

PERCEPTIONS OF FILIAL RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS THE CARE NEEDS OF ELDERLY PARENTS: GENDER AND CULTURAL CLEAVAGES IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES OF MAGHREBINE ORIGINS IN ITALY.

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INTRODUCTION

Family relationships have been traditionally regarded as key determinants of social cohesion and solidarity in modern society. The family is the basis from which family members participate in society and family relationships have significant consequences for individuals' well-being (Ingoldsby and Smith, 1995). However, there is still a lot to be understood on family relationships, particularly as far as different immigrant communities are concerned (Georgas et al., 2006).

The number of immigrants in Western Europe has risen substantially in the last decades. The number of immigrant elderly family members has been equally growing, especially in the last years. Estimations from the Country Office for Data Processing and Statistics of North Rhine Westphalia reported a rise in the numbers of elderly migrants in Europe from 7 million, in 2008, to 15 million, in 2015. However, until recently, many scholars and policy makers have forecasted that a large part of migrants would return to their origin when approaching later life (see for example Warnes et al., 2004). One of the consequences of such implicit expectation, as noted by Warnes and Williams (2006) is that policy and academic debates on the welfare needs of the migrant population have almost exclusively focused on the short-term economic aspects of migration rather than on long-term issues in terms of health and long-term care (LTC) services – with some relevant exceptions (e.g. Ebrahim, 1996; Ritch et al., 2006; Bolzman et al., 2004). On the contrary, it is becoming increasingly evident that elderly migrants are likely to stay (permanently or for a large part of the year) during their later life (White, 2006; Bolzman et al., 2006). Hence, the rising aging population in Europe will increasingly comprise a relevant proportion of individuals of immigrant origins. Such demographical and societal change will have several implications for family relations and care arrangements (de Valk and Schans, 2008). From the perspective of social policy, in fact, immigrant older people from low income countries are a group with a high risk of facing unmet health and welfare needs (Warners et al., 2004).

It is clear, therefore, that for potential and actual elderly caregivers and care receivers, a key issue is the balance between informal family care and formal welfare services provided by public institutions or acquired through the market. A focus on family, and in particular filial, perceptions of responsibility towards the care needs of elderly parents is crucial in this sense. Accordingly, this paper is intended as a contribution to the debate. While feelings of obligation may not necessarily translate into actual support behaviour, they are indicative of the functioning of families and thus of the potential impact on support (Klein Ikkink et al., 1999; Stein et al., 1998). In other words, any assessment of the future demands for family and

elderly care requires consideration for values and attitudes towards family and elderly care (Lowenstein, 2007). In turn these may spur into support and (care) opportunities. Or they may rather add to elderly vulnerability while further crystallizing social inequalities (Attias-Donfut and Wolff, 2000; Kuenemund et al., 2005) associated, among other things, with a welfare provision that does may fail to address the needs of older cohorts adequately (Lowenstein and Daatland, 2006; Walker, 2000).

#### PATTERNS OF INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT AMONG IMMIGRANTS

Despite increasing academic interest in the analysis of patterns and factors affecting intergenerational solidarity and exchange of instrumental support in Europe, relatively little attention has been paid to the specific characteristics and configuration of these phenomena among the immigrant population (and, within this group, to differences among and across cultural and ethnic groups). Additionally, little work has been carried out on the topic by adopting the point of view of young adults and their feelings of obligations towards the care needs of elderly.

Generally speaking, immigrants are less likely than natives to provide care support to non co-residing elderly parents, while they are more likely to provide them with economic support (Attias-Donfut and Wolff, 2008; Baykara-Krumme, 2008; de Valk and Schans, 2008; Attias-Donfut et al., 2012). The transnational nature of immigrant families largely explains this difference. Distance makes it difficult to provide care, whereas the (often) weak pension system of origin countries makes economic support to parents essential. Importantly, kinship networks are maintained over time, through transnational exchanges. Even low-paid employment may provide opportunities to support families that are “left behind” (Haller and Landolt, 2005). Little is known about multigenerational living arrangements among immigrant families but they seem to be higher than in native families – at least in Nordic European countries - such as the Netherlands (see for example de Valk and Schans, 2008). The most common reasons are associated with elderly health problems, the death of a (former) caregiver, financial hardship, and a desire for companionship (Brackbill and Kitch, 1991).

In the framework of the study of the exchange of intergenerational support among immigrants we think that particular attention should be devoted to views, expectations and perceptions of the 1.5 or second generation immigrants. In fact, immigrant adolescents and adult children have been found to adopt new attitudes and values more rapidly than their parents do (Szapocznik and Kurtines, 1993). This is likely to influence the support provision on their side. Taylor et al. (2012) provided evidence of a cycle of receiving and giving, with a sense of giving back to the family. What is manifest is that filial obligations develop during socialisation, through personal experiences as well as by observing relationships between family members of different generations (Goldscheider and Lawton, 1998; Burr and Mutcler, 1999). The provision of support is also determined by socio-economic characteristics and ethnic differences have been found to play a role too, although evidence is indecisive in this respect. Moreover, while obligations can be described as moral norms, they are also negotiated commitments (Finch, 1987). The family as a unit does provide an arena for negotiations on cultural patterns and identities that can be conflictual and ambivalent (Antonucci, 2001; Lowenstein, 2007). Ambivalence towards norms and expectations of reciprocal intergenerational support within the family - which is a typical trait of intergenerational relations among the native population - is likely to play an even greater role among immigrants, due to contrasting social norms in the origin and hosting countries.

Against this background, the paper will focus on immigrant adult children's perceived obligations and responsibilities towards the care needs of their elderly parents. Research stresses that considering multiple rather than separate facets of intergenerational solidarity offers valuable insights into the meaning of relationships (Dykstra and Fokkema, 2011; Silverstein and Bengtson, 1997; Van Gaalen and Dykstra, 2006), but little empirical evidence is available (Rookyackers et al., 2014). Hence this paper wishes to contribute to filling the gap, by analysing adult children's perceptions towards the various care needs of their elderly parents.

#### NORMS AND PRACTICES IN THE ORIGIN AND DESTINATION COUNTRIES

The family has long been and continues to be the main source of support in most Arab countries, including also Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and other countries of Maghreb. Because systems of public support are embryonic in many Arab societies, families have been largely meeting the needs of older adults by means of co-residence (Khadr 1997; Shah et al., 2002; Yount 2005; Yount and Khadr, 2008), in connection with three organisational principles of kinship: (i) familial solidarity based on bonds connecting male members of the same paternal lineage (see also Stevenson, 1997), with men's obligations to support the family financially (Charrad, 2001; Rugh, 1984); (ii) "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti, 1988), with women upholding the collective interests of the kin group (Charrad, 2001; Kabeer, 1999; Stevenson, 1997); (iii) patrilocal residence and kin endogamy (see also Stevenson, 1997).

However, divergences among Arab countries are significant and these, in turn, can contribute to producing relevant differences in the way family solidarity is enacted and understood in each country (of origin of immigrants). Differences may have triggered changes in the (traditional) family configuration, thus bringing along new pattern of old-age care (Sibait and Yamout, 2012). To cite an example, in some African countries (particularly in the West), formal, long-term care facilities for frail older adults have been proliferating over the last decade, in response to the conflicting demands of the former as opposed to those of younger generations (see for example Nazarchuk, 2001).

In Italy, the context of arrival of the participants to the survey whose data are presented here, intergenerational co-residency is a widespread phenomenon, although it is mainly adopted (by Italians) as a strategy to support adult children rather than elderly parents. Furthermore, among the native Italian population, financial transfers from children to elderly parents are sporadic and care support to frail elderly parents is mainly provided by daughters or daughters in law (Albertini et al., 2007; Albertini and Kohli, 2013). An alternative strategy that is often adopted - and that is crucial for the Italian welfare system - is that of employing a foreign caregiver (Ambrosini, 2014; Catanzaro and Colombo, 2009; Da Roit, 2007). Financing this solution is mainly up to elderly parents themselves (with the help of public cash-in transfers in case of severely disable individuals that are totally dependent on external help for daily activities) and adult children.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do filial obligations of immigrants of Maghrebine origins towards their elderly parents differ from those of Italian natives?
2. To what extent do the support strategies envisaged by adult children of Maghrebine origins compare to those of Italian natives?
3. In particular, to what extent are similarities or differences evident as far as co-residency strategies are concerned?

4. How do the perception of filial obligations differ according to caregivers' characteristics and in particular gender, age, age at arrival in the host country, educational level, religion and proximity to parents?
5. In particular, to what extent are the gender cleavages evident in support obligations towards Italian parents reproduced by immigrant adult children?
6. Also, considering that second generation immigrants tend to receive less economic support from their parents (than natives) are their perceptions on support obligations towards their parents influenced negatively?
7. How do the perception of filial obligations differ according to the different care needs of care receivers?

## DATA & METHODS

The data presented in this paper draws from a survey conducted between November 2015 and June 2015, in Bologna (Italy). It involved face-to-face interviews with immigrants from three different countries of origin: the Maghreb area (Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria), China and the Philippines. The sample was selected by means of snowball. A total of 334 interviews were undertaken in various public spaces with: 143 individuals from Maghreb; 71 from the Philippines; 120 from China<sup>1</sup>. The target groups comprised male and female individuals with an immigrant background, of 18-60 years of age, living in the city of Bologna. Interviews were structured in three main parts: basic socio-demographic information; 6 vignettes on upward and downward transfers; information on children and parents (gender, age, living distance, frequency of contact, religion, death). Two of the vignettes utilized in the survey focused on elderly care and this paper builds specifically on them. Next, we will provide a description of the actual vignettes, while reporting some initial results as they are emerging from the preliminary analysis of the empirical data.

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The analysis of the empirical material collected is in progress. It is being conducted through a mixed-method approach that comprises statistical and textual analysis of vignettes' responses. So far 50 questionnaires of immigrants from the Maghreb area have been analysed. Below we report some initial results with our interpretative observations.

In the first vignette, a non self-sufficient mother lives in the country of origin and respondents were asked who should help her - son or daughter who lives in Italy with his wife/her husband and two children or else his male or female siblings who are similarly living in Italy. The largest majority of respondents expressed the idea that assistance to the elderly mother should be provided by taking her to Italy to live in co-residency with one of her adult children (who previously) migrated. This choice, however, according to the respondents, should take both negative and positive aspects into due consideration:

*"They [adult children] should decide together but surely they should take care of their elderly mother. The best solution would be to organise her transfer to Italy, although such a choice would need to be balanced against both negative and positive aspects. The former connect to*

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing (this abstract), it is yet unsure whether it will be possible to include in the (comparative) analysis the data collected for the immigrant groups from the Philippines and China.

*migration from her own country of origin, which would mean living “her life” and habits behind; the latter connect to proximity to her children.” (Male, 29 years old, Morocco)<sup>2</sup>*

The second most frequent answer was that adult children should send financial support back to their mother in the country of origin.

#### **Analysis of preferred strategy, %**

	All respondents	Stimuli			
		Son	Daughter	Youngest	Oldest
Co-residency in Italy	56	67	46	50	61
Paid care in Italy	2	-	4	4	-
Co-residency in origin country	12	12	12	14	11
Paid care in origin country	30	21	38	32	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N	50	24	26	22	28

Overall, we did not observe a particular preference for daughters to provide care to elderly parents. On the contrary the majority of respondent expressed neutral feelings vis-à-vis the preferred gender of the caregiver. Female respondents were more prone to identify the daughters of the elderly mother as those in charge of providing care. Only when the stimulus (the vignette story) involved a male, as the main character respondent, the actual respondent seemed to be more prone to identify the sons as those in charge of providing care.

#### **Analysis of gender of preferred care provider, %**

	All respondents	Stimuli		Respondent's sex	
		Son	Daughter	Man	Woman
Sons	24	37	11	24	24
Daughter	24	21	27	10	35
Neutral	52	42	62	66	41
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N	50	24	26	21	29

Some respondents reported that financial support should be put forward in the form of a shared contribution from each and all siblings, females and males, younger and older included. Importantly, in line with Taylor et. al (2012), a cycle of receiving and giving emerged in respondents' narratives, as the following extract exemplifies well:

*“Parents must be always supported, without ever turning away (from them); they have invested in and sacrificed their time to bring us [children] up and when they need help, it is their children's time to do their part.”<sup>3</sup> (Male, 33, Morocco)*

<sup>2</sup> Authors' own translation from Italian: “Mettendosi d'accordo tra loro dovrebbero sicuramente provvedere alla madre. La soluzione migliore sarebbe organizzare il trasferimento dell'anziana madre in Italia, ma dietro tale scelta va considerato il lato negativo, ovvero il fatto di sradicarla dalla propria vita, dalle proprie abitudini, dai propri affetti presenti in Marocco – e quello positivo, ovvero la vicinanza ai propri figli.”

In the second vignette, a lone frail elderly mother lives in Italy and so do her daughter and son that live in the same city and are both married with children. Respondents were asked who should help the elderly mother and how. Both male and female respondents suggested the main responsibility should fall onto the daughter – although many stressed that female and male siblings irrespectively should equally shared the burden, similarly to attitudes of the native population:

*“They [children] should take turns, in their free time, [and share the burden] equally. They are both [no matter if male or female] children, in the same way.”<sup>4</sup>(Male, 22, Morocco)*

In addition, a fifth of respondents reported that while adult children should share of care provision, it is the son that should pay bills and help with paperwork and household chores (e.g. gardening). Daughters, on the other side, should be in charge of personal care.

Among the preferred solutions, many respondents suggested co-residency, stressing that this would first and ideally be with the daughter:

*“The best solution (...) would be for the mother to leave the house in which she has been living and move to either her son’s or daughter’s. (...) However, I would suggest she moves to her daughter’s, as I assume her husband works and she is at home, thus with more time available to take care of her [mother].”<sup>5</sup> (Female, 21, Morocco)*

#### **Strategy and responsibility to provide care, %**

	All respondents	Respondent’s sex	
		Man	Woman
Sons	10	14	7
Daughter	42	43	41
Gendered division	20	14	24
Equal care provision	22	19	24
Paid care provider	4	5	4
Equal co-residency	2	5	-
Total	100	100	100
N	50	21	29

Just two respondents supported that children should employ a private caregiver, which is clearly not in line with attitudes among Italians, for whom hiring a care worker is often the preferred solution (Colombo and Catanzaro, 2009). In this sense, respondents reflected that employment of a caregiver would be reasonable only whereby co-residency was forcibly opted out - and sufficient financial resources were available - or if the elderly mother explicitly expressed her will not to migrate. Under the same condition, an additional option

<sup>3</sup> Authors’ own translation from Italian: “I genitori vanno aiutati sempre, senza mai voltare loro le spalle; loro hanno investito e sacrificato il loro tempo per crescerci e quando hanno bisogno tocca ai figli fare la loro parte.”

<sup>4</sup> Authors’ own translation from Italian: “Nel tempo libero dovrebbero alternarsi in modo equo, sono entrambi figli, allo stesso modo.”

<sup>5</sup> Authors’ own translation from Italian: “La soluzione migliore (...) sarebbe quella di far lasciare alla madre, la casa in cui si trova per portarla a vivere o dal figlio o dalla figlia. (...) Io comunque direi più dalla figlia, perché presumo che il marito di lei lavori, e al contempo lei sia a casa, avendo quindi più tempo a disposizione per accudirla.”

was envisaged: non-working daughters could take turns to reach their mother and assist her, thus bringing to light gender cleavages.

A few respondents mentioned their (vague) expectations on (Italian) welfare support, although they did not refer to specific measures:

*"(If the children work) it will be social services that take care of their elderly non self-sufficient parents and help them in their everyday activities."*<sup>6</sup> (Female, 38, Morocco)

*"In this vignette, no hypothesis is taken into consideration with regard to the possibility [for adult children] to ask for the welfare support. This should be considered instead, because the State must also help with some kind of [welfare] benefit."*<sup>7</sup> (Male, 25, Morocco)

Further analysis of this paper will specifically focus on the extent to which second generations are actually aware of the welfare benefits their parents may have right to and the extent to which this may contribute to influence and possibly change their perception on filial obligations.

Finally, the option of a nursing home was not taken into consideration by our respondents. On the contrary it was described as being one of the negative characteristics of the typical care arrangements adopted by the native population:

*"Often, here in Italy, elderly people are taken to a nursing home, but in the Muslim world this practice is very much reproached - it means that sons/daughters do not show any gratitude towards their parents, after all they [their parents] have done to bring them up."*<sup>8</sup> (Female, 35, Morocco)

In this extract, the respondent made explicit reference to religion and its possible relevance in adult children perceptions of their obligations is certainly worth considering.

To resume, our preliminary analysis seems to suggest that there are no particularly strong gender cleavages among our respondents, as far as negotiations of family responsibilities towards elderly parents are concerned. What seems to distinguish the attitudes and expectations of Maghrebine immigrants, in particular, is a quite strong preference for adopting intergenerational co-residency as a strategy aimed to provide support to frail parents in later life. Differently, the possibility of hiring a professional caregiver and/or recurring to institutional support is rarely mentioned. This is in stark contrast with the strategies enacted by the native population – above all in the area where the interviews were carried out – within which the use of private and public care services has been considerably widespread.

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<sup>6</sup> Authors' own translation from Italian: "Se i figli lavorano, i servizi sociali si occupano di aiutare persone anziane non più autosufficienti a svolgere le attività quotidiane."

<sup>7</sup> Authors' own translation from Italian: "Nella vignetta non è contemplata l'ipotesi di chiedere assistenza statale. Andrebbe invece considerata, perché lo Stato deve anche aiutare con una qualche forma di sussidio."

<sup>8</sup> Authors' own translation from Italian: "Spesso qui in Italia gli anziani vanno in casa di riposo, ma nel mondo musulmano è una pratica molto mal vista - vuole dire che un figlio non ha la riconoscenza per i propri genitori, dopo tutto ciò che loro hanno fatto per crescerlo."