the female body. On the other hand, he has to demonstrate to his family and friends that he has not betrayed his culture by crossing

boundaries more than just once: first geographically, by migrating, and then symbolically, by marrying an Italian woman.

Hamid's relations with co-nationals become limited after his marriage, not only because he, as the male partner, has to deal with family duties. If, before the union, he speaks in particular about his relationships with co-nationals, after marriage a certain difficulty in meeting other co-nationals' families arises. Mixed families do try to create relationships, especially with other mixed families, searching for similarity and affinity on which to build new network relations.

> N: When I came here I had friends that I knew in Palestine. I never made new friends. [...] We were friends. But now everyone has his family and we rarely see each other, usually alone. I have no relationship with the community here, I have no new friends. [...] When we were younger, we used to go to the bar to drink, play football, I was living with them. We came all from the same city. Then everyone made his family. Someone with Italian women other with Palestinians. Those with Palestinian families see each other and I do not see them ... I see most of those who have married an Italian woman like me.
> (Nadir, 60, Palestinian - Julia, 59, Italian, married for 31 years, a son and a daughter)

In the following narrative, Mohammed expresses his difficulty in creating strong ties with co-national homogamic couples. A discourse on the perception of his marriage and his family's cultural *mixité* consequently emerges. The search by similar couples demonstrates the isolation in which they experience the social context, together with the loosening of ties between the foreign partner and homogamic couples of co-national communities in Italy.

> M: I'm sorry. I had friends with whom I met, but, they (and their families) are of Moroccan culture while we are always in the middle ... so ... "half culture"...
> I: What does it mean?

M: In the sense. As a couple we are half Moroccan and half Italian. But I can't say "my wife has become almost Moroccan and we can easily meet other Moroccan couples. I cannot say I mixed cultures and it is easy to create relations with other Moroccan families. There had been some attempts … but you could not …you could not create a strong relationship. She is still seen as Italian … and my wife sees them as Moroccan families. We are … special. So … we were not able to create stable relationship over time. [...] For example … I had two friends (Moroccan). When they were alone there were no problems. They came always to visit me and we spent time together. After they married to a Moroccan woman I did not see them anymore. And it made me suffer. We were friends.

I: And do you know why?

M: Eh. I know that there are other Moroccan families. Their wives prefer to visit other Moroccan women.

I: In the sense they prefer to meet other Moroccan families?

M: Exactly. They recreated a Moroccan community and we were excluded … and that's why we created an association of mixed couples … like an Italian man with an Eritrea women, a Lebanese man with an Italian woman, a Moroccan man with an Italian woman. It was also … to have a space to discuss issues and problems that we may have in common with the rest of the couples … especially concerning children. It was also, as I told you, to create stronger friendships. Also to help us in some periods between us … as mixed couples.

(Mohammed)

The search for similarity, alliances and complicity in the choice of friendships along the same marital path reflects the need for affinity as an important resource, in order to discuss, for instance, children's education with other couples (Cerchiaro et al. 2015). The self-representation of the unicity "we are a mixed couple [...]" forces that

couple to enlarge the circle of friendships which can represent common ground and, therefore, the opportunity to create or enforce alliances between the partners.

The awareness of being in a minority within the context of migration leads the man to try to build ties with co-nationals married to Italian women and with other couples, whose marriages compare the breaking of the endogamic rule and the consequent sense of loneliness and "cultural betrayal".

Conclusions

I n the narratives analysed so far, a rich and complex portrait, reflecting differing biographical paths and related differing ways of "building a family" has emerged. The scenarios emphasise masculinities in movement, which have become visible as subject to greater reflexivity, and which face the dominant public discourse on Muslim masculinity (De Sondy 2014), often in the overlapping and double presence of "here" and "there" (Waldinger 2008) in the everyday family context. The two scenarios symbolically represent two important biographical steps: the close encounters between different family models (unmasked men) and the management of relations with co-national communities (suspected of betrayal). A variety of processes appear, demonstrating how gender identity has been renegotiated within the context of migration, often producing what Batnitzky, McDowell and Dyer define as "flexible and strategic masculinities" (2009: 1288). The male partner is sometimes forced to manage dissonance among the various models of masculinity which arise, particularly when family and co-national networks wish to control expectations and to make other demands concerning the man's identity as a father, son, friend, co-national, Muslim. There is the risk that the attempt to reconcile differing life contexts often makes the male partner feel guilty of not satisfying others' expectations twice: physically and symbolically, through

migration, and then through marriage to an Italian woman. The idea that the man implicitly has the power to make decisions as a husband and father is further discussed here as a "cultural problem", which involves the management of being both a man and a Muslim, and leads him to adopt strategies aimed at avoiding conflicts with his family and exclusion from co-national groups. The couple's visit to the husband's country of origin in particular calls into question the patriarchal masculinity model and how it is linked to the risk of the man's feeling deprived of his status in front of his family of origin. Through the continual compromise between "proximity" and "distance" (Tabboni 1986: 37), "presence" and "absence" (Sayad 1999: 103), tradition and betrayal, "here" and "there" (Waldinger 2008: 24), these men show how they present different masculinities to reconcile the regulation of gender relationships in Italy and their relations with co-nationals. The importance assigned to the creation of new friendships with other mixed families in order to discuss common problems also emerges. This appears to be a strategy adopted by the two partners to diminish the consequences of breaking the endogamic rule and distancing themselves from co-national groups. These processes are framed within a *mixité* over-exposed to the discourse on difference (Allievi 2006; Saraceno 2007). External mediation, through networks of family and friends, influence masculinity construction processes. Hence, the narratives analysed so far offer a closer perspective on migration and masculinity processes which do not only involve transnational mobility (Hopkins and Noble 2009) but also the paths of masculinity: *strategic*, in aiming to find a new balance within the family context, and *flexible*, in alternating between two roles of social interaction, moving between borders represented as conflictual and incompatible.

We not only refer here to social groups (the original family and the new one) and geographical borders (the country of origin, and that of migration), but also to identity borders, where the link with the country of origin reveals the problems in coping with memories which clash with ongoing changes in the same country. The narratives, not only of the men but of the entire family, also reconstruct only fragments of stories, which

show how migration and union with an Italian partner all need constant reprocessing of masculinity. These processes are linked to the development of the relationship with the family of origin and co-nationals and with the creation of new relations, in order to build similarities and affinities which can reduce the perception of a "different" marriage. The strategies which emerge tend to reconcile external forces which are, instead, focused on polarising and contrasting identities, religions and cultures. In view of recent attention given to this new field of study and the still underdeveloped literature, further studies could be made, starting from the deconstruction of this position on masculinity of Western scholars and the creation of a conceptual framework which considers new forms of masculinity, ones which cannot be reduced to mere polarisation of the discourse between Western and Muslim masculinity. In this sense, the present paper aims to be one piece in the puzzle. The complex processes of identity construction pass through negotiation, defence or (re)invention of a man's own sense of masculinity, through reflection which implies new forms of masculinity, bringing the theological debate (De Sondy 2014) to a "flesh" debate (Allievi 2002: 18). This debate is composed of men and of many identities in its capacity to alternate various types of masculinity, just like the *mixité* which these couples build in their everyday lives.

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