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Introduction

Recent years have witnessed profound changes in migratory trends in the Mediterranean. Some aspects of these transformations are of particular interest, as they testify to the participation of this area in a new "age of migration" (Castles, Miller, 1998). Indeed, the Mediterranean has experienced both a social diversification and a spatial differentiation of migratory movements. Spatial mobility, in particular back-and-forth movements, have intensified as a consequence of the globalisation of economies and due to the rise of transnational communities (Simon, 1990). Besides, during the last thirty years, Mediterranean countries, which were traditionally countries of transit and/or emigration also became receiving countries. In the 1970s and afterward, Southern Europe turned into an area of settlement for foreign immigrants. Then, in the 1990s, North-Africa also became an area of immigration, especially for Subsaharian African populations.

In this context of profound migratory changes, another feature of particular relevance is the feminisation of economic migration from Maghreb to Europe. Even if we can express some doubt about the "novel" character of female economic migration from Maghreb[1], it remains that in all the receiving countries the female population rate has increased in the last decades. In particular, the rate of "women moving on their own", as they are usually labelled - that is to say: moving independently - seems to be increasingly significant, though we have lack of data about this phenomenon (Ouali, 2003 ; Ramirez, 1999 ; Salih, 2001 ; Zontini, 2002 ; Schmoll, 2005). Even if it is an under-researched issue, this rather new modality of emigration has slowly started to emerge within the public debate in Maghreb societies (Moujoud, 2003).

In Italy, which is one of the main countries of settlement for those migrants, women from Maghreb number today 77514. They increased from 15.7% of the

1 For instance Nasima Moujoud observes that during the colonial period, some Moroccan women employed by French colonisers in the domestic service were used to follow their employers in France (Adam, 1968 in Moujoud, 2003).

regular residing population from Maghreb in 1994 to 24,9 % in 2004 (Ministero dell' Interno, 2005). Unfortunately, as said before, it is impossible to discern the rate of women that move "on their own" within this female population. Indeed, the main problem that arises when one tries to estimate this population concerns the fact that the idea itself of "moving on their own" is much more a social construct rather than a clear statistical or juridical category.

In the Maghreb societies, this social representation is above all associated to the idea of "moving by themselves". It is also frequently associated to the concept of "being single women". Both these concepts are regarded as outrageous and are associated to 'risk' and 'danger' in the most common mentality, since a woman that moves on her own appears to be no longer connected to (hence, also controlled by) her relatives.

From this point of view, one can wonder if the notion of 'women moving on their own' is not a way of stigmatizing these women and putting them into a status of complete otherness more than a pertinent category. There are actually different ways of 'moving on their own', which correspond to various levels of transgression and acceptation by the society of origin and by migrant groups, as I shall demonstrate in the coming sections of the paper. Notwithstanding these limitations, the paper will make recourse to this notion since women regularly use it when it comes to define themselves, maybe in an "appropriation of the stigma" fashion. To do so, this paper focuses the attention on the mobility practices and strategies performed by women moving independently between the Maghreb region and Italy. The analysis draws on the twofold meaning of the concept of mobility.

This paper focuses on mobility practices and strategies performed by women moving independently between the Maghreb region and Italy. The analysis is based on the twofold meaning of the concept of mobility.

Firstly, mobility has to be intended as a spatial category. I prefer to speak of mobility rather than migration, because some of the women I have been investigating are more mobile individuals than migrants, as they do not permanently reside in Italy. In fact, even though they travel back and forth between their country of origin and Italy, they usually spend only a small part of their everyday life in Italy (about one week a month or so). Moreover, I prefer to speak of mobility rather than migration because travel as a spatial movement is an important part of their daily life. For these reasons, I consider migration as a notion pointing to a more extensive concept of mobility.

Secondly, I will use the concept of mobility in the sense of social mobility. Spatial mobility can be understood both as a tool and an indicator of social mobility. Amongst the multiple aspects of social mobility, I have chosen to focus my attention more specifically on the processes of economic, relational and spatial autonomisation experienced by women, which are of crucial importance as potential sources of women's empowerment. Moreover, I will take into consideration the reorganisation

both of the productive and the reproductive spheres, which are also crucial to the understanding of the successful character of the migratory process (Kofman, 2003).

Socio-spatial mobility strategies are supported by a multiplicity of relational resources. Amongst these latter social networks play a prominent role, particularly in a context of weakening of long-term institutions of minority integration and of 'illegalisation' of migrants (Palidda, 2001 ; Castles, Miller, 1998). Besides, one has to consider the ways in which female migration from Maghreb has so far not experienced a high level of institutionalisation of the migration process if compared, for instance, to what happened in the case of Filipinas overseas workers with the emergence of recruitment agencies (Phizacklea, 2003 ; see also Massey *et al.* 1993, Goss and Lindquist, 1995). At the same time, they are not part, for those of them who are prostitutes, of trafficking circuits similar to those described by S. Sassen (Sassen, 2000 ; Morniroli, 2003). For these reasons, it seems more pertinent to focus the attention on informal and less institutionalized networks in order to understand women's strategies and practices. This shall lead us to a critical understanding of the notion of 'women moving on their own'.

In the field of migration studies, network analysis is one of the most influential approaches since the 1980s onwards and has to be connected to the discovery within the social sciences of the idea of "social capital" (Boyd, 1989). The emphasis laid on networks was a reaction to structuralist approaches, most notably to the push-pull conceptual framework of analysis, which was unable to explain the interactions taking shape between structure and agency (Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram, Sales, 2000). Networks analysis has been crucial, for instance, to highlight the chain migration mechanisms and, at a later stage, to the understanding of the constitution of transnational communities. However, in many respects, an exclusive focus on ethnic networks could produce a static and somehow holistic vision of migrants' societies of origin. Interpretations based on the functioning of ethnic networks demonstrate little sensitivity for the number of changes occurring in developing countries. In fact, as I will try to demonstrate in the next section of this paper, these transformations are central to the understanding of migrant women's practices ands strategies. Moreover, one has also to take into account the ways in which immigrant social networks have been frequently limited to ethnic networks. A consideration of women's social networks could question the primacy of the relational resources linked to bonds of ethnic solidarity, and could at the same time shed light on other kinds of relational resources such as gendered networks for example.

In reflecting upon the transnational methodologies of research, Michael Peter Smith has sought to develop a more comparative outlook on transnational networks (Smith, 1999). In this paper, my purpose is to use a comparative framework of analysis to highlight the similarities and differences existing between two groups of migrant women. The paper is based on a qualitative research that I have undertaken in Italy

since 2000, mainly in the city of Naples. Ethnographic observations and biographies are the most relevant sources of the empirical material used in this text.

The paper draws on two case-studies. The first is based on a previous research work that was concerned with 40 Tunisian circular migrants residing in Tunisia and dealing with cross-border commerce between their hometown, Sousse, and Naples, where they frequently went to buy differing kinds of consumption goods. This work on circular trade has profited from a wider comparative perspective, comparing my research findings with those of Véronique Manry's research on Algerian female traders[2]. The other case-study focuses on women from Maghreb residing in Italy, who arrived in the host country independently from a family reunification process. I am now at a early stage of this research and I have conducted so far only 11 interviews with migrant women. Thus, the reflections presented here should be taken as a departing point of my research rather than definitive results.

The purpose of the paper is to investigate the social and relational resources that women are used to rely on within their social and spatial mobility strategies. In doing this, I will adopt a multilevel approach to network analysis, simultaneously considering levels of analysis related to kinship, family, friendship and transnational communities. Before doing this, however, I would like to explain how the feminisation of migration from Maghreb reflects profound changes that have occurred in their country of origin and, more broadly, within international migration.

1. Women from Maghreb and the new trends in international migration

The participation of women in the flows of migrant workers directed to Western Europe has increased in recent years. This tendency has been highlighted in the general literature dealing with ethnic and migration studies, calling attention to the ways in which in a number of cases women's flows appear to be independent from those of men and, thus, are no longer strictly linked to dynamics of family reunification. This is an important achievement in this literature because it is capable of disrupting a long-standing conventional wisdom about women as mere followers of male labour migrants. Moreover, in investigating the role of women in the labour markets, this literature has also shed light on the complex and multifaceted relations connecting the productive to the reproductive spheres in present-day post-Fordist economies and societies. Finally, an influential strand of research in this literature has been concerned with the case of Southern Europe. In fact, this area has witnessed an intensified demand for foreign female workers, due to changes that have occurred in the labour market (namely in the form of an increase of native women in waged work) and to the specific features of a weak welfare system such as that of Southern Europe (see, for example, Anthias, Lazaridis, 2000 ; JEMS 'Migration in Southern Europe', 2004 ; Oso, 2003 ; Pugliese, 2002).

2 See Manry, Schmoll, 2005, forthcoming.

At the same time, literature dealing with transnationalism has also reconsidered this issue through a reconceptualisation of the role of both the productive and the reproductive spheres at an international scale (Pratt, Yeoh, 2003). These achievements have led to better recognise the relevance and the specificity of women's participation to transnational communities. Issues related to 'transnational mothering' and women circular migration have also shown how staying between two distant geographical places is a difficult task to be dealt with by migrant women and can generate forms of high self-exploitation (Ellis, Conway, Bailey, 1996 ; Hondagneu and Avila, 1997 ; Morokvasic, 2003 ; Oso Casas, 2002 ; Yeoh, 2005).

Due to difficulties in recognising them as autonomous agents within the migratory process and as actors being able to devise their own self-promotion strategies, women from Maghreb have been almost completely excluded from this literature. The tendency to represent them as followers and as 'family-members rather than workers' is still a commonly held belief (Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram, Sales, 2000). Therefore, neither their participation in the productive sphere, nor the way this participation can influence the organisation of the reproductive roles have been questioned in the general literature[3].

Moreover, women from Maghreb are also seen as parts of a broader collective strategy. This leads scholars to an underestimation of the tensions potentially arising between the individuals and the community and/or the family. For example, women are frequently portrayed as sources of cultural pacification and integration. They 'make the link' in the more natural way both between their country of origin and the receiving country and between their family/husband and the settling society. Even when women are perceived as sources of conflict (as in the case of the 'veil affair' in France) they are considered as manipulated victims, not as autonomous agents. Thus, the contradictions that may exist between the desires of those women, their individual projects and external pressures are overall ignored.

Moreover, this approach demonstrates weak consideration of the social, political and economical changes that have occurred in the societies of women's countries of origin. These changes have indeed exerted much influence on the evolving patterns of international migration and, in particular, on female migration.

First of all, it has to be noted how in the last decade the Maghreb region has experienced some relevant changes at the political and economic levels. These changes have been mostly a consequence of the process of adaptation to the imperatives and pressures imposed by the structural adjustment programmes. From this point of view, the pathways to social change followed by Maghreb countries resemble those of other developing countries and regions, especially for the process of impoverishment that has widely affected the lower and middle classes (Sassen, 2000 ; Fargues, 2004). In particular, the middle-classes – whose status was protected

3 Notable exceptions are Salih (1999, 2001), Decimo (2003), Ramirez (1999) and Zontini (2002).

by the State in previous times - experienced a restriction of economic chances , leading to a process of lowering of their social position. This particularly happened in Algeria and Morocco (Musette, 2000 ; Haddad, 2001 ; Baba, 2005).

Indeed, many migrant women were previously civil servants and lost their job as a consequence of the budget restriction policies. Some of the traders I interviewed were still working in the public sector but chose to practice trade as a second job, since the rise in the cost of life made it necessary the search for a complementary income.

Karima is a nurse employed in a Tunisian hospital. She says : "Until now I can say that up to 90 % of the people working with me at the hospital do trade as I do. Our wage here is not sufficient, we can't live with 300 dinars a month (about 190 euros). For us it is nothing".

Besides, in Algeria, the outbreak of the civil war in the 1990's has generated a deep feeling of insecurity and precariousness within the population. Even though the war did not lead to any mass emigration, as pointed out by Fargues (2004), some women left their country as a consequence of persecution. Working women indeed were one of the main target of the islamist dissidents. Yet, this emigration is still scarcely documented today, since public opinion mainly focuses on the intellectual, political and artistic elites in exile.

At the same time, in the Maghreb countries, it has become increasingly dangerous and difficult for men to travel because of the reinforcement of migratory controls at the frontiers. In this respect, some interviewees explain that they had to embark on a migratory project since it became increasingly difficult for men to emigrate. Women, in fact, attract lower attention during custom checks and more easily obtain trading or tourism visas.

Moreover, the feminisation of migration flows has to be connected to the social transformations that Maghreb countries have undergone in the last decades. In particular, it has to do with a broader process of individualisation in society and, above all, with emerging dynamics of women autonomisation. In the labour market, these changes are witnessed by the participation of women in customarily masculine activities and roles. The example of trade is of particular interest in this regard. Traditionally, women were accustomed to engage in trade activities at home, within the limited perimeter of the domestic space (Boulahbel, 1996 ; Jomni, 2000 ; El Hariri, 2003). Trading in public space was considered a niche activity and concerned only street selling, an activity which was highly stigmatised by mainstream society: those who were used to do street-trade were either old women selling cheap goods, having the reputation as someone close to the condition as beggars, or women selling gold jewels, who were seen as swindlers since they asked great amounts of money for jewels that they bought from poor women in debt. Nowadays, there has been an extension of selling spaces run by women. Women are used to trade on their own in public spaces such as boutiques and street-markets. One interviewee, Hayet (aged 46),

explains the progressive negotiation of the selling space that she had to go through in order to sell by herself in street-markets:

"In the past, a woman couldn't have gone out to the souk (market) by her own. It was forbidden, she wasn't accepted, so she used to sell at home. I would say that it has been now for two years or so that it is quite "OK" (« ça passe »). When I started doing trade, I was used to do it at home. Then, about eight years ago, I started doing trade in the street-markets, with the help of my husband and my son. It is now two years that I can join the market by myself".

Moreover, recent times have experienced a widening of women's buying spaces. For transnational traders, buying journeys from Maghreb to Europe are not a new phenomenon. In fact, the women I have interviewed contend that female transnational trade already existed in the 1950s. What is new today is the fact that the new trajectories of transnational traders include not only Italy but also France, Turkey and Syria and, for some of them, Asian destinations like Taiwan, China and Thailand.

Of course, I do not want to maintain here that women's condition in Maghreb countries are no longer problematics and rife with contradictions. On the contrary, women's legal status needs to be considerably improved (in particular in Algeria): social control exerted on women is still very coercive and patriarchal models persistingly dominate. My intention, however, is to show how, regardless of the heavy structural constraints they have to face, women's presence in the public sphere evolves over time and is more and more relevant. Besides, symbolic and physical violence that is perpetrated against women can be interpreted as a reaction against women's empowerment. In this context, female migration can be considered both as a consequence of women's empowerment and as a factor of autonomisation.

All these changes in women's condition - along with the rise of transnational communities and the specific labour demand from the receiving countries acting as "pull factors" – have contributed to the generalisation of what Francesca Decimo calls a "feminine culture of emigration" (Decimo, 2003) and have persuaded women to move independently. However, the social profile, women's strategies and resources are highly differentiated. I will now present two case studies, which correspond to two very different kinds of migration: circular migration and permanent settlement. This typology helps us understand not only women's spatial and migratory practices but their specific positionality in the labour market, as well as their linkages with their country of origin and their social resources.

2. The case of female traders circular migration

Social networks, between resources and agents of social control

Tunisian female traders belong to urban lower-middle-class. They are of different ages but share the fact of being all married, except for the youngest ones who travel

and circulate along with their mothers and/or their sisters. Tunisian female traders base their economic and circulatory strategies on a variety of social networks. First of all, they have access to specifically gendered networks. In fact, women never travel on their own, but often use to share their journeys along with a group of female travelling companions, defined as "mates" ("copines"). Travelling together has of course its disadvantages: it gives them more visibility outside and inside the group. This can have negative effects for the trading activity as women have a tendency to conform to the others, buying the same type of product and, thus, lacking originality.

However, despite all these limitations, it remains the fact that travelling together is by far women's favourite option. First of all, it is a way to share competencies and knowledge related to the commercial routes and the trading interlocutors encountered during the business activities. For this reason, the 'initiation to travel' of a newcomer in the group consists in showing her the "route" in the twofold, metaphorical and material, meaning of the expression - that is to convey her both the knowledge of the itineraries and the knowledge of the right people to get in touch with. Travelling together is also an expedient to share the hotel and transportation costs.

In addition to this, it has to be noted how traders' networks only partly reproduce conventional sociability circuits, which are usually defined on the basis of the family membership, the area of residence and the region of origin (Berry-Chikhaoui, 2000). In fact, the opportunity to create a new women's sphere of sociability is considered by female traders as one of the biggest advantages of their activity. For example, a number of amusing situations are created in the hotel rooms and in the boat cabins, where small parties and other entertainment events are sometimes organised.

Moreover, this distinctly women's organisation provides a gendered solidarity and protection from possible risks stemming out from predominantly masculine environments such as those in which they undertake their commercial activities. Staying together is considered as a more secure and reassuring condition by those waiting for them in Tunisia, particularly husbands, brothers, and fathers. In fact, collective travel is a way to neutralise the transgressive charge of women's movements, as women's networks exert a kind of social control function. From this point of view, it can be argued that collective travel has a role of "cancellation of the *mixité*" (Navez-Bouchanine, 1997 ; Berry-Chikhaoui, 2000).

Another kind of social resource on which women are used to rely in order to devise their circulation and business strategies is the familiarity with people of their country of origin who are based in Italy. These people provide their help by lending them money and hosting them if necessary. In particular, the most important persons for them in Italy are the intermediaries: usually men from Maghreb who have settled in Naples in previous years and have specialised in acting as guides of circular migrants during their visits to the places where they buy and send their goods. In establishing relationships between the traders and the local actors in Naples, intermediaries build "social bridges" between 'here and there' (Portes, 1997). In

particular, intermediaries allow women to establish direct relationships with shop-keepers, hotels' owners and managers and forwarding agents.

Life in the home country : strategies to make trade acceptable

The attitudes of women's relatives towards their trading activities is ambivalent. In many ways, cross-border trade is still a socially reprehended activity, but women enact different strategies to make it socially acceptable, especially on the part of their husbands.

Firstly, as said before, women never travel on their own. Secondly, they employ a considerable part of their earnings in buying gifts and providing economic support to their family and relatives. In fact, in many cases, women are the main family's income source, so that their activity is at the core of a wider family project of social ascension.

Transnational trade, indeed, is clearly a way to engage in a social mobility path that otherwise would have been less likely to take shape within the current state of the Maghreb society. Earnings obtained by women from their commercial activities are mainly invested in the household and in the family spheres: building a new house and providing it with new decoration and furniture, financing children's studies, providing daughters with a nice dowry, buying a new car or a new computer for their husbands, are all ways to increase the well-being of the family. At the same time, these life improvements and the new commodities are status symbols and means to achieve social distinction. For example, houses are decorated with Italian furniture, in order to distinguish themselves from the local aesthetic taste.

Most of the women are used to sell at home and on the markets. However, their primary aspiration is to buy a boutique, symbolising the shift from the illegal to the formal economy. Some of these women have indeed set up a new shop, such as Latifah, who owns two luxury shops in the centre of her hometown, thanks to a loan received from a wealthy client. The most successful women have invested their earnings in the housing market. This has allowed them to obtain revenues by renting flats to students and larger houses to tourists.

With regard to the sexual division of labour, it should be said that women activities introduce relevant changes in the productive sphere, originating an inversion of the roles with men. Traders' husbands are mostly shopkeepers, unskilled workers, civil servants or unemployed people. They often collaborate with their wives, helping them to keep the books of their activities or to take care of the shop when they are abroad. Even though men sometimes play an important role in the commercial activities, women in any case retain the headship of the enterprise.

However, despite the inverted roles in the productive sphere, migration does not generate significant ruptures in the family order, since the implicit condition underlying the departure choice is that women keep their conventional role within the reproductive sphere, bringing up children and taking care of the household duties.

Even though they sometimes rely on relatives and domestic workers to do the housekeeping and to take care of the children when they are abroad, women retain their role as supervisors and decision-makers within their domestic space. In fact, keeping their reproductive tasks is the only way to make their relatives accept their activity. Since they are away for nearly half of the month, women have to find a number of stratagems to accomplish their reproductive tasks. Some women bring their children of small age along with them, for example.

This double responsibility – i.e. being both a reliable wife and mother (or daughter for the youngest ones) and breadwinner of the family – is a rather wearing one. At the same time, however, it is a way to draw respectability and legitimacy on their practices. Therefore, circular female traders neatly distinguish themselves from other female migrants from Maghreb settling abroad independently and having, as we shall see below, a bad reputation in their society of origin (Ramirez, 1999) From this point of view, indeed, practising circular migration notably reduces the social and family costs that would be generated by the neglect of their family responsibilities. This means that, for women, circulation is a way to sustain their family without having to operate a durable settlement abroad: it is "a strategy of staying at home and thus, an alternative to emigration", as Mirjana Morokvasic points out (Morokvasic, 2003, 102, 122). As a consequence of this, female traders are viewed in a positive light by the members of their family who, when interviewed, declare great esteem of their *"courage"*.

Moreover, transnational trade also enables women to gain autonomy with respect to the family sphere. Migration is seen as a way to affirm themselves, to construct by themselves a trajectory that is not limited to the family and the husband's spheres. Overall, migration is pursued by women in order to negotiate a new positionality in their society of origin and, in particular, to acquire a stronger financial decision power. Although women could feel exhausted at a certain moment of their journeys, they clearly express a positive attitude towards travel, which is associated to the search for a greater autonomy they try to obtain from their activity. Women appreciate their profession and say that they could not quit it. In some case, the metaphor of 'virus' or 'illness' is used to qualify their activity. For example Hafida, Hayet's daughter, says about her mother:

" she can't stand staying still. When she doesn't travel, she can't breath, she can't eat, she gets ill…"

Thus, there is a clearly individual motivation for travel, even though are in many respects the family interests and motivations which make the migration choice socially acceptable.

3. Permanent migrants: coping with a twofold position of marginality

The permanent migrants I have interviewed are of different ages and professional positions. Unless their transnational traders' compatriots, permanent migrants do not respond to a consuming demand in their place of origin, but to a labour demand in the receiving country. Most of these latter women have experienced a disqualification in their working status and a process of lowering of their social position when they arrived in Italy, so that they can be described as "déclassées".

Most of them find a job in the lower segments of the sexually and ethnically segmented labour market. They are employed mostly as domestic workers, entertainers (singers or dancers), waitresses or prostitutes, even though some other have better social positions such as students, small entrepreneurs or cultural mediators (*mediatrici culturali*). Alternating various activities or having a double job are, however, very frequent practices. For example, trade or prostitution are generally part-time activities, which are alternated to other kinds of work.

Contrarily to the circular traders, these women do not leave behind a married life in their country of origin. They are single women, though some of them have experienced a family rupture - such as a divorce or a repudiation - or have been left a widow. When they have never got married, women are already 'too old' to get married in their country of origin. Therefore, emigration appears is a strategy pursued in order to begin a new life course on a 'novel bases', to define and formulate a new life project in the receiving countries (Ramirez, 1999 ; Zontini, 2002). Some of these women have children, and generally choose to live with them, except those who work in prostitution or entertainment, who leave their children in their country of origin, or commit them to Italian women's custody.

A twofold condition of social marginality

Female migrants living in Italy do not rely on the same social supports as their circular migrants counterparts. These women are stigmatised both in their country of origin and in the country of settlement, and live in a twofold condition of social marginality. In their country of origin, women are usually considered as 'lost persons' as they completely escape the control of their relatives and the local community. At the same time, these women are totally excluded from access to the community resources and organisation in the place of settlement, since their migration is not socially accepted by the host society. As a consequence, they find themselves in a situation of full social exclusion.

Souad and Najiba were nurses in Algeria. They left their country in 1998, in a condition of deep psychological suffering due to a massacre that happened in the hospital where they worked. They did not have any contact when they arrived in Naples, but they knew that a lot of people from Algeria lived there. They decided to go to the mosque, which they considered as the best place where to ask for hospitality.

*Unfortunately, they were badly welcomed at the mosque and told "here there is no room for women". They were forced to sleep for two nights in the railway station, until they met a compatriot, Rachid, who decided to help them. First, Rachid asked an Algerian girl that he knew in Naples to take care of them for a few days, but she didn't accept, saying that she didn't know those girls and that they could represent a danger for her. Finally, Rachid managed to find a room for Souad and Najiba in a immigrants' guest house (*centro di accoglienza*). Some weeks later, Souad and Najiba found a job in a factory and left the "centro di accoglienza" for a place of their own.*

In this context, women can hardy rely on gender solidarities, as the example of Souad an Najiba shows. In fact, other women tend to stigmatise them. For example, in Morocco and Tunisia, I saw many discussions taking place between women about those who emigrated in Europe. Leyla, for instance, one of the transnational traders presented above, speaks of a Tunisian woman working in Italy in these terms :

"She says she is a dancer. In Rome. She has left her son on his own, with her husband that has disappeared, how can't she feel ashamed for this? I don't know how she can do this… The boy is here without anybody, thanks god that I take care of him"

Two considerations can be made in light of Leyla's words. First, her words show how some women may appropriate migrant women productive role, and thus gain power and legitimacy from the absence of other women. Secondly, her words show the ways in which women living by their own in a foreign country are considered as abandoners of their women duties in the reproductive sphere. Having said this, it has to be noted that it is not true that these women completely neglect the family sphere. On the contrary, women keep a strong material and affective involvement in the activities related to their country of origin. They tend to counterbalance their absence, justifying their permanence abroad by sending remittances and gifts. Although these women do not return home as frequently as circular traders do, they go back at least once a year to their country of origin. They always participate in the more important family events, such as weddings and funerals, and it happens that they decide to stay for a longer period (several months or so) if there is any compelling necessity in the family. Nevertheless, in any case their relationships with their relatives remains strained and turbulent, due to the 'original sin' they have committed, that is 'leaving the country on their own'.

The importance of circumstantial solidarities for women

The condition of marginalisation and the lack of access to group resources that women experience in Italy has a number of unexpected consequences. Indeed, their situation of complete isolation and their lack of communitarian social resources lead them to experience new relationships. In particular, women rely on masculine social resources, helping them to perform a social mobility path. I define such resources as 'circumstantial solidarities', since they are not formed on the basis of a previously held knowledge nor on a common origin but rather on the circumstances related to

the migratory experience. Some of these social bonds are rather temporary, but some of them can also become serious and strong. As demonstrated in the following examples, these relationships can be constructed through various paths: a simply business relationship may turn into a protection relationship, an affective (not necessarily sexual) relationship may turn into friendship and strong solidarity.

Leyla, a 38 years-old Moroccan women, owns a phone centre in a central area of Naples. Alfredo is a lawyer, specialised in helping foreigners to obtain working authorisations and sojourn permits. Leyla met him when she started her business and used her position to find clients for Alfredo. In return, Alfredo was used to give her a rate of the profits he made with those new clients. First, they became "very close friends and, then, lovers", as Leyla tells me. Even though Alfredo is married and doesn't take into consideration the possibility of leaving his wife, he rent a flat not far from his home, where Leyla settled recently. Leyla likes this flat which is really much better than the place where she stayed before. She says: " I can finally invite my family from Morocco without any shame".

Nadira is a 40 years-old Tunisian women, who works as a prostitute. She lives in a poor area in the historic centre of Naples with Ahmed, a 45 years old Algerian guy. Although they sometimes have sex together (they met by this way), Nadira and Ahmed define their relationship as a 'brotherhood' one. They don't have any common project for the future, but simply like to live momentarily together. Ahmed pays the rent and she takes care of the food. Nadira says : "he helps me and I help him. Life is easier for both of us in this way".

Yayah, a 32 years old Algerian trader, is married and has a little child in Algeria. He met Farida, a 30 years old Algerian girl, in a pizzeria where she was working. She was alone in Naples and didn't know anybody. He had an empty room in his flat, since his Algerian room-mate just left for France. So he decided to suggest Farida to share the flat with him. They have now lived together for one year. Yayah says: "I prefer that kind of solution than living with a man. I enjoy very much her company, especially when I come back from work and I find the dinner ready". Now Yayah is thinking about bringing his wife and his child to Italy. But he has no intention to ask Farida to leave the flat: "it is better that she stays here. She has nowhere to go, and she can help my wife to feel better here, she can give her Italian language lessons for example".

It has been argued before that women settling on their own in Italy are stigmatised and excluded from group resources. The following questions arise at this point: why these men do not exclude them? How is it possible to explain their attitudes of solidarity towards these women? Men do not have the same origin as women and have in all cases met them in the settling country and not in their country of origin. This means that men even if they sometimes have the same nationality as women, they do not perceive themselves as particularly constrained to exert a form of social control on them.

However, some more reasons may explain their collaborative and friendly attitudes towards women. First of all, men frequently found themselves in a situation

of social isolation. They suffer from discrimination and exclusion from the receiving society and have uncertain economic prospects. They are permanent residents in Italy but find it hard to undergo a process of social mobility. For this reason, it is difficult for them to bring their family in Naples. In fact, these men consider their situation in Naples being far too 'precarious' and uncertain to allow them thinking about any kind of stable family life. Rather, the multiple uncertainties associated to their economic situation engender a host of difficulties in undertaking matrimony strategies. The necessity to offer a good living condition to a wife is indeed one of the most relevant gender constraints that men emigrating abroad have to face in their place of origin. Moreover, the pursuit of family reunification goals requires a number of socio-economic criteria which are hard to be met by migrants (i.e. a working contract, a regular accommodation), especially in Naples, because of the high level of decay of the housing stock and of the widespread diffusion of the underground economy. In this context, a kind of class solidarity can arise between these men and women from Maghreb living in Naples. A mutual affective relationship with a women from Maghreb can help to make daily life a less bitter. In fact, men and women frequently define such relationships in terms of 'brotherhood relationship'. As evidenced by the life stories presented below, women make recourse to their 'gender qualities' to seduce these men. Their relationship clearly reveals a sexual division in the mutual exchange of favours and tasks: for example men are used to give material support to women (to a certain extent), giving them a roof, some gifts, and so on… while women in return take care of some house duties such as cooking and cleaning, somehow acting as a sort of "temporary wife" for these men.

Furthermore, another reason explains this circumstantial solidarity between men and women. Because they have overcome the limits of what is allowed in their societies of origin, women find themselves in a special status, which could be defined as an "outsider's status". Thus, men do not feel the moral obligation to a correct behaviour - nor they feel as agents of moral control towards these women. It is, in other words, because they are completely outside of the moral and normative obligations that women can benefit from those solidarities. Therefore, it can be said that the original stigma and gender disadvantage (i.e being a single women doing a socially stigmatised path such as the one described here) is somehow turned into a profitable resource by women.

Conclusion

In the Maghreb countries, the diffusion of a 'feminine culture of migration' has contributed to a diversification of migrant women's social profiles. Therefore, it can be concluded noting how "women on their own" is a definition that covers extremely varying realities, as showed by the cases of circular migrants and permanent settlers presented in this paper.

These differences should be emphasised especially with regard to migrant women's social networks, to social and family belonging and economic position both in the country of origin and in the host society. Besides, the meaning conferred to their practices also differs in a considerable way. From the point of view of women's society of origin, the degree of transgression entailed in circular migration is far less relevant than that entailed in permanent settlement. From migrant women's perspective, circulation is chosen as a suitable solution for "being there but here above all" (Ellis, Conway, Bailey, 1996; Morokvasic, 2003, 2004), while settlement is seen as a way 'to start a new life on novel bases'.

However some common tendencies can be found in both cases bringing evidence to general trends taking place within phenomena of women's mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean area. From this point of view, the findings presented here could stimulate reflections around the rethinking of the short-cut distinction within migration studies between circular migration and permanent settlement. In particular, women's practices bring light on an increasing empowerment of women through the migration process, which should not be necessarily associated to rupture with their context of origin. At the same time, these practices also witness the emergence of a specific women's gendered way of being "transnational": the use of a multiplicity of solidarity links, the necessity to 'over-justify' their movements in the family sphere and the constant preoccupation to keep strong and durable linkages with their home. All this reveals how these women, albeit engaging into a process of empowerment, have to face a host of gendered obligations and constraints. But gender belonging can be a resource too as it has been seen in both case studies: being a women can be a way to cross frontiers more easily and it is also likely to attract the solidarity and the attention of male migrants.

To conclude, it can be said that 'women on their own' are not actually 'alone', in spite of the ways in which women moving independently are usually depicted. In fact, women draw on a variety of relational resources in devising their mobility strategies (gendered networks, masculine networks and so on), which appear to be much more diversified and multifaceted than those comprised in what has been conventionally perceived as 'ethnic' circle. Women mobility is also the result of a number of social transformations in Maghreb societies and can be the result of a variety of often contradictory dynamics, both of emancipation and exclusion.

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