

THEMED ISSUE • Migrant mothers: kin work and cultural work in making future citizens

article

Transmitting marriage models across generations: Narratives of mothers and daughters between Morocco and Italy

Giulia D'Odorico, giuliadodorico@hotmail.com
FISPPA, University of Padua, Italy

This article explores the processes of construction of gender and sexuality in the life course of two generations of women of Moroccan origin in Italy – mother and daughter dyads – while challenging the most popular constructs within academia and the current policy climate around migrant families. While these approaches are often a combination of evolutionary and polarised assumptions focused on establishing how far behind 'they' are from 'us', with inevitable discriminatory consequences, this article explores the potential of a different frame. Based on 29 biographical narratives collected in Italy and Morocco, it unravels how discourses and practices around marriage models are differently transmitted, reproduced, contrasted and transformed across women's generations in multiple spaces and times. Marriage models are treated as processes to which women may contribute through a variety of intergenerational kin activities, instead of being considered as fixed and static categories.

key words family • migration • marriage • Morocco • Italy • kin work • citizenship

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Introduction

This article is part of a research project exploring processes of gender and sexuality construction¹ among two generations of women – pairs of mothers and daughters – who have, directly or indirectly, experienced migration between Morocco and Italy. In particular, it attempts to illustrate ongoing transformations related to family issues and particular marriage models within the framework of global migrations (Kofman, 2004; Grillo, 2008; Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008; Strasser et al, 2009; Kraler et al, 2011), specifically arguing that variations that exist between different generations of migrant women in relation to gender norms and values may be better understood through the lens of translocational positionality, 'a contextual, dynamic and processual analysis that recognises the saliency of different social ontologies at the local, national,

transnational and global levels and their interconnectedness within social relations in terms of processes and outcomes' (Anthias, 2009b: 1).

The biographical narratives of different generations of migrant women may help to grasp the intergenerational negotiations over models, ideas and practices of marriage in different locations, with due consideration to local, national and international social contexts and time (Anthias, 2008, 2009a, 2012). Indeed, biographies may shed light on kin work as the collective labour of family-centred networks that reinforce shared values. As a concept, kin work explores the intergenerational activities and practices that take place across households involving more than domestic work and childcare (di Leonardo, 1987). Thus, kin work provides an interesting understanding of migrant women's work in relation to the conception, maintenance, negotiation, reformulation and rejection of a variety of discourses and practices regarding gender and sexuality (Piccone Stella, 1979; Saraceno, 1991; Siebert, 1991; Gedalof, 2009).

Kin work systematically challenges a historical, homogenised and essentialist/naturalised view of difference and identity. Through the lens of translocational positionality, narratives of kin work help us to understand differences between different generations more generally in terms of processes in a space and time framework and at a more local, national and transnational level, and not as the possessive characteristics of individuals (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Erel, 2010).

This article focuses specifically on the intergenerational kin work through which mothers and daughters negotiate freedom of choice regarding marriage models, partners and timing of marriage. This takes place against a backdrop of restrictive immigration legislation in Italy on the one hand, and patriarchal personal status laws in Morocco on the other. Mothers and daughters are challenged to negotiate and realise their aspirations for a 'good marriage' within a framework of expectations from kin and from the ethnic community in the Moroccan diaspora and during visits back home, as well as from Italian society more broadly.

Methodological notes

The study on which this article is based relies on 29 biographical narratives collected through interviews and participant observation in the north east of Italy and Morocco between February 2012 and September 2013. This article is centred round the narratives of four mother–daughter pairs: Souad and Narjis, Khadija and Kawtar, Fatiha and Sara, and Hayat and Chaimaa.²

Italy has attracted increasing numbers of Moroccan migrants since the mid-1980s, and is now the third largest foreign community in Italy after Romanian and Albanian migrants (Istat, 2017). After Italy introduced visa entry requirements in 1990, undocumented migration and family reunion became the dominant pathway for Moroccan migrants wishing to enter the European Union (EU), with most women entering Italy as part of the family reunification process³ (Davì, 2010; Mghari and Fassi Fihri, 2010; de Bel-Air, 2016).

A biographical approach in migration studies (Sayad, 1979a, b; Bourdieu, 1993; Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007; Erel, 2007), and an intergenerational approach especially (Inowlocki, 1993; Lutz, 1998; Delcroix, 2009), offers an important opportunity to grasp some of the dynamics of social and cultural changes and the plurality of possible self-presentations and perspectives in different times and spaces. In particular, the focus here is on two generations of women – pairs of mothers and daughters. Consequently,

continuities and changes between different generations – but also within the same generation – have been investigated. Indeed, a generation is conceived not only in historical terms but also as a site where different social discourses and practices are transmitted, contested, created and destroyed, at times in ambivalent and contradictory ways.

This research adopted a multi-sited approach (Marcus, 1995; Salih, 2003; Gallo, 2009). Unfortunately many of the changes that take place in the society of origin and in the transnational migrant group – to which migrants refer throughout their narratives – are not usually taken into consideration in the analysis of the changes that take place in gender and marriage models and family formation. Thus, a multi-sited approach may contribute to extend the scope of the area of study, while moving beyond nation-based lenses and including movement and mobility within and between countries and different locations.

Contextualising the family migration literature

Most of the existing European literature on family migration tends to explore how different generations of migrants are moving from holding attitudes towards marriage that are perceived to be more patriarchal and ‘traditional’ to supposed ‘modern’ discourses and practices, such as those based on ‘love’ and romance, with this ‘assimilationist’ perspective being radicalised in much of the French literature (Boubekeur, 2004; Milewski and Hamel, 2010; Attias-Donfut et al, 2012). Notably, some French authors are interested in taking an expressly critical stance to common-sense ideas of migrants and not encouraging processes of ‘othering’ and racialisation (Lacoste-Dujardin, 1992; Etiemble, 2001; Santelli and Collet, 2003; Hamel, 2005; Durand, 2008; Caponio and Schmoll, 2011). Other studies, meanwhile, are less critical, for instance, in Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain, where the focus is on exploring the reasons why people of migrant origin prefer to marry someone from their country of origin or of other nationalities (Schoenmaeckers et al, 1999; de Valk and Liefbroer, 2007; Trilla et al, 2008; Carol et al, 2014). Furthermore, there is a tendency within the literature, especially in the UK and some Nordic countries, to reduce migrant families to certain problematic aspects, such as those related to forced and sham marriages as well as honour crimes. While I do not wish to minimise the seriousness and dramatic consequences of such realities (Siddiqui, 2003), I would like to point out that these phenomena are often approached and analysed exclusively in a culturalist and essentialist manner (Meetoo and Mirza, 2007; Thapar-Bjokert, 2007; Wilson, 2007), thus obscuring the multiple subject positions and structural constraints of women in relation to gender and practices of marriage in the context of globalised migrations. However, there is also more nuanced work that sheds light on the complexities of migrant family lives (Bredal, 2005; Shaw, 2000; Grillo, 2011; Qureshi, 2016).

The marriage practices and ideas of migrant people therefore become a measure of their integration or social inclusion/cohesion – to name two of the most popular constructs within academia and the current policy climate (Anthias, 2009a, c) – or of its failure in mainstream society (Kofman et al, 2013; Bonjour and Kraler, 2015). This kind of frame has a problematic nation-lens (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002; Anthias, 2009b) – focused on establishing ranking among different family models based on the deviation of the ‘others’ from ‘us’ (Sayad, 1999; Narayan, 2000) – and if

adopted it can give rise to a combination of evolutionary and (in the case of migrants originating from Muslim-majority countries) orientalist misconceptions and assumed polarities (Lutz, 1991; Razack, 2004). This tendency inevitably stigmatises women's lives and produces ambivalence and hostility towards migrants, as well as racism (Abu-Lughod, 2011). This prevents us from giving true consideration to the variety of women's lived experiences, and it ends up depicting marriage models as monolithic and static discourses, when, in fact, practices are actually internally plural and divergent as well as shifting and slippery.

The following sections of this article illustrate the main argument of the study by focusing on two empirical themes: the complex interplay of state policy and family formation and parents' influence and self-determination.

The complex interplay of state policy and family formation

State policy within the realm of neoliberal globalisation penetrates the everyday life experiences of migrant women, including those of family creation and marriage. Migration policies and institutions worldwide are subject to an increasingly restrictive trend. Thus, marriage may be an important accessible channel of migration, through family reunion. Marriage migration may also be defined by a global climate of disparities in terms of marked social and economic differences that especially affect women: it may thus become a socially acceptable means by which women achieve geographical, social and economic mobility, particularly within those contexts where such mobility is strongly legally and socially discouraged. Women's experiences in relation to marriage migration, then, are modulated within the realm of state laws, but also those of global market forces and patriarchal norms of gender and family. Through their narratives, women contribute to challenges increasingly being made to the idea of 'passive movers' and, as this study shall now argue, shed light on the ways they move strategically to negotiate their best interests and shape their lives according to their own wishes (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008).

Souad is 40 and originally from Fez. At the age of 18, she decided to marry a cousin who had migrated to Italy, feeling that marriage could be an opportunity to migrate and improve her social and economic status. She immediately became pregnant and in 1991, a week before giving birth to her first daughter, she arrived in Italy through family reunification. Some context is necessary here concerning the structural backdrop against which Souad made this choice. Since the early 1980s, Morocco has experienced a deep political and economic crisis. Structural adjustment programmes imposed by The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), including public spending cuts and austerity measures, have had negative social and economic consequences, particularly for women (Maher, 1989; Ennaji and Sadiqi, 2008). Marriage migration has been a relatively efficient means of ensuring upward social mobility for women such as Souad, otherwise thwarted by economic crisis and high unemployment in their country of origin. Indeed, until 2004, Moroccan women were only able to migrate abroad if their tutor – that is, their husband or a male relative – agreed to the release of a passport; for a woman to be given permission to migrate alone was especially rare (ADFM, 2008). And as Italy introduced visa requirements in 1990, family reunification became one of the few options to migrate through regular channels from Morocco to Italy; most Moroccan women, like Souad, who have entered Italy subsequently have done so as part of the family reunification process.

Alongside an attempt to travel abroad and improve her economic situation, Souad also understood marriage migration as a strategy for making free choices in relation to her sexuality, in contrast to the restrictive gender and sexuality norms (social, but also legal) in Morocco.⁴ She and her siblings had grown up just with a mother; their father had been in Italy since she was a young girl. Being a single mother without male ‘protection’ in Morocco meant being exposed to social pressures in relation to daughters’ behaviour. Thus Souad’s mother pushed her to get married at a young age. This is another example of the political and social context in which Souad made her choice. However, her expectations were to be disappointed once she was in Italy, as she actually moved downwards to a lower-class status, her husband being unable to provide for his wife and children, and when she gave birth to another child in 1994, she was only able to work as a cleaner or carer, due to the segmented and racialised women’s labour market in Italy. The marriage was also to prove abusive, with Souad routinely subjected to violence from her husband.

Through her narrative, Souad brings to the surface her strategies for dealing with the patriarchal norms of gender and family in her country of origin – economic discrimination, the impossibility of travelling without a man’s permission, and social and legislative repression of sexual intercourse outside marriage. She also illustrates how these norms interplay with visa and immigration regimes (she was able to move abroad only on the basis of family reunion) and how she is forced to deal with gender discriminatory norms, at the level of visas, in Italy, too – a ‘dependent’ visa saw her constrained within a relationship of dependency (in legal, financial and social terms) with her violent husband, until she finally sought help from an anti-violence centre, and in 2007 she escaped the marriage, taking her children with her.⁵

Once divorced, Souad found herself concerned about the effects of being a single mother on the life of Narjis, who at this time was 16. In concert with her family, Souad forced Narjis to marry an older, wealthy man living in Morocco. She felt that marriage could be a means to ensure a wealthy future for her daughter, considering their precarious economic situation in Italy. Moreover, the marriage could have been a strategy to ‘contain’ gossip between Italy – where some family members lived – and Morocco about Narjis’ ‘illicit’ sexual conduct, and also about Souad’s role as a single mother in a ‘foreign’ country. This gossip, she felt, should be stopped and the only socially accepted frame to contain it was that of marriage.

Narjis – who at the time of being interviewed was 26 – had not been able to refuse marriage when she was a teenager. However, she was aware of the structural constraints within which both she and her mother were entrenched in the interface between Italy and Morocco, and described precisely how she exercised her agency to attain her self-interest within and across state borders. She took advantage of restrictive Italian migration laws to keep away from her husband: her ‘lower’-class background and situation meant that she was unable to fulfil the income and house requirements necessary for achieving a visa on the basis of family reunion. Finally, she decided to divorce. In the first instance her marriage had, to echo her mother’s words, allowed Narjis to behave in a socially acceptable way, in terms of norms both in Morocco and among the Moroccan community in the host country:

‘I was meeting a boy, but hiding. My mother knew that and she started speaking to my father, and people started speaking ... [with] my paternal family.... So what happens here, what you eat, drink in the morning, the

OK or did you want to change any wording from your notes?

1 family in Morocco knows everything in the evening. I was really upset,
 2 they were describing me as a “bad girl”.... And my grandmother called my
 3 mother and she said to her: “I met a man – because I was 15 years and a half,
 4 he was 32 – who is looking for a wife.” And my grandmother said to him:
 5 “There is the daughter of my daughter in Italy, she is 15, there is also the
 6 daughter of my sister, she is 30 and she lives in Morocco.” In your opinion,
 7 who will a Moroccan man living in Morocco choose? One who is two
 8 years younger? Or a baby he can manage as he wants, thanks to whom he
 9 also has the opportunity to go to Italy, one day in the future. It is normal,
 10 one plus one is two. And so we started speaking.... I did not want to.... I
 11 thought: “I say yes, I do the engagement, then I come back, I do not want
 12 to know about him anymore.” After two years, I was able to divorce.’ (Narjis,
 13 5 December 2012)

14 Narjis’ account helps us ‘to go beyond “victimisation” to a more balanced and
 15 context-sensitive consideration of changing dynamics in the nexus of marriage,
 16 gender and migration’ (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008: 24). Moreover, through their
 17 narratives, both Souad and Narjis enable exploration of the complex interplay of
 18 different sets of social relations, arrangements and expectations in a space and time
 19 framework, and the continuing transnational connections they put in place to design
 20 their marriage trajectories. In this way, their experiences are not analysed exclusively
 21 in terms of ‘where they were born’ or their migration experience, but across different
 22 social processes and relations in terms of gender, class, and life cycle and between
 23 transnational spaces.

24 In contrast to Narjis, other interviewees felt that, as young girls, they were able to
 25 refuse marriage proposals in respect of men from their country of origin, and explain
 26 their refusal with a description of the possible negative consequences of getting
 27 married to someone they did not know. Feelings, as well as the sharing of a space of
 28 eroticism and intimacy, are seen as a basic premise of a marriage. The interviewees
 29 look to older female family members for similarities and differences in aspirations,
 30 discourses and practices, in order to carve out a space to negotiate their own choices.
 31 For example, Khadija, now aged 42 and who had grown up in a working-class area
 32 of Casablanca in the 1970s, felt able at the age of 13 to reject her father and uncle’s
 33 proposal that she marry a Moroccan migrant in France. She took advantage of the
 34 failure of her sister’s arranged marriage to over-rule the authority of the male family
 35 members, even while she was conscious that she was putting herself at risk of their
 36 disapproval. Structural positioning, in terms of gender and age, may have constrained
 37 and channelled her agency, but it did not totally preclude it.

38 Khadija is a mother living in Italy with her daughter, Kawtar, now aged 29. Kawtar,
 39 who spent much of her childhood in Morocco before migrating to Italy at the age of
 40 18, explained how she had received some suggestions from her parents that she get
 41 married, particularly to men living in Morocco. Ironically, however, she has learned
 42 from her mother how to negotiate her own interests in respect of marriage and social
 43 norms, although she has also taken advantage of generational relations with her mother
 44 – and also her father – that are now less authoritative, to have more decisional power.
 45 She is also well aware of the relationship between the system of arranged marriages
 46 and restrictive migration policies, and for this reason she was not necessarily adverse
 47 to the idea of helping other people to enter Europe through marriage, albeit ‘only’ her

cousin. This was a hypothetical scenario in which she invested, whether emotionally or rhetorically, at the level of identity in a strongly racialised migration system.

Elsewhere in their interviews, Kawtar and her mother demonstrate awareness of the limited opportunities for would-be migrants from non-EU countries to reach Europe regularly and safely, and were critical of contemporary immigration rules and procedures. They were also aware that the groom's visa status played an important role in transnational marriages, with this becoming part of the dowry.

These various women's stories open up avenues for a dissection of unequal gender and sexual power relations in a wider social, political and economic context of discrimination and domination (even violence), at particular times and in different geographical locations. Their narratives also shed light on women's agency and the ways in which they deal with these constraining structural frameworks.

Parents' influence and self-determination

Some women, especially the most observant, mobilise religion as a power resource to question and challenge gender practices that create and sustain situations of oppression and domination (Dwyer, 1999; Ramji, 2007; Ryan and Vacchelli, 2013), and to subvert them towards their own ends. Moreover, as this study found, they may precisely do so by comparing and contrasting their lives against those of their parents and other older relatives. For example, Fatiha, aged 59 and originally from Salé, talks about the experiences of her mother, Rachida, in relation to marriage practices and norms. Rachida grew up just with her own mother – her father had died before she was born – in a remote village near Fez. At the age of 13 she was forced by her uncle to marry an older man, with the family feeling she needed a man's protection, especially as her mother was not able to maintain her in comfort. However, she was able to run away from her husband and to move to the city, where she earned enough to survive working as a domestic servant. There, she married three times – every time the relationship did not meet her expectations, she got divorced. The distance from her family and community of origin and exposure to cultural changes occurring in Morocco during the colonial period, especially in urban settings, could have influenced Rachida's way of thinking and acting in relation to marriage and divorce. But it was religion in particular that she mobilised as a means to make sense and give meaning to her non-conformist life choices – and this is also evident in how Fatiha recounts and evaluates her mother's life:

'She grew up in the countryside next to Fez. She got married really young. This man was really old, she did not like him, so she started to run away from his home to go back to her mother's house. She used to sleep between her parents-in-law in order not to be raped. She used to run away during the night and to stay at the top of a tree to hide from him. She just hated him... She was around 12, 13 years old. So she decided to travel to Fez, where a cousin used to live. She paid for her trip by selling her silver bracelets. Then a lady suggested she should move to Rabat and helped her to find a job as a domestic worker. She accepted, because she did not have anybody, she was free, she could do whatever she wanted. And then she married three times and every time she realised she was not in love anymore or she did not accept some of her husband's attitudes, she asked for divorce. When I was young,

I felt really ashamed of my mother's behaviour but later I understood that religion does not prescribe divorce, so I stopped feeling worried about social pressures. My mother knew that only marriage – it does not matter how many – can legitimate a relationship, so she did it.' (Fatiha, 23 June 2013)

It could be argued that Rachida was interested in transmitting to her egalitarian – visions of gender dynamics – through Muslim arguments (Conklin and Nasser El-Dine, 2015). Fatiha thus used religion to understand her mother's choices related to marriage and divorce: if she had used a culture/tradition frame, she would never have accepted her mother's behaviour, especially towards the religious community. But understanding Islam in the way her mother transmitted to her, as a power resource to overcome barriers to women's choices, she was able to make sense of it.

Young Muslim women today have more opportunities to deepen their religious knowledge through the internet and many Muslim youth discussion groups. They often go through this process of 'being born again' (Ali, 2012), from the passive acceptance of religious values transmitted like a tradition between generations, to a re-appropriation of Islamic cultural capital – that they consider aimed at promoting the egalitarian ethics of Islam – to be used as a way of being and acting for change. However, they also look at their mothers and grandmothers' discourses and practices to find some life story elements to question and reinterpret taken-for-granted religious values and practices, often interpreted through the lens of tradition, and that now acquire new meanings. Thus, Rachida's granddaughter Sara, Italian-born, aged 24, mobilises particular interpretations of Islam she has learned through study, but she also makes reference to family tradition with her mother and grandmother in order to decide her own destiny in relation to marriage. In particular, both she and her mother, due to their migratory experience, are especially concerned to turn to Islam as a means of going beyond the 'victim' paradigm of migrant Muslim women (Lutz, 1991), which is predominant in the racialised Italian society, especially in light of the post-9/11 political environs. Thus Islam becomes, for Sara, a means to highlight the mechanisms of exclusion operating in the host society: in order to do this, she looks to her mother, who wore the hijab in a Morocco that was under French colonialism as a form of resistance – relating to gender identity – against asymmetry in that specific political context. At the same time, both women use their 'authentic Islam' in opposition to what they consider both to be an archaic Islamic tradition and a Moroccan culture heritage. In this way, they demarcate themselves from both non-Muslim Western women, but also Islamic traditionalists and Moroccan women. Their religious and gender ideals are constructed in opposition to these three groups of 'others':

'My grandmother and mother were living in a society that has just been liberated from French people, so we did not have our proper Islamic views; we were straining at the leash of French; we did not learn to think by ourselves; we used to think what French told us to think and if they do not say anything ... no idea. There was this old-fashioned, wrong idea of Islam, so when my grandmother said: "I do not feel good with this man, I don't love him, I feel bad, I am sorry, it's finished." How can a woman hold all this decisional power, to be able to choose what to do? And she used to say: "My religion allows me to stay with the man I love, since I do not love this

man, I can divorce.” And she divorced. And this touched me.... Until she did not feel good with the last husband, she said to me: “I loved him. Why do you have to force yourself to stay with someone you do not love just for the sake of society? So (the others) that people can say: ‘Oh, good’. And maybe you live a sad life.” (Sara, 5 February 2013)

The experiences of Fatiha, Sara and Rachida help us to challenge ‘mainstream’ feminism to look at its own troubled relationship with religion and to re-examine some of its dogmas in relation to the interplay of a multiplicity of social differences, such as gender, class and racialisation, in different time and space contexts (Sikand, 2010; Mir-Hosseini, 2011, 2012). Through their narratives, mother and daughter show how they learn from their respective (grand)mothers to consider Islam as an identity resource in relation to gender models. They show how this is part of kin work put in place by the grandmother (by Rachida). Their narratives shed light on how the pair move continuously in a range of different locations, different times and different contexts, while establishing a multiplicity of transnational connections – specifically, homeland and the country of residence, but also other destinations, such as the international Islamic groups with whom Sara has links, through the use of media and the internet.

Alongside the issue of religion, political, economic, social and legal changes taking place over time may affect women differently in relation to marriage discourses and practices at different stages of their lives. Some mothers in the study are now taking advantage of some of the significant changes that have occurred in Morocco, especially in urban contexts (Maher, 1989; Ennaji and Sadiqi, 2008), such as greater access of females to education (including co-education in most schools) and the increased participation of women in the market economy and in leisure outside of the home and family. Since the 1990s, Moroccan society has been through significant political, economic and social changes. These transformations have affected family models (El Harras, 2006) and women’s conditions, bringing much improvement, especially in terms of legal status, access to education and employment – the most evident being the reform of the Family Code *Moudawana* in 2004 (Moussavi and Collectif 95 Maghreb-Egalité, 2005). The women use the potential of these profound transformations – that may eventually mean fewer restrictions on movement and more sexual opportunities for women through increased contact with unrelated males – as a means to question some discriminating gender practices.⁶ Daughters take advantage of the changes in attitude that their mothers experienced in Morocco, and refer to them when claiming more freedom in decision-making about pre-marital romance in their lives. This is illustrated in the case of the mother–daughter pair, Hayat and Chaimaa. Hayat, aged 47, who grew up in Skirat, in a middle-class family, was forced to marry a man against her will at the age of 17. Now, she does not want her daughter to live through the same imposition. She supports her daughter’s independence, perhaps to compensate for her own limited power in taking decisions about her own marriage (Qureshi, 2016):

Hayat: ‘He has been in France since the 70s. He moved there to work. He saw me, he liked me and he asked me in marriage. I did not agree because I was not interested in marriage, not even in boys, I just wanted to study. And I wanted to finalise my secondary school and then go to university. I had so many plans in my head.’

Interviewer: 'What kind of plans?'

1 Hayat: 'To study, to become a doctor or a lawyer, because I stare at my
2 mother, she is just doing the housework, always at home.... And
3 then they disappeared [she laughs], those projects. This is why I tell
4 Chaimaa [her daughter] to study, study, study.... I hope she will
5 get it.... What I tell her is that if she does not like the proposed
6 husband and she does not want to marry him, she can't keep silent,
7 she can't do what I did. At that time we couldn't say no, but now
8 she can do that, she can say no.' (23 July 2012)

9
10 Hayat challenges the obsolete image of the submissive and passive 'Muslim' 'Moroccan'
11 woman. She is aware that gender and generational relations were more authoritative at
12 the time when she was forced to marriage. Despite not feeling able to ultimately resist
13 her family's decision (due to their middle-class position and desire for respectability),
14 she articulates both her disinterest in marriage and the route she would have preferred
15 her life course to take – which is also the route she feels her daughter, in contrast
16 to her, should be able to pursue. Now, when her husband is starting to evaluate
17 different marriage options for Chaimaa, Hayat, thinking of her own experience of
18 forced marriage, claims for Chaimaa the right to choose. In her narrative, she moves
19 backwards and forwards through different stages of her life cycle in the different
20 contexts of Morocco, France (where she moved immediately after getting married)
21 and Italy, to support her daughter against any marriage imposition.

22 Chaimaa, now aged 23, and who migrated to Italy with her parents at the age of six,
23 also feels she has greater decision-making power in relation to marriage choices than
24 her mother. She goes back to her mother's marriage experience and acknowledges
25 the gender inequalities and real abuses that Hayat suffered. She also recognises that
26 her emancipation is possible partly because her mother enabled her to take advantage
27 of more liberal gender and sexual attitudes.

28 Daughters like Chaimaa are still looking for their parents' approval, but tend to refuse
29 parental intrusions in their choice of partners – they claim more autonomy in pursuing
30 several relationships, and strongly affirm their will if they receive marriage proposals.
31 They do not accept their parents' intervention or any other family and community
32 members when marriages do not promise to fulfil their expectations. Rather, they
33 look for successive approval of their autonomous partner choices, which has a more
34 emotional meaning of parents' support, especially in case of divorce (Etiemble, 2001).

35 Through their narratives, different generations of women draw together some of
36 the directions of social change within marriage models in several time and space
37 contexts; they bring into view their subjectivity and the multiple and contradictory
38 ways in which they contribute to social reproduction. Discourses and practices
39 around marriage have become increasingly 'free' between generations: 'free to choose
40 the partner, free in relation to the decision that causes it and free with reference to
41 the personal reasons that motivate it' (Foucault, 1984: 78–9). It is the couple, rather
42 than kinship and parental strategies, that is viewed more and more as the basis for
43 marriage. The couple emerges as 'a separate unit of private desire, distinct from
44 their families and gender groups' (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 51) – although not necessarily
45 autonomous. Women are more inclined to choose partners and be ready to challenge
46 patriarchal authority (generally male, but not exclusively so). This illustrates how
47 women may activate more power resources to assert their self-determination and, in

1 this way, to resist – as ‘a process of creating and recreating, transforming the situation,
 2 participating in the process’ (Foucault, 1982: 210; Abu Lughod, 1990) –oppressive
 3 societal expectations and discriminating constructions of gender. Their biographical
 4 narratives shed light on the variety of activities that mothers and daughters do in
 5 space and time across generations to create, maintain and transform gender models
 6 and sexual expectations.

7 Conclusion

9 This article offers a critical perspective from Southern Europe (Anthias et al, 2013)
 10 that may help in interrogating and destabilising some of the ethnocentric and
 11 national-based biases that may suffuse many migration family studies in an era of
 12 transnationalism and globalisation. The life stories of the migrant women lead ‘us’ to
 13 pay attention to and to critically reinterpret social and family changes in contemporary
 14 societies; these transformations do not exclusively concern those we call ‘others’, but
 15 overall society at a more translocational and transnational level. Thus, they lead ‘us’
 16 to focus on wider societal processes, while not ‘culturalising’ or ‘ethnicitising’ them,
 17 and indeed, casting doubt on solidified notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ – Europeans and
 18 non-European migrants, non-Muslim and Muslim, first- and second-generation,
 19 host society and country of origin, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ differences. There is the risk in
 20 such binarism of not understanding how differences, as well as asymmetries and
 21 subordination, relating to gendered norms and practices are produced intersectionally
 22 in relation to a variety of social divisions – such as age, class, processes of racialisation,
 23 across different time and space contexts. Moreover, it holds the danger of fostering
 24 stigmatisation and racism rather than preventing their furtherance. The ‘others’ are
 25 integral to what we refer to as ‘us’.

26 Through their narratives the mothers and daughters reveal the complexities of their
 27 lived experiences while shedding light on the importance of the contexts, time and
 28 interactional and translocational spaces in which these are embedded. The mothers
 29 and daughters do not reduce differences between and within them (as distinct
 30 generations) relating to gender socialisation, sexuality and marriage exclusively to
 31 the migration experience or to age. Rather, they are able to grasp the ways in which
 32 they actively challenge and negotiate different sets of social relations, in relation
 33 to ‘irreducible and dialogical’ (Anthias, 2012) social divisions, within specific time
 34 and space contexts. Through their narratives, they show they learn from each other
 35 to understand, negotiate and reformulate different identity resources in relation to
 36 gender models. They show how this is part of kin work that takes place in a range
 37 of different locations, different times and different contexts.

39 Notes

40 ¹ This article focuses exclusively on heterosexuality simply because women involved in
 41 this research shared their experiences of heterosexual relationships. This does not mean
 42 that the variety of patterns of partner choice and family formation can be reduced to
 43 their heterosexual forms (Ruspini, 2013; Williams, 2013).

44 ² Interviewees have expressed the desire to have their names not anonymised.

45 ³ In Italy, there are a few different types of entry visa: for reasons of study (1 year,
 46 renewable); for family reunification (2 years); for subordinate employment (permanent
 47 – 2 years; fixed-termed, seasonal – 9 months); and for self-employment (2 years). **Most**

Moroccans, including women, are entering Italy by sea and then they seek asylum. Since January 2017 they are the fifth most prevalent nationality of Mediterranean sea arrivals in Italy (UNHCR, 2017).

⁴ According to Article 490 of the Moroccan Penal Code, anyone who has sexual intercourse with a person outside wedlock is liable to either imprisonment (for a term of between one month to one year) or payment of a fine.

⁵ It was only in 2013 that the Italian government introduced a new clause (Article 4, Law 119/2013) in the Immigration Act in order to release a separate permit of stay for humanitarian reasons to foreign female victims of domestic violence, whose visa was previously dependent on that of their husband or partner.

⁶ Mixed-sex classrooms have largely replaced sex-segregated classrooms at school. Some legal barriers that prevent women from entering the labour force have also begun to disappear, although Articles 6 and 7, alongside Article 726, of the Commercial Code were only abrogated in 1996. According to Articles 6 and 7, a woman needs her tutor's authorisation to open a small business. Article 726, meanwhile, states that a woman must obtain her tutor's authorisation to sign a work contract (Moussavi and Collectif 95 Maghreb-Egalité, 2005).

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