2020 | Anuac. Vol. 9, n° 1, Giugno 2020: 87-109

Kinship ties on the move

An introduction to the migratory journeys of kindred

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Abstract: The concept of family is a social construct, and the one used in Western countries fails to accommodate the complex systems of interaction between parenthood practices, relationships between spouses and siblings, vertical and horizontal relationships among relatives, conjugal ties, marriage contracts, domestic arrangements in other countries – the more so as these relations are frequently conducted at a distance. Nonetheless, the term "family"is widely used in studies of migration and mobility, though often uncritically. This introduction intends to expose the pitfalls incidental to this uncritical perspective and aims to clear up some of the misunderstandings that can occur when migration and mobility studies adopt an ethnocentric idea of family. Far from being inflexible and forging the self-same links whatever the migration circumstances, kinship ties adapt and help others adapt to the novel situations encountered in new countries, thereby proving a resource and an essential part of the culture of mobility.

Keywords: Culture of mobility; Translocality; Transnational family; Kinship; Arranged marriage.

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2020 | Anuac. Vol. 9, n° 1, Giugno 2020: 87-109.
ISSN: 2239-625X - DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-4216

Migration, mobility and kinship

The discussion about the crucial role that relatives, neighbours or communities play as prompting factors in the individual's choice to migrate has been ongoing since the emergence of the first critiques of migration theories based solely on economic paradigms (Castles, Miller 2005:47)[1]. One of the main human factors recognized in the New Classical economy of labour market explanations is that families, extended families or even groups of neighbours might be involved in designing the migration path of one or more members of the group, so that the migrant, once settled in the host country, could help the others in their country of origin (Taylor 1987; Stark 1991; Castles, Miller 2005). Insights into the bearing on mobility of kinship ties and relational networks have come mostly from social sciences, and especially anthropology and sociology that have used ethnographic methods, albeit at different depths, in the study of migrations.

That mobile people go through life cycles, entering into conjugal ties, reproducing, delivering and raising children is obvious, yet the fact that such a reality gets categorized as "family making" is reductive: it risks conflating in a single, universal category all social interactions – the decision to enter into conjugal ties, ways of parenting, plus the values people ascribe to these stages in the life cycle either in their places of origin or when moving across countries – and in so doing it obscures rather than illuminates cultural dynamics and related values. In fact if there is no consensus about the concept of family (Moore 1988; Goulborne 2010) it is even more complicated to try and apply such a concept to the multifarious domestic arrangements adopted by the diverse cultures of the world in the course of their movements and migrations. The word family, from a western point of view, calls to mind a nuclear family composed of mother, father and their children; this is a very idealistic concept, as it is not reflected in the domestic

1. Some papers of this thematic section were part of the conference *Gender, Generations, and Family in Transnational Migration* (held in Lisbon on 6-7 December 2016) in the framework of the project "Migration, family and social network relationships between Africa and Southern Europe" (Italy- Portugal 2015-2017), resulting from the collaboration of: the Institute of Social Sciences (ICS-ULisboa), the Istituto di Studi sulle Società del Mediterraneo (CNR-It), and the University of Urbino Carlo Bo (Uniurb-I), Paola Avallone, Immacolata Caruso, Marzia Grassi, Bruno Venditto and Tatiana Ferreira. I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for good suggestions on how to reorganize this introduction.

arrangements of many peoples and countries, but it is certainly an idea continually appealed to by the mass media which, in these times of consumerism, tend to socially construct the needs of such domestic units and thus target each member of a nuclear family with specific consumer advertisements.

Concerning the legal provisions that regulate conjugal ties, those, too, are different not only in different countries of the world but even in each of the countries of the European Union. By way of example, it is enough to cite that living under the same conjugal roof is legally part of what is considered being married in Italy, but it is not so in other countries, or the different laws in different countries regulating the end of the marriage contract, the divorce. Thus, taking the western concept of family as a frame may impose ways of looking at the life cycle which are not necessarily shared universally. The use of this concept and the legal regulations underlying it in a completely different legal system leads to misunderstandings and, indeed, to abuses – a good example are the sort of "conjugal ties" established by the Italians with the Eritrean women in the colony.

During colonial times in Eritrea, the Italian scholar Conti Rossini was impressed on encountering a society in which the institution of temporary marriage was considered perfectly legal (the *demoz* or *quzar*). Only women devoid of better prospects would engage in such relationships, not least because the woman concerned would not be entitled to inherit part of the husband's estate (Barrera 2011: 100-101), but the Italians, for whom marriage was indissoluble, tended to confuse *demoz* with concubinage. The Eritrean women involved in such relationships were swindled. While the Italian men considered it a sort of "temporary marriage" or "marriage by reward", as accepted by the customary law, they did not take permanent responsibility for the offspring of the couple, as the local tradition in Eritrea envisaged even after the relationship had terminated. Thus the children born of such relationships were often abandoned in the colony with their mothers. The colonial officers knew of the cultural misunderstanding that could occur. Discussing the different legal statuses of different forms of marriage, Ferdinando Martini, Governor of the Eritrean colony at the turn of the twentieth century, stated that "the White could cheat and the indigenous woman could be cheated" (Martini 1946 in Sorgoni 1998: 129). The *demoz* was used so as to enable the institution of *madamato* to provide permanent sexual partners for the soldiers and colonial officers in service. Yet, in Eritrea the women would consider their conjugal agreement a legal marriage while for the Italians it was a wholly different thing: a form of concubinage in

which they would refrain from interfering with customary law but blithely disregard the local rule which obliged them to support the offspring of the couple for life.

Talking about the life cycle of mobile people in contexts of translocality, misunderstanding of terms is usual, as in many intercultural relations. Yet, one problem with many studies on migration is that they are written from the perspective of people who consider migration and mobility to be occasional characteristics of lives that are assumed normally to be resident in one place.

The paradigm of sedentarism

Allow me an apparent digression to clarify my argument. Some suggestions are provided by Africanist studies which have developed a radically new approach to research into movements of people, also from the point of view of "those who move" rather than of "those who stay" (Declich, Rodet 2018).

As a premise to her studies on refugees in Africa, Liisa Malkki has clearly highlighted that anthropologists have always encountered migrants during their ethnographic studies; yet, for a long time, they were not able to include them as objects of their study because the anthropologists' paradigm of knowledge would see the migrants as incompatible with what was considered the minimal unit of study, a culture, a tribe, an ethnic group. Malkki dubs the process of normalizing the existence of nations in which inhabitants must have fixed residency the "national order of things", a specific way of looking at the world that, besides numerous other assumptions, considers sedentarism and permanent human settlement as the norm (Malkki 1995). Yet, in the African continent, nations were imposed through a top-down process and very recently – since the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) with the European scramble for Africa – upon populations that were organized according to different political forms (see also Declich and Rodet 2018), not to mention those who practised nomadic lifestyles. Thus, the imposition of national borders entailed sidelining all those who did not fit the kind of sedentarism required in a colonial nation state. Turton addresses the wording we use to classify social groups and argues that "the very word 'displacement' implies an assumption that all human populations 'belong' in a certain place and that, in an ideal world, they would all be where they belong" (Turton 1996: 97). This would entail the belief that one's identity is based 'naturally' on association with a place, and thus the absence

of that connection is seen as losing "part of one's very humanity" (Turton 1996: 97). No wonder the African experience can still tell us something about living without borders.

Certain social constructions of kinship were part of specific cultures of mobility (Declich 2018a). The capacity of the Somalis to travel all over the world, for instance, and their success in adapting everywhere quickly and easily has long been due to their kinship system, based on a unique patrilineal allegiance in which even far distant cousins are considered like brothers (sing. *walaal*) and, therefore, deserve almost unlimitedly long hospitality. The proverbial hospitality (Declich 2007) and welcome afforded even very remote members of the same patrilineage was solidly grounded in the nomadic pastoral livelihood culture but proved successful even in Western countries, especially with first generation migrants, as part of a culture of mobility. Although this hospitable attitude is becoming less widespread in Western countries due to the different dwelling conditions in European or American cities and the lifestyles imposed in Western countries, it has served as the basis for the extensive network of Somalis living in many parts of the world. This kind of network eludes state control: many people can live in the same dwelling and easily move elsewhere undetected, following the paths of their invisible network. In the pastoralist contexts of the semi-arid Somali environment, the members of a household stay apart for many months of the year, depending on the availability of water in the wells and on the possible rains. The camel herds must be pastured in areas where there are specific plants to eat, while other animals like goats and cows cannot survive transhumance. Thus young and older men may follow the camel herds while women and younger children may stay longer in semi-permanent settlements, taking care of other animals. Thus the social distance they maintain from one another varies according to the season, the productive activities and other factors.

The fact that uncontrolled movements of human groups come to be defined as problematic goes hand-in-hand with the wording used to name those who move as "displaced", in which the prefix "dis" equals "lack of", meaning therefore lack of place (Turton 1996: 97), thus denoting mobility, rather than settlement, as an inadequate form of livelihood.

But what can a state make of a lifestyle that involves mobility and where domestic arrangements and conjugal ties are by default often maintained at a distance? Even nation states in the Horn of Africa have devised policies to foster sedentarism; in the Horn of Africa to settle nomads is also meant to be a way of combating forms of translocal trade that have come to be

considered smuggling, although trade is part of the normal activities of nomads that travel in semi-arid environments (Manger, Ahmed 2000). Nomads are not easily traceable when it comes to paying taxes. The undesirability of uncontrolled migration and the fact that it is portrayed as a problematic phenomenon thus stems from the need for social control over people whose livelihoods the states consider desirable only if sedentary rather than mobile.

With this in mind, studying from an emic point of view the way mobile people manage their conjugal ties, as well as the care of their children, may prove a perspective from which we can gain a better understanding of mobility which always involves some sort of domestic arrangements which may not entail a fixed place of residence over the year. Such an insight is only likely to result if we avoid imposing our own category of "family", framed from the point of view of those who are settled, which would lead us to find much of what we are looking for, i.e. a unit similar to a nuclear family everywhere.

National, transnational, translocal and state control

In 2002 in a cornerstone text on the discussion of kinship in migration contexts Ulla Vuorela and Deborah Bryceson (2002) elaborate on the concept of the transnational family. Assuming with Henry James Maine (Maine 1861; Bryceson, Vuorela 2002: 9-10) that family is not a "biological unit *per se*" but a social construction, they see the concept of the transnational family as one that may unhinge the "nation state's definition of legitimate immigrant families" (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002: 10). There is a tendency from a Western viewpoint – they assert – "to make the family synonymous with the household; the management and sharing of everyday life in a common dwelling" (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002: 28); as this unit becomes the target of social policies, the authors see this idea of a household as something that cannot accommodate the different composition and structure that families assume when they get dispersed in different countries. Therefore, they propose to correct the term "family" with the adjective "transnational", suggesting a larger space than one nation. In the European context, Deborah Bryceson asserts "transnationalism, the espousal of different locational loyalties and cultures, was potentially subversive" (Bryceson 2002: 31).

Their book, as the title spells out, refers however to "new European frontiers and global networks"; it thus appears a text addressed to a European audience and is meant to provides tools to expand the ideal-type concept of family by adding the transnational aspect to it. The concept of

transnationalism itself, though it does open the idea to relationships that can cross nations, seems at the same time to imply that transnational families are a new phenomenon by neglecting the fact that many translocal relationships and translocal domestic arrangements were creating bridges among peoples long before nations existed (Declich 2018b: 8-16).

Despite the intention, the term "transnational families" has come to be used in a vague way, yet reproducing the paradigm of sedentarism as a normal feature of anybody's identity and the existence of nations as a prerequisites for the existence of domestic arrangements based on translocality.

Many studies on migrations have arisen in national contexts in which states need to exert social control on kin groupings through their legal and welfare systems. Family units are a basis for the state's social control (McIntosh 1979; Moore 1988). Thus, if conjugal ties or parental care take place at a distance, and especially across nations, this appears an anomaly. In Europe social services identify individuals as family members and target families as the "ideal" units to which services are addressed. This approach also entails that families "must" provide certain services for free, including care of children and elderly people and, in general, all the work necessary to generate and take care of the labour force during the life-long cycle (McIntosh 1979; Moore 1988).

Yet, using the western concept of "family" for the networks of relatives through which humans navigate mobility may also obscure a number of complex social interactions that lie behind the conjugal relations of mobile people. Moreover, it also obliges the mobile people to represent themselves according to that model, (also Decimo, Gribaldo 2017: 204) for legal systems only allow strictly defined family units and states offer welfare only to western-looking families (Lee 2013), as well described in the newly published book by Frédérique Fogel (2019). The impact of this sort of welfare has been well presented by Ida Idjayawanis through the example of the conjugal relations of three Swahili women who migrated to the United Kingdom. Single women with children who live on British national welfare are sought as second wives by Swahili men who cannot support them and now count on the UK social services for it; they may marry them according to the Muslim rite but would not do that under British Common Law as polygamous marriages are not allowed in the UK and the womens' welfare benefit would be forfeited (Hadjawayanis 2018). In describing how the different standards of welfare in the European countries influence the life cycle of individuals and their positioning in the social hierarchies of kin

dispersed in different countries, also Aurora Massa (this issue) talks of the welfare system in the UK and highlights how it boosts the position of refugee women alone with children to the detriment of male self-esteem. This might create problems for fathers who are stuck in countries like Italy that block any form of integration and see their wives developing skills and opportunities.

Notwithstanding the fact that there is no consensus about the term "family", social science discussion of transnational migrations towards Europe has been pervaded by the concept of family used in a broad sense, often vaguely defined. While the large majority of scholars have kept using the term "family" (Goulbourne, Reynolds, Solomons, Zontini, 2010), some have developed the discussion about transnational families (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002; Evergeti, Zontini 2006; Razy 2011; Grassi, Vivet, Marinho 2016), others have made clear that the idea of transnational families is highly contested (König, de Regt 2010: 5) and some others, especially anthropologists, have preferred the term "kinship" (for instance, Gardner 2002 and Decimo, Gribaldo 2017).

Interestingly, the latter have re-analysed the importance of kinship in migrations as a "space deeply crisscrossed by borders" (Decimo, Gribaldo 2017: 208; Massa 2017), but also as a set of relationships that the states try to control by choosing "how they fit into 'natural' relationships deserving of state recognition" (Decimo, Gribaldo 2017: 207). I would add, in Henrietta's Moore words, that states "tend to promote a particular form of 'family'/household structure: the male wage earner, with dependent wives and children (Wilson 1977; McIntosh 1978; 1979)" (Moore 1988: 128), which also allows the reproduction of the labour force by exploiting women's unpaid and invisible contribution as domestic care workers. Thus, those kinship networks that are not consistent with the nuclear family model are not considered "normality" as they tend to elude this kind of state control. Kinship as a culture of mobility experienced by people with a pastoralist background, like the Somalis, seems therefore to be a resilient pattern of behaviour which is also more susceptible of innovation and negotiation.

In this thematic issue we suggest looking at human movements by trying to reverse our standpoint and, as far as possible, using local concepts of kinship and kinship networks so that the western concept of family is not superimposed on social relations that are framed elsewhere through different ways of looking at them. This reasoning may open new possibilities in thinking about the links between kinship networks and mobility. The three articles presented here tackle different kinds of dynamics of

relatedness that become crucial in mobility: conjugal ties at a distance, parental care at a distance, forms of friendship that are used to get away with kinship constraints, connections between mother and daughter in order to chart a course through the rules governing migration. Some individuals resort to migration anxious to escape parental wishes. Describing these ties and dynamics in their interconnectedness and diversity, I argue, is far more productive than bundling them all together under the single heading of family, which would also make women's care work invisible.

Negotiating gender roles, kinship and translocal mobility

In Egypt Mulki Al-Sharmani (Al-Sharmani 2006) noticed that for several Somali women the chance to be on their own as refugees in the country had allowed re-negotiation of their gender roles within their couple and some of them had also become the main economic support and decision maker for a number of their relatives. Similarly, Getachew (1996) in a refugee camp on the northern Kenyan borders found that women, when they become refugees and live away from their husbands due to forced migration, may acquire new skills and tend to renegotiate their authority within the groups of relatives.

In this issue Aurora Massa describes how many Eritreans are obliged for years to conduct conjugal ties and relations with siblings at a considerable distance. She also notices that gender relations change during this process. Many Eritrean refugees cannot return to their country because they dodged military service, but they are condemned to live apart from siblings and partners as the border regimes may not even allow them to travel freely within Europe. It is not uncommon that parents travel occasionally to the country where they have become refugees or asylum seekers but still their relational lives with siblings, partners and other relatives, when pursuable, extends over a broad area that can cover several countries. Personal encounters depend entirely on the possibilities offered by border regulations and travel opportunities. This distance, and especially the border regulations between African and European countries, allows for negotiation not only in gender roles but also in a variety of other aspects of the life cycle such as relationships among spouses and siblings, practices of parenthood as well as marriage forms. The very border regulations sometimes shape and determine the ways people decide to initiate conjugal ties.

Also the Somali refugees that travel within Africa maintain their vertical and horizontal relationships among spouses, children, parents and siblings at long distance and vast geographical space (Declich, this issue). The chances of entertaining such relationships in person are still determined by

socio-economic conditions, even in contexts in which border regulations may be less strict. For instance, in ten years the Somali Bantu refugee, Arbay, could only go twice from the refugee camp of Kakuma to Chogo, in Tanzania, to meet her relatives in person. Although distances from northern Kenya to central east Tanzania may be shorter, and borders more easily crossed than the European ones, poverty and working conditions may prevent such meetings from occurring frequently.

The socio-economic conditions may also have an impact on how long people stay apart. Praneet, a Pakistani woman who has permanent residency in Italy and an Italian passport, – as described by Sara Bonfanti (this issue) – given her status as a middle-class person, is able not only to go and visit Pakistan as she wishes, but she was entitled to go, marry and come back fifty days after her wedding. She actually decided to live apart from her new husband, only visiting him regularly until getting pregnant. Pregnancy strengthened the chances of obtaining family reunification and his husband's transferral to Italy. Thus Praneet, holding a residence permit, can navigate the Italian legal system concerning marriage, unlike the Eritreans described by Aurora Massa (this issue).What is particularly striking in the Pakistani case is that Praneet chose an institution of her Pakistani cultural inheritance, the arranged marriage, which would otherwise seem to restrict her freedom, to pursue her aim of having her Pakistani husband come to reside in Italy,

How binding are the constraints of kinship ideologies in translocality and how much space is there for individual agency? In all three articles, the actors try to find in mobility an opportunity to negotiate a personal space within the constraints that kinship ideologies impose. Praneet, contrary to the customary practices of her mother's homeland, is able to have her newly married husband displaced from Pakistan to Italy, thus setting up a matrilocal and matrifocal couple. Arbay manages to go to live in Kenya and study there, avoids an undesired marriage in Tanzania and, thereafter, marries a partner of her choice in the refugee camp of Kakuma. Mohamed does not achieve what he wishes, but his motivation for escaping to Kenya is one of social mobility: he wants to find a good job and start a new life. Thus the articles describe the agency of several actors that try to "bend" the kinship ideologies of their relatives to their own purposes, whether successfully or not. Certainly the distance from the original group offers a certain freedom from constraints, a space for action which would not have been available had they stayed in their own country (Declich 2018b).

The variable value of conjugal ties and children

The ethnographic material presented here shows the extent to which conjugal ties are seen differently in different contexts of migration. Setting up conjugal ties does not lead universally to the experience of an ideal settled family as one might envisage a white, middle class, Western nuclear family, a couple with two children in a comfortable home. This is not only because border regulations introduce obstacles but also because the sheer diversity of human experience shapes human relations in many different ways and permanent residence in the same place for life cannot be taken for granted; family is a socio-cultural construction and many people do not necessarily aim at a nuclear family model. Social mobility is one reason why the Eritreans whom Aurora Massa met start conjugal ties: they represent a real opportunity for major life changes. The kinship ideology which facilitates their removal to Western countries clashes with the border regulations which, in extreme cases, prevent their even meeting as couples.

The "ideal family" stereotype also obscures fact that some kinds of migration occur in order to escape from ties with relatives that are oppressive, negative and even dangerous for the girls who experience them. Paola Tabet (2004) has already shown that many African women migrate to urban areas to flee from restrictive and oppressive traditional customs. The work recently published by Katarzyna Grabska, Marina de Regt, and Nicoletta del Franco shows the extent to which girls' internal migrations in Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Sudan are often prompted by these kinds of dramatic relations within families (Grabska, De Regt, del Franco 2018). For instance, children whose parents have died are often considered cursed in Ethiopia and thus are mistreated by relatives so as to provoke their flight. Maltreatment by relatives also pushes Bangladeshi girls to flee from their homes. Mohamed's escape to Kenya, presented in this issue (Declich), is not as dramatic: the parents were set on organizing a wedding that Mohamed did not want. His flight, however, in search of a good job in Mombasa, is embedded in the framework of the kinship ideology which sees children trying to achieve successful life standards that will, later, bring secondary benefits for their parents.

Arranged marriages are practices which are acceptable in Eritrea, Somalia and many other countries. Thus, the three cases reported in this volume should not come as a surprise: Eritrean arranged marriages with refugees living in Europe are regarded as a very good opportunity to ensure oneself

and one's relatives back home a good standard of living (Massa, this issue); the Somali Bantu refugee woman who, having studied and resided in the refugee settlement of Mkuiu and in Chogo in Tanzania, agreed to an arranged marriage in the refugee camp of Dadaab, hopes she might be offered, at some point, a resettlement in the US (Declich, this issue). Praneet, on the other hand, finds that an arranged marriage organized in a traditional way conflates two of her wishes: giving fresh impetus to her life in Italy where she is unlikely to get naturalized, and then embracing her mother's Pakistani traditions while still retaining her life in Italy as a married woman. She, too, navigates the legal system to achieve her objectives by entering on conjugal ties (Bonfanti, this issue). The main aims of these marriages go far beyond the desire to start a life as an "ideal couple" living in a fixed place of residence. Kinship becomes a resource for mobility.

It clearly emerges from the accounts of the Somali refugees in Tanzania (Declich in this issue) and the Eritreans in several countries (Massa in this issue) that kinship ideologies are often the support of a system of social security that is the only one available, especially in conditions of poverty. Some of the practices which look as though they curtail the individual human rights of young people are sometimes part of this social security system (Declich 2016a, 2011). In such contexts parents count on their children as if they were their retirement scheme and, indeed, in many parts of the world there are no such schemes offered institutionally. The moral and economic obligations that Eritrean migrants feel towards their parents and relatives back home is part of the "moral model of the 'successful migrant'" (Massa this issue), but is also a strong driver for people living in Africa, even for non-mobile people; it is a moral model based on the lack of any other institutional social security or welfare.

The work of kinship in contexts of mobility is thus much deeper than one might imagine. It does not simply reproduce its typically resilient character (Decimo, Gribaldo 2018: 206) wherever it operates; in translocal contexts aspects of kinship are reinterpreted and reorganized in response to the individual's negotiation of the new environment (Declich 2018b). That has been the experience of the Shariif along the coast of the Western Indian Ocean, of the Hadrami and the Banyans in many countries overlooking the Indian Ocean, of the Umar Ba Umar in Somalia as shown elsewhere (Declich 2016b). Ironically, while border regulations produce a scattering of relatives dispersed in several countries, setting up painful obstacles in the way of spouses and their children meeting, however irregularly, it is not true that all the individuals involved only long for permanent reunification under the

same roof, as the Family Law in Italy, for example, envisages for spouses. The idea of family, among the Somalis for instance, as a large network extending through many branches bears only a pale resemblance to what a middle class white European means by using the same word. Yet, even those diverse ideas get readapted to different conditions when people travel, as Praneet shows by setting up a matrilocal marriage in an otherwise patrilineally organized Pakistani culture.

Three ethnographic contributions

The article by Sara Bonfanti describes the way in which the Pakistani girl Praneet, raised in Italy, reconciles the pressure she is under to comply with a marriage arranged by her parents in Pakistan with her desire to continue living in Italy and enjoying her livelihood in Europe. She, in fact, goes to Pakistan and marries the designated husband, agreeing thus to a return marriage (that is, with a Pakistani living in Pakistan) and fulfilling her parent's expectations; quite soon, however, after the wedding, she goes back to Italy and succeeds in arranging to bring her husband there through a family reunification. She is thus pro-active in a context in which a marriage to a countryman served to reinforce her cultural identity in a place, Italy, where she could not hope for naturalization. Contrary to the usual idea that men go first as migrants and later bring their womenfolk along (Cvanjer 2018), it was her mother, Kanval, who arrived first in Italy to open the road for her husband. Thus the daughter, Praneet, seizes her opportunities in dialogic relations with the norms of her original group in India but follows her mother's course in securing her lifestyle by first migrating and then, as an economically successful migrant, bringing a husband to join her, rather than the other way round. In some ways, she bent the patriarchal gender rules that constrained her life and navigated the opportunities of the neoliberal governance of migrant human capital in Italy. She does certainly exert agency in navigating structural constraints. The impossibility of obtaining naturalization in Italy hampered her chances of full integration and fostered her desire to follow at least some Indian traditions. Mobility facilitated a combination of mother and daughter agencies in which a negotiation of gender roles occurred.

The article on conjugal ties and parental care at a distance by Aurora Massa reflects on the experience of three Eritrean refugees in dealing with their private lives across continents and European nations. Marrying a refugee in Europe has become the easiest way to gain access to European

countries through family reunification and this can be done by both men and women. Therefore the most widespread way of guaranteeing a wedding, the arranged marriage, is also practised across Eritrea and Europe and represents an important investment which parents and relatives can make for a child. The people Aurora Massa presents have to struggle between an ideology of romantic love and a livelihood strategy that, even though it may seem an economic contract rather than a love story, can ensure a much higher standard of living to an individual and to his/her relatives at home. One of the cases describes the story of Efrem and his spouse Huda. They were able to arrive in Europe separately, one in England and one in Italy, and they could only meet in France, due to the fact that they were unable to join each other in either England or Italy because of visa restrictions. The spouses could not spend much time together even on a temporary basis and the children were taken care of at a distance. In time, both managed to lead a relatively successful life in their respective host countries, but Efrem could never, because of visa requirements, visit the children and the spouse in England. The article shows how different approaches to marriage can be, but also the extent to which the Dublin Treaty and the enforcement of national borders in Europe (and the Dublin Treaty) can put people who marry in the impossible situation of not being able to live together or travel within European countries. At odds with the ideal which envisaged a transnational space in which supposed families are at liberty to develop their interactions, we have a class of people who are free to decide whether to interact with their loved one across states or to a lifestyle that entails travelling (for instance, UN and World Bank staff, international students), while others, though married, cannot meet even if they would like to. This class dynamic, determined also by the socio-economic status of the people in mobility, has been effectively highlighted by Marzia Grassi in research work on Portuguese engineers working for the petrol industry in Angola who conduct a good part of their time with wives and children resident in Portugal through the internet (Grassi 2016; Tamburlini 2016). Thus, observing that kinship ties are moulded by boundaries and border regulations has important political implications but does not point to a brand new phenomenon since such ties have always been very elastic and people have used them in creative ways across countries to suit their interests or the requirements of their domestic arrangements in settling areas, as suggested by the study of several groups along the coast of the Western Indian Ocean (Declich, 2016b). In Massa's article, as well as in Bonfanti's, conjugal ties are seen as allowing great

opportunities for mobility and for imagining different ways of life. People realise that and they take their chance. Such ties, though, do not seem particularly connected with ideologies of romantic life or a marked desire to spend time together as a couple. The conventional way of talking about conjugal ties as pertaining to the "private" sphere proves again to be an euphemism; calling the domestic sphere "private" eclipses the work performed in it as well as the cost of such work; the state, as feminist literature highlighted long ago, exerts social control over conjugal ties and the ways married people ought to behave (Moore 1988). The border regulations are one of those forms of social control. To govern migrations, states attempt to delineate those kinship ties to be regarded as legitimate relationships (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002: 10). On the other hand, border regimes separate relatives of specific undesired groups of migrants putting their lives in paradoxical situations.

My own article shows that migration paths do not always follow the parents' or kinship groups' desires. Rather than following the parents' advice or complying with what they feel as obligations towards the parents, girls and boys often escape from kinship ties that they perceive as too constrictive. Thus kinship ties may be a push factor in opting to pursue the migration path, not because the migrants follow the parents', communities' or ethnic group's project but because they wish to escape, at least temporarily, from such a project. Arbay, for instance, after completing her fourth year of study in Tanzania, did not have funds enough to continue studying. Her decision, therefore, was to go and live in a refugee camp in Kenya, a two-day journey from where her relatives lived in Tanzania, to seek more options for studying and to avoid early marriage. Her brother Mohamed, who also did not manage to go on to secondary school in Tanzania, escaped from the village together with a male friend to try their luck as workers in Kenya. In the end they had to come back to the village as they fell ill. The migratory paths of the children were not decided within the kin group, but rather in negotiation or opposition to their parents' will. In both cases, the boy and the girl had clearly exerted agency in pursuing a path designed to lead to a different life from the one that the structural constraints of their kinship group had traced for them. On the other hand, should they be successful and attain a good standard of living, their achievements would lead back into a path which their parents had envisaged, i.e. to ensure social security for their relatives.

The articles describing conjugal relations refrain from mentioning how spouses kept apart by borders reacted to the lack of affection and sexual life. In preparing her married life, the young woman described by Bonfanti does not hesitate to stay away from her newly wedded husband for months until she obtains family reunification. The conjugal ties seem more of an achievement in one's life – useful in attaining a desired livelihood – than the realization of a romantic love. The very widespread practice of the arranged marriage is resorted to as an option that may increase the chance of a better standard of living in Europe. It is not surprising that people are ready to entertain and preserve such ties, even across countries, especially if they promise better living conditions.

Life stories and diachronic anthropology

It turns out that the three articles in this thematic section present life histories describing the trajectories of migrants over several years. These life histories have not been elicited through straightforward interviews with the actors, designed for that purpose; they have been gathered over the course of time through longterm friendships that the authors have maintained with the protagonists of these stories. This shows the importance of this specific tool in anthropology in understanding mobility from a diachronic perspective, a tool that implies a long-term commitment from the anthropologists involved. It has come to be recognized as an anthropological method of almost crucial importance that can be used in multi-sited fieldworks conducted over an extended period, and one that provides a formidable density of information. Long-term fieldwork shows the extent to which the anthropological approach involves a thorough knowledge of the socio-cultural background of the "interviewees". Such knowledge has usually been acquired at many levels beyond the range of the mere interview by reflecting on one's own experience in the field (Piasere 2002: 42-43), spending a long time within the group one studies while waiting for the people to give you their point of view (Piasere 2002: 183-184), resonating with the people, as suggested by the Balinese to Norwegian anthropologist Wikan (1992 in Piasere 2002: 148), "trying to interpret with all available emotional and cognitive means"... "fragments of cognitions, fragments of emotions, fragments of practices" (Piasere 2002: 185) and counting on the embodied knowledge (Okley 1992: 18). The long anthropological fieldwork also allows one change one's mind through the process of tuning the researcher to the emic wavelength of the interviewees and the subjects involved in the

research. Such a process of knowing differs from what can be achieved through the in-depth interviews used by sociologists as the main tool of a sociological qualitative ethnographic method (Cipolla, De Lillo 2004). The latter interviews, albeit defined as in -depth and used either to explore hypotheses that are pre-constructed before starting the research work (Statera 2014) or to enquire into values (Marradi 2005), are not a flexible enough tool to pursue local explanations that could arise while the field experience is ongoing. Nor can they alone provide a "thick", thorough knowledge of a context (Geertz 1975), as happens with anthropological ethnographic work in which the lives, aspirations and socio-cultural background of the people becomes known to the researcher at many levels.

Conclusion

Domestic arrangements, conjugal relations, forms of parenthood, ways of experiencing siblinghood lived at distance, networks of lineages that constitute hospitality for their far distant relatives, all practices which do not resemble the ideal-type of a western resident nuclear family elude the control of the state. Although the border regimes exasperate all possible relationships experienced at distance, as can be seen in this issue from the case of the Eritreans, these networks still evade national control because they are not considered within the range of possibilities. In the cases shown here, kinship is a resource for mobility and an idiom that can help in devising paths and choosing behaviours to adapt to mobility.

All the articles show the extreme fluidity of the concept of family and the different ways conjugal ties, or avoidance of conjugal ties, are used to pursue individual aspirations. A poorer or richer socio-economic background can be the driving force behind either migration or mobility, but the conditions of mobility differ accordingly. Socio-economic status makes a difference in a context where border regimes are becoming ever stricter and less porous.

Choices that had been made on the assumption that crossing European and American borders was easier have a strong impact on the way people rethink their lives and the decisions they take at key stages in their lifecycles. People may marry and remain in refugee camps for twenty years, waiting and dreaming of resettlement in Western countries, or they may start a conjugal relation that can rarely be enjoyed together. Barren refugee camps become ideal destinations for a Somali Bantu newly wedded couple in the wait for a possible resettlement in Western countries, as shown in my own article (Declich, this issue). Arranged marriages that young "modern"

Eritreans were trying to avert become desirable in the perspective of possibly spending their married lives in the West through a family reunification procedure. Conjugal ties in certain conditions are seen as offering the possibility of social mobility for middle-class Eritreans and for the Italian Pakistani woman, Praneet, (Massa and Bonfanti, this issue); in other circumstances they are viewed as an obstacle to the achievement of young people's aspirations, as in the case of Arbay and Mohamed in Tanzania, coming from a poor peasant family. And yet the debt incurred through the upbringing received from parents is still often the driving force which propels mobility.

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Kinship ties on the move: An introduction to the migratory journeys of kindred
2020 | ANUAC. VOL. 9, N° 1, GIUGNO 2020: 87-109.
ISSN: 2239-625X - DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-4216