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Dissonant masculinities? Migration, emotions and masculinities in marriages between Italian women and Moroccan men living in Italy

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ABSTRACT

Through the life stories of 20 couples comprising Italian women and Moroccan men living in Italy, this article explores the interconnections between emotions, masculinity, and migration. The aim is to understand the extent to which a mixed marriage challenges particularistic definitions of masculinity. The article contributes to gender and migration studies in three ways. First, it investigates how partners produce multiple coexistent and contradictory discourses on gender depending on cultural contexts. Emotions reveal a hidden aspect of the performance of masculinity, from which conflicts often arise. Second, it adds to a growing field of studies focusing on the interplay of migration and masculinity, showing how migration and having a native partner require a constant reprocessing of masculinity. Lastly, it underlines the importance assigned to the creation of new social networks with other mixed families. These networks help provide a symbolic common space to overcome social stigma and the consequent isolation.

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Introduction

This article explores the interconnections between masculinity, emotions and migration through the life stories of couples comprising Italian women and Moroccan men living in Italy. These couples provide an emblematic case study of ‘mixedness’,¹ since they incorporate layers of differences: religious, as one partner has been socialized into Islam and the other into Christianity, and ethnic, with a white Italian married to a non-white immigrant partner.

Italy has only relatively recently become a significant immigration destination. Moroccans were one of the first groups to prompt attention being paid to the phenomenon at the beginning of the 1980s (Salih, 2001, 2007). According to the 2018 ISTAT data, Moroccan citizens residing in Italy are currently the third most numerous group of immigrants (416,531), after Romanians (1,190,091) and Albanians (440,465).² Most have settled in Northern Italy, because the industrial districts in the area offer employment opportunities.

Studying Italian-Moroccan couples offers an opportunity to focus on an atypical, underexplored form of male migration, which breaks the rule of endogamy by pursuing a personal marital choice. As highlighted in Parisi’s (2016) research on Italian-Moroccan families in Italy, mixed couples have more vulnerable relationships, because of the pressures of having to deal with their families of origin and their wider social environment. My own research has demonstrated that disagreement or conflict between partners can occur, particularly on some symbolically meaningful occasions. These notably

concern the relationship with the migrant partner's family and country of origin, the rites of passage in children's religious socialization (Cerchiaro, 2019a), household management, and friendship networks (Cerchiaro, 2016a). The 'transitional nature of the migration process' and 'the connections linking origin and destination places' (Waldinger, 2008, p. 25) are framed within a further complexity.

The current paper investigates the extent to which the relationship with a partner from the majority group challenges particularistic definitions of masculinity and how emotions interact with these processes. As underlined by Charsley and Wray (2015, p. 403), 'discourses surrounding migration [...] remain characterized by neglect or dismissal of the gendered experiences of male migrants. Where they do appear, men are frequently cast as the oppressor of family members [...]. Their vulnerabilities and affective ties and needs are rarely foregrounded.' Only in the last decade have scholars paid increased attention to masculinity (Batnitzky, McDowell, & Dyer, 2009; Charsley & Wray, 2015; Donaldson, Hibbins, Howson, & Pease, 2009; Sarti & Scrinzi, 2010) and many aspects have yet to be explored. Given the fact that literature on gender and migration frequently focuses on women, the links between masculinity, emotions, and migration point to an arena in which it may be possible to more deeply understand the cultural processes underlying the experiences of mixed couples. The 'couple' is approached here as a unit of analysis where the interaction of partners can be observed. It reveals what is at stake for both the man and the woman when gender difference, as a cultural construction, becomes the issue of their communications. In doing this, the article expands on the concept of 'dissonant masculinities,' in order to explain the transnational gender implications for these migrant men.

In the following paragraphs, I give a brief overview of the interplay between emotions, masculinities, and migration that represents the theoretical framework of the article. To contextualize the source of the data, I present a section ('Research context') that highlights some statistics on mixed marriages in Italy and the specificity of those including a migrant man from a majority-Muslim country. I then provide a 'Methodology and participants' section, giving further details about the research methods and data. This is followed by a 'Results' section divided into two parts: 'there', where I analyse the visits of couples to the migrant partner's country of origin, and 'here', where I focus on the relations with co-nationals in Italy. These narratives allow an analysis of how the overlapping between 'here' and 'there' (Waldinger, 2008) leads partners to express multiple, co-existent, and contradictory discourses on gender. The 'Conclusions' section includes a discussion concerning the interest of the data for researchers in the broader fields of gender and migration studies.

The interplay of emotions, masculinity and migration

Emotions 'in masculinities'

One of the essential aspects that make mixed couples particularly interesting for sociological analysis lies in their relationship with the social context. In this, the notions of endogamy and exogamy (i.e. marriage within or outside a particular group) (Davis, 1941) assume, over time, new borders and meanings. Emotions are relevant in the understanding of mixedness, since they not only correspond to biological factors, but are also shaped socially by structures connected to couples' ethnic and religious backgrounds (Montes, 2013). The 'socially conditioned relationship toward emotions in boys and men is one of the most widespread characteristics that define what it means to be a man across cultures and, thus, how masculinity is achieved' (Montes, p. 472). In recent decades, an increasing number of studies have acknowledged that emotions should not be seen as existing in the realm of pure individuality. Instead, 'they operate through common or similar experience among members of a group living in similar circumstances, through cultural stereotyping of experience, and through shared expectations, memories, and fantasies' (Leavitt, 1996, p. 527).

According to the definition of 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1979), emotions – seen within an interactive perspective – are subject to acts of management. People work on 'inducing or inhibiting

feelings' (p. 551), trying to feel in a way 'appropriate to the situation' (p. 552). How we feel is thus directed by a set of socially shared 'feeling rules' (p. 563), through which we are accepted as part of a particular social group. In the contemporary globalizing world, however, individuals are increasingly confronted with 'feeling rules' from the different communities in which they participate (Maehara, 2010; Ryan, 2008). In particular, in a family context where partners have different ethnic and religious backgrounds, culture may determine not only which emotions can be shown to whom and in what context, but also 'what set of emotions is entitled to what gender' (Montes, 2013, p. 471). The narratives analysed in this study refer precisely to partners dealing with different 'feeling rules' and the conflicts they experience in doing so. As Maehara (2010, p. 956) points out in her study: 'The context of migration and intermarriage adds unique dimensions to such emotion work, since migrants are often required to manage their feelings in a conscious effort to establish relationships with significant others in multiple places.'

Masculinities and men's studies

Analysing the specificity of the male migrant partner's experiences allows us to offer a distinctive empirical contribution to men's studies.³ On an international level, several empirical studies and theoretical reflections have already focused on the analysis of virility and masculinity representations in relation to social and cultural changes in a given social context. These works have also focused on the plural aspects of the 'gender crisis,' especially in cases where the traditional conception of male identity has suffered the strongest repercussions (De Sonty, 2015; Hearn, 1998; Hopkins, 2009; Kimmel, 1987; Mosse, 1998). Masculinity – considered both as a lens of analysis and as a phenomenon – emerges as a psychic and social identity. It is neither genetic nor fixed by social structure, but is socially constructed through the actions and resources of men in a specific social context (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Masculinity becomes visible when it is perceived as a problem, challenged by the struggle between different cultural models (Connell, 1995). It also changes from one culture to another, and within the same culture during a man's life and among differing groups of men (Connell, 1995; Hopkins & Noble, 2009; Kimmel & Michael, 2001). The notion of hegemonic masculinity 'embodies the currently most honored way of being a man, it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). The impact of migration on men and masculinity significantly contributes to extending the understanding of gender and migration issues (Kofman, 2004; Mahler & Pessar, 2006).

Transnational masculinities

Literature about transnationalism frequently refers to the definition of it given by Basch and colleagues (1994, p. 7) as: 'the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-standard social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.' In recent decades, various scholars have further investigated the implications of this living between 'here' and 'there,' and have also begun to highlight the 'emotional costs' (Montes, 2013) of migration from a gender perspective. These include the sense of 'unease' and the 'feeling of being trapped in a vicious circle' (Salih, 2001, p. 667), and the specific 'solitude,' 'isolation,' 'marginalization,' and 'invisibility' (Sarti & Scrinzi, 2010; Wray, 2015; Donaldson et al., 2009; Kwak, 2018). Despite the growing number of mixed marriages, little remains known about the impact on masculinity for migrant men who build a family with a partner from the dominant group. In the analysis here, focusing on male migrants, I take into account two main challenges pointed out by Ryan and Webster (2008), and Pascoe (2011). As Ryan and Webster (2008) observed, '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 time' (Ryan and

Webster, p. 5). I consider that analysis of the masculinity of the minority partner in mixed marriages is a key issue in understanding the 'in-between space' (Bhabha, 2004), in which identities and culture are 'developed over time.' Accordingly, I furthermore consider the reflection offered by Pascoe (2011, p. 5–6), who criticizes the fact that sociologists have often approached masculinity by focusing their analysis only on the male body. Instead, Pascoe believes that masculinity appears in relationship with a 'multiplicity of bodies, spaces and objects' (Pascoe, p. 9), which actively define and construct it in a choral process. In order to understand masculinity, in the following analysis I refer to it as an aspect of wider identity processes that actively involve women.

Islamic masculinities

The integration of Muslim minorities into Western societies is seen by European institutions as one of the main challenges for contemporary societies dealing with pluralism. Differences between Muslims and non-Muslims regarding the interpretation of gender roles are often seen as a particularly salient field of cultural conflict (Scheible & Fleischmann, 2013; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). The interpretation of this conflict particularly involves migrant Muslim men and their life trajectories. The strategies adopted by Muslim men to deal with public discourse – which often represents Muslim women as passive victims of a patriarchal and fundamentalist Islam – emblematically show masculinity as a key issue in understanding the life stories of such men married to Italian women. Ghousoub and Sinclair-Webb (2000), Ouzgane (2006), and De Sondy (2015) have systematically explored Islamic masculinities, putting them at the centre of the wider discussion on Islamic fragmentation and Muslim communities in Western countries. According to these authors, the discourse often implies a monolithic notion of Islamic masculinity, opposed to an alleged and often essentialized Western equivalent.

In his book *Islamic masculinities*, Ouzgane affirms that 'the dominant masculinity within Islam cultures has remained for a long time a non-recognized category, which maintains its power precisely in the refusal to recognize itself' (Ouzgane, 2006, p. 88). By collecting multidisciplinary articles all having a constructionist approach, Ouzgane investigates the different aspects of masculinity in several Muslim societies, from Pakistan to Northern Africa, and from Turkey to Yemen. The volume demonstrates how gender roles within Muslim cultures have been created by a mixture of components that refer more to patriarchal cultures prior to Islam than to a rigid interpretation of the Quran.

In his work, De Sondy (2015) deepens the conceptualization of the rigid notions of masculinity inherent in the Muslim world. He shows how they have generated a crisis in 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 Quranic masculinity' (p. 91). Focusing on the Indian and Pakistani examples, De Sondy shows on the one hand, the variety of spiritual paths inherent in Islam, and on the other, the political distortion of Islamic theology that deems as 'right' or 'wrong' only one type of masculinity and femininity. The same idea of 'submission to God' and the definition and perception of Muslims' religious identities have therefore been manipulated: 'Such narrow interpretations of submission to God by some have demoralized 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 non-religious Muslims' (De Sondy, p. 180).

As Henrietta Moore (1994) argues, we cannot see subjectivity as a singular, fixed, and coherent entity, otherwise 'it becomes very difficult to explain how it is that individuals constitute their sense of self [...] through several, often mutually contradictory subject positions' (p. 141). The gendered subject must be deemed to be the product of the co-existence of multiple gender discourses, in which some discourses overrule others at certain times and in certain social situations. The female and male construction, the main irreducible difference of every heterosexual couple, reaches a deeper degree of complexity and self-reflection in my case study, since the couple's experiences

force partners to discuss the 'taken for granted' in gendered roles and to directly confront the majority-minority dynamics.

The research

Research context

In Italy, citizenship is based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* and so is inherited through the parent-offspring tie, but can also be acquired by marrying an Italian citizen (*jus conubii*). As a result, mixed marriages are often stigmatized as a factor that puts at risk an assumed 'purity' of the 'Italian white identity.' This overlapping among "blood, 'nation,' and 'citizenship' reinforces the social construction of 'white [...] defined as the absence of any racial mixture' (Bratter, 2007, p. 842). Especially in the Veneto region (northeastern Italy) where the data was gathered, couples with a partner from a majority-Muslim country offer an emblematic case study for the phenomenon of mixed marriages. This is because within the social space of the family, they incorporate racial, ethnic, and religious differences that are represented as 'strong' and 'conflicting' in the hegemonic public discourse (Saraceno, 2007). The position of Catholic and Islamic religious authorities, openly suspicious about this type of relationship, and the weight of the rhetoric of the right-wing populist party Lega (the former 'Northern League,' firmly established in Italy), are important in understanding the context of external pressure and hostility that characterizes the everyday life of these families. During recent years, the Lega has explicitly built its political actions around the public visibility of Islam. Examples include daily disinformation campaigns, anti-Muslim demonstrations ridiculing the prophet Mohammed, and protests against the building of mosques (Allievi, 2012).

According to the last two national population censuses of 2001 and 2011, mixed marriages are increasing in number. There were 198,347 in 2001 and 320,234 in 2011, which is an increase of 61.5 percent.⁴ The latest ISTAT data of 2018 shows that Italian women in mixed marriages are most commonly partnered with men from majority-Muslim countries. In the typology 'foreign man-Italian woman,' the three most frequently found countries of origin of the man are Morocco, Albania, and Tunisia.⁵ However, as demonstrated by recent empirical research (Parisi, 2016), in the north-east of Italy, a mixed marriage between a white Italian woman and an immigrant man from North Africa is especially perceived as a taboo. The stigma that associates male migration with the 'theft of our women' is reinforced here with the stigmatization of Muslim men as patriarchal and violent. The fear of uncontrolled immigration together with the fear of losing a supposed 'national identity' are the key arguments that convey, in the public sphere, a monolithic 'Muslim identity' as the emblem of 'otherness.' This reinforces the paradigm of the 'clash of civilizations' suggested by Huntington (1996).

Methodology and participants

The current study draws on the life stories of 20 couples comprising an Italian woman and a migrant man from Morocco. I conducted 40 interviews with partners in their own home, in line with the approach of Daniel Bertaux (1998), who defines the life stories of interviewees as *récits de vie*. These are in-depth, biographical interviews, using open-ended questions aimed at shedding light on 'the interviewee's world' within their universe of meaning. All the interviews were conducted individually by the author, in the absence of the other partner, and each interview lasted on average two hours. Some couples were initially met through contact with an association for Christian-Muslim couples in Northern Italy. In order to vary the sample as much as possible, I then relied on snowball sampling, with contacts gathered through the help of local priests and Islamic associations, or personal contacts with local Moroccan communities. By contrast, other conversations reported in the article refer to joint discussions with all the family members present during celebrations or similar times. In order to explain the aims and scope of the research and interview both partners, indeed, I met almost

all the couples at least twice. This gave me the possibility to build up a relationship of trust and to conduct participant observation to enrich my fieldwork notes.

The interviews were originally conducted and transcribed in Italian on the initiative of the interviewees. Although the migrants' language proficiency was good, the English translations reflect some of the imperfections of their original speech while making some corrections in the interest of comprehensibility. All names used in the article are pseudonyms. In accordance with other authors (Edwards and Caballero, 2008; Wykes, 2017), I selected pseudonyms that are 'as close as possible in intention and effect to their actual names' (Edwards and Caballero, 2008, p. 46). In addition, I collected ethnographic observations during the time spent with the couples. Moments of enjoyment such as the tea ceremony spent together with all the family members were taped, transcribed, and became part of the material used in this article. All the couples had been formed between the early 1990s and 2010. There is generally an imbalance in the socioeconomic status of the families of origin; the migrant men come from working-class families and report migrating for economic reasons, while the Italian women are generally from a middle-class background. As I argue further, the different educational levels of the partners also represent an element to take into consideration in the gender dynamic that is analysed. In this article I do not explore in depth the management of religious differences within couples, as this would require a dedicated paper (Cerchiaro et al., 2015; Cerchiaro, 2019b). Here, I want to focus on the 'here-there' overlapping that exposes different definitions of masculinity. The title of the paper, 'Dissonant masculinities,' refers precisely to the management of the 'gender arena' that is explored in the next section, recalling the 'there' and 'here' experiences.

A final methodological consideration regards the position of the author/interviewer in the context of the interview. It is important, indeed, to consider that the author (white, Italian, well-educated man) represents, in the eyes of the interviewees, the hegemonic Italian context. That is why especially the Moroccan partner refers to the interviewer as 'you here' intended as 'you Italians'. This fact has probably enhanced the reflexivity of the interviewees who tried to elaborate on, instead of taken them for granted, their emotions in managing masculinities between 'here' and 'there'.

Results

In order to offer a detailed description of the interplay of migration, emotion, and masculinity, I focus on two meaningful everyday scenarios that emerged as recurrent narratives in the partners' life stories. First, the 'there.' The initial visit by the couples to Morocco, which symbolically represents the first physical contact with the 'other's world,' was often described by women as a sort of culture shock. This represents the inversion of the roles within the couple, when the majority partner becomes the minority. Second, the 'here,' where the focus is on the consequences of the marriage with regard to relationships with co-nationals in Italy and the construction of new friendship networks. These narratives allow us to analyse how the overlap between 'here' and 'there' produces what I term 'dissonant masculinities.' I accordingly chose the most representative case studies from the interviews. The analysis focusing on these can be considered representative of a more general pattern reported by all the interviewees, although – as I explain below – the sense of dissonance was stronger when the family backgrounds of the two partners were characterized by a difference in socioeconomic status and educational level.

'There': the couple's visit to morocco

The visit of the couple to the husband's country of origin is emblematic of a pivotal step, in which the system of expectations concerning 'masculinity' emerges. These visits usually coincide with the official engagement prior to the wedding. The Italian woman's expectations and those of the man's family become the stakes between the opposing sides that are encountered in their first social interaction. Referring to some everyday episodes, the couples talked to the interviewer about things they remembered from their lives. In these narratives, identity is clearly at stake, and the actors'

performance gives it meaning. As Lerner (2013, p. 182) notes: '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.' In this way, the symbolic struggle between the partners' cultural backgrounds takes place within the gender arena. In the following narrative, the *alter* representations in the 'performances' of Mohammed and Giovanna create a sociologically meaningful picture. Round the kitchen table, the division of housework and expectations regarding gender roles identify the patriarchal culture of her husband's family, which Giovanna refuses to accept. By behaving in this way, she breaks and changes the ritual of a 'taken for granted' situation in her husband's family.

I was a university student in Psychology. I was getting my degree at that time. That is to say, I wanted to be an independent realized woman [...] The first time in Morocco was a devastating experience for me. It was hard. I did not expect anything like this and we had never spoken about these things before. [...] He has two sisters and five brothers. The first time I went there, everybody was in the house around the table for lunch. Men didn't lift a finger [...] and when they said "I'm thirsty" ... their sisters ran to bring them a glass of water. Well ... I saw women who worked very hard while men ... Women served men with everything. I did not accept what I saw. [...] 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 on meeting his family in Morocco. We stayed there for a month ... and it was a traumatizing month. (Giovanna)

The narrative clearly introduces us to two important aspects. Mohammed, in Giovanna's words, tends to manage cultural divergences by separating them, in order both to avoid facing his wife's opposition and to protect her and their relationship from stress. Giovanna's actions are also characterized by the claim of differentiation from the traditional gender relationships implied in her husband's family. The different educational levels between the university student Giovanna – who defines herself as an 'independent realized woman' – and Mohammed, a worker with a lower level of education, increases the social distance between the backgrounds of the two partners, and consequently the representation of two conflicting worlds that, in this visit, were encountered for the first time. In his narrative, Mohammed refers to the same episode to explain his specific 'suffering' as a Moroccan man, married to an Italian woman, who was already somehow considered to have 'betrayed' his own culture. He describes how the first meeting between his wife and his family represented a conflict in the management of gender relationships taken for granted in Giovanna's family.

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

The first time she came to Morocco with me, it was difficult. Especially with my parents. You know ... my parents have a vision of a woman ... one who helps the 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 ... this thing just made me feel bad. I mean, she did not have to live with my parents. She just had to stay there for that period. Got it? [...] You [referring to Giovanna] know that here in Italy I am always with you ... helping with 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 ... do it yourself. Take your stuff and wash it." Got it? In front of them! My parents were scandalized. I felt like ... it's hard to explain what it means for a man. (Mohammed)

This episode, showing Mohammed's upset in front of his relatives, is an extraordinary example of the ambivalence of the gender performance between the two contexts. Mohammed explains how he changed his perspective of what 'men's duties' are, so that he could 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 feels that he is losing his authority as 'the man of the house'; he has become more 'Westernized' and therefore, in his parents' eyes, weaker. Giovanna's narrative of Mohammed's suffering is then presented, from her perspective, as an 'unmasking' in front of his family of origin,

the first culture shock ('traumatizing month') she experienced. Similar narratives seem to point to the impact of class differences between the partners' families of origin. In their countries of origin, these men are induced by the social context to perform a different image of the self as man and a husband. Therefore, narratives of conflicts due to the different self-presentation of the husband between 'here' and 'there' recur. The discrepancy in the Italian partners' narratives between 'he in Italy' and 'he in his country' shows how masculinity can be differently performed according to the cultural context.

Below, Claudia and Jamal express their emotions about their journey to Morocco.

When I went there the first time, I had some doubts about my decision. The bad thing was that I was taking him back to his home, his 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 ran off from morning to night 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 [...] I was afraid of losing him. He was back in his own world and I was not there anymore. [...] But the truth was that I was scared and I saw things as worse than they really were. Over time I realized that Morocco was changing too. (Claudia)

When Claudia first visited Morocco with me she felt lost. It was strange for me too. We were both lost because I could not find what I had left and she did not recognize me anymore ... as she said. The truth was that I had changed, I had studied etcetera, and Morocco was changing too. We lived based on mutual stereotypes that we overcame over time. That was the problem. (Jamal)

In the couples' everyday life, the first visit to the husband's country of origin is recurrently described as a disorienting and conflictual moment. The gender arena transversally emerges as a place where partners' recognition and misrecognition are expressed in cultural terms. The visit turns out to be a physical and symbolic experience that 'tears the partners in two.' Claudia's emotions of 'anxiety' and 'fear of loss' during her visit to Morocco highlight the reversal of power relations between majority and minority contexts. These experiences bring with them the contrasting expectations regarding gender roles and the management of the couple's dimension. This visit to his family means that the man returns home, to his previous context of socialization, in which he rediscovers (or believes he does) habits and lifestyles he had abandoned or changed. The Italian partners' narratives of fears and tensions about this 'winding back' of time – which gives rise to new discordances between the couple's identities and balances – is seen in the words: 'he was back in his world and I wasn't there anymore.' The dissonance the partners narrate is expressed through a 'cultural stereotyping of experience' (Leavitt, 1996, p. 527) where the two partners reinforce the polarizations of 'we vs. them' and 'Western vs. non-Western' countries. This representation refers to the situated character of masculinity, and the management of the two contexts is achieved through the capacity for alternating different models of masculinity. The visit, in the wife's eyes, is narrated as a sort of 'unmasking' of the man she now barely recognizes. The hegemonic masculinity highlighted in these narratives shifts as the couples move between the 'there' and 'here.' In this sense, Islamic and Western masculinities emerge as two essentialized poles of a cultural discourse used by the same partners to express their own experience of alterity in the minority context. In doing so, they also reveal their mutual stereotypes regarding gender roles in the other's culture. In their descriptions of further visits to Morocco, the partners accordingly often described a relaxation of these initial tensions. The perception of two opposed worlds in conflict with each other that dominated the first encounter with the Moroccan families of the men subsequently receded, leaving space for a narrative focused more on the development of mutual knowledge.

'Here': the relationship with co-nationals in Italy

This section focuses on the consequences of the marriage for the relationships with men's co-nationals in Italy, and on the construction of new friendship networks as a measure to combat the isolation experienced early in the relationship. These two elements allow me to focus in more detail on masculinity and on how emotions emerge as a central means of grasping the management of the 'dissonance.' Speaking about how their union with an Italian woman influenced their relationships with

co-nationals, men recounted facing attitudes of scorn and sometimes hostility. This was frequently with accusations of having been converted or subjugated by their 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 expanding relationships with homogamic families. Even when the man does not refer to any conflict with or explicit disapproval from his co-nationals concerning his marriage to an Italian partner, we can still see how these relationships are in any case significantly influenced. The 'fear' of the migrant described by Sayad (1999, p. 157) concerning co-nationals' accusations of 'leaving his own country,' 'being weak,' and of 'betrayal,' in this case acquires to a certain extent a radical meaning. The suspicion of betrayal, even of apostasy (social and cultural, rather than religious), is a permanent feature that is obsessively present in considering migration as a practical form of conduct and category of thought. It is an 'illegitimate' absence that requires intense, constant work towards legitimization (Sayad, 1999, p. 171).

The conversation reported below is a clear example of this. Having 'accepted' the baptism and Catholic education of his daughters, Hamid describes how his encounters with co-nationals became rare as a consequence of these choices, mainly reduced to sporadic encounters at a coffee shop or during leisure time, when members of his family are not present or not involved. The ambivalence in the management of these relationships therefore privileges the lack of direct contact 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 baptized ...' [the first child], you confirmed that the problem was 'other Moroccans' ... what they would think ...

Francesca (wife): Er ... yes

Hamid (husband): It still is, but less now ...

Francesca: No ... I am not so sure

Hamid: Yes, it is still present but not like in the past. Many Moroccans know that my children are baptized.

Lara: But dad ... you argued with Amira [the second daughter] until a few years ago ... 'If you go to church, don't walk in front of the Moroccans' bar, put your headscarf on.'

Hamid: How many years ago? Well, Francesca, Lara ... what are you saying?

Lara: It is not true. Even now you act like that.

Francesca: Yes ... it's like this even now, Hamid.

Hamid: It isn't true.

Lara: Yes it is. Don't look at me as if I shouldn't say these things.

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

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

Hamid: No. My mother doesn't know it ... because she doesn't understand these things, these discussions. She wouldn't understand. I told my sisters about it [the baptism of the daughters] and they understood [...] my older sister less so. They always say [...] 'do you want to baptize us now?'

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

Hamid asking his daughter to avoid the Moroccans' bar when she goes to church, the fact of wearing the headscarf in front of them, or not telling Hamid's mother that his daughters were baptized, all exemplify the suspicion of betrayal, even apostasy, to which Sayad (1999) refers. This type of apostasy is

social and cultural, rather than just religious. Traces of masculinity are thus disclosed; a form of masculinity that only becomes visible when it is perceived in a situation of crisis. Here, 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 the father's traditions (De Sondi, 2015; Kimmel, 1987; Mosse, 1998). My data goes further into what Maehara (2010, p. 962) found with regard to 'Conflicting Loyalties Towards Families "Here" and "There";' in her research into Japanese migrant women in mixed families in Ireland. These women struggle with 'conflicting loyalties' and a 'strong sense of guilt' in moving between the Japanese and Irish family contexts (p. 963). Hamid's embarrassment during the interaction with his wife and daughter, who contradict him in front of the interviewer, clearly reveals the 'deep acting' theorized by Hochschild (1979, pp. 557–558); a situation in which the social actor tries to control their emotions, rather than show them. On the one hand, Hamid has to detach himself from the stigmatizing hegemonic discourse that 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 only once: first geographically, by migrating, and then symbolically, by marrying an Italian woman.

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

When I came here I had Moroccan friends. [...] But now everyone has their own family and we rarely see each other. I have no relationship with the community here. I have no new Moroccan friends. [...] When we were younger, we used to go to the bar to drink, or play football. I was living with them. We all came from the same city. Then everyone started their family. Some with an Italian woman, others with a Moroccan. Those with Moroccan families see each other and I do not see them ... I see most of those who married an Italian woman like [...]. It is easier to understand each other. (Ahmed)

In the following narrative, Mohammed expresses his difficulty in creating strong ties with co-national couples. A discourse on the perception of his marriage and his family's cultural mixedness consequently emerges. The search for 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 in co-national communities in Italy.

I had friends I used to meet up with, but their families are of Moroccan culture while we are always in the middle ... we are half Moroccan and half Italian. [...] I cannot say it is easy to create relations with other Moroccan families. There have been some attempts ... but you cannot create a strong relationship. My wife is still seen as Italian ... and she sees them as Moroccan families. We are somehow different. [...] For example ... I had two Moroccan friends. When they were single there were no problems. They always came to visit me and we spent time together. After they married Moroccan women I did not see them any longer. And that made me suffer. They prefer to visit other Moroccan families and we were excluded ... and that's also why we created an association of mixed couples ... 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 to create stronger friendships, to help us in some difficult periods ... 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 with other couples, for instance, critical issues such as children's education (Cerchiaro et al., 2015). The self-representation of the singularity ('we are a mixed couple') that forces a couple to enlarge its friendship networks represents an attempt to overcome the partners' difficulties and the sense of 'isolation,' 'ambiguity,' or even 'betrayal' expressed above by men in relation to their co-nationals.

Conclusions

Through the life stories of couples consisting of Italian women and Moroccan men living in Italy, this article explores the interconnections between masculinity, emotions, and migration. Aiming to answer a precise research question, namely the extent to which a mixed marriage challenges particularistic definitions of masculinity, the article contributes to gender and migration studies in three ways.

First, it investigates how partners produce multiple coexistent and contradictory discourses of gender depending on cultural contexts. The experiences of 'dissonance' and 'betrayal' of the migrant men, as well as those of 'anxiety' and 'fear of loss' of the Italian women, highlight the construction of masculinities at the centre of a transnational process. The data goes further in highlighting the 'emotional costs' (Montes, 2013) of migration for both partners in the couples. The social distance in terms of class and sometimes educational level between the partners symbolically emerges when the minority and majority contexts are reversed for the first time (the first visit to Morocco). As already highlighted by Salih (2007, p. 669) 'the material and psychological preparation to undertake this trip may be overwhelming.' In doing this, emotions reveal a hidden aspect of the 'performance of masculinity' from which conflicts often arise. What is represented as an 'unmasking' by the Italian partners is, indeed, a way for the men to avoid facing their wife's opposition and to protect their relationship from stress.

Second, it contributes to a growing field of studies focusing on the interaction between migration and masculinities (Charsley & Wray, 2015; Donaldson et al., 2009; Hopkins, 2009; Montes, 2013; Thai, 2008). The case of migrant men married to women from the dominant group shows a variety of contradictory processes at work, demonstrating how gender identities are constantly renegotiated within the context of migration, often producing what Batnitzky et al. (2009, p. 1288) define as 'flexible and strategic masculinities.' The narratives, not only of the men but of their wives, show how migration and union with an Italian partner require a constant reprocessing of masculinity. What I call 'dissonant masculinities,' recalling Maehara's (2010) notion of 'emotional dissonance,' arise particularly when family and co-national networks wish to control expectations, and raise other demands concerning the man's identity as a father, son, friend, co-national, and Muslim. Whereas Donaldson et al. (2009, p. 216) conclude that 'while men may move themselves with relative ease across the globe, shifting their own masculinities proves rather more difficult,' I have tried to concretely investigate these difficulties. The attempt to reconcile differing life contexts often makes the male partner feel guilty about not satisfying others' expectations twice over: physically and symbolically, through migration and through marriage to an Italian woman. The couple's visit to Morocco, in particular, is linked to the risk of the man feeling deprived of his status in front of his family of origin. The emotional opposition between 'presence' and 'absence,' 'betrayal' and 'loyalty' (Sayad, 1999), and 'here' and 'there' (Waldinger, 2008, p. 24), demonstrates that it is important to analyse not only the processual dimension of power and the construction of subjectivities, but also the relationship between the two, in order to grasp the moments of rupture, complicity, and ambiguity.

Third, the article underlines the importance assigned to the creation of new friendships with other mixed families in order to find a symbolic common space to overcome the social stigma and consequent isolation of the couple. This appears to be a means adopted by the partners to diminish the consequences of breaking the endogamic rule, defending their intimate life from external pressures. To meet other similar 'mixed' couples helps a couple both to minimize their perception of differences and, in particular, to counter the judgement and marginalization the migrant man experiences from his co-nationals.

The analysis here is limited to the symbolic moments when these couples experience cultural conflicts around the definition and the performance of masculinity. In doing this, the article does not include a longitudinal analysis over time, which should be undertaken in future in order to study the evolution of the relationship between 'here' and 'there' in a couple's biographical trajectory.

Moreover, future research should compare these results with other studies focusing on the relationships between masculinity, migration, and emotions in order to identify similarities and differences depending on other social indicators such as nationality and class.

Notes

1. I refer here to Collet's (2012, p. 71) notion of 'conjugal mixedness,' as being 'not only a question of different cultures but one of conformity or deviance with regard to social norms.' Although the notion of 'mixed' is reflexively criticized and deconstructed by the same partners (see Cerchiaro, 2016b), in accordance with other authors (Collet, 2012; Song, 2016; Varro, 2003), I use the term 'mixed' to encompass the multiple differences (regarding ethnicity and faith) that characterize the participants in my study.
2. Latest ISTAT data, accessed 8 November 2018 from <http://demo.istat.it/str2017/index.html>.
3. Since there is no unique accepted definition of *men's studies*, I refer to it as the 'study of masculinities and male experiences as specific and varying social-historical-cultural formations' (Brod, 1987, p. 40).
4. To consult the 2001 census data: <https://www.istat.it/it/censimenti-permanenti/censimenti-precedenti/popolazione-e-abitazioni/popolazione-2001>. To consult the 2011 census data: <https://www4.istat.it/it/censimenti-permanenti/censimenti-precedenti/popolazione-e-abitazioni/popolazione-2011>.
5. Latest ISTAT data, accessed 8 November 2018 from http://demo.istat.it/altridati/matrimoni/2018/tav3_3.pdf.

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