

# Homosexuality elsewhere: young migrants, sexuality and transcultural identity strategies

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## Abstract

The article focuses on young people of foreign origin in Italy, analysing in particular the experiences of those of a homosexual orientation. Starting from a theoretical reflection that takes into account the various possible statuses expressing young migrants situation, we will analyse the complexities that arise in terms of identity for young foreigners who, when living their sexuality, relate both with the cultural standards of the country of origin (often homophobic and repressive) and with those of the host country, in which they can instead intercept new opportunities to express themselves and their desires. The core idea is to verify the means through which they manage these contrasts, aiming at empirically outlining the strategies of behaviour, thus increasing the understanding of the ongoing processes of social and cultural integration.

**Keywords:** homosexuality; young North African foreigners; Italy; identity strategies; integration

## Introduction

The ongoing debate on multiculturalism in contemporary society places special emphasis on young foreigners, seen as protagonists of innovative intercultural paths that reshape the forms of the relationship between immigrants and natives<sup>1</sup>.

This peculiar “juvenile status” is usually given considerable attention, because, as Cavalli explains, new generations are the focus of our hopes and fears<sup>2</sup>; they are both a problem, to the extent that their patterns of behaviour and thinking can undermine the social structure and culture of a society, and a resource, meaning that they can determine progress in terms of innovation<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, musings on young foreigners are generally characterized by this ambivalence, seeing them, on the one hand, as a

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<sup>1</sup> Donati P., *Oltre il multiculturalismo*, Laterza-Bari, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Cavalli A., *La gioventù: condizione o processo?* on “Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia”, XXI, 4, in Merico M., (edit) *Giovani Come*, Liguori Editori, Naples, 2002, 520.

<sup>3</sup> Vulbeau A., *La jeunesse comme ressource*, èrès, Paris, 2001.

source of maladjustment and new social problems and, on the other, as a hotbed of new, composite, plural social identities<sup>4</sup>.

As Sayad critically depicted, the birth of second generations upsets the tacit acceptance mechanisms for immigration based on the assumption of its precariousness<sup>5</sup>: the transition from temporary migration to permanent settlement requires the society to open up to the needs of newcomers and question the meaning and the full recognition of all citizenship rights. Indeed, it is not enough to restrict them to mere economic citizenship, functional to the needs of the labour market. For example, the new social needs, embodied by the children of foreigners, require an investment in terms of policies to fight this form of marginalization and insecurity, which adult foreigners often undergo, either tacitly or openly. Therefore, second generations are often the test bed of social integration processes of the immigrant population<sup>6</sup>.

In order to better analyse the problems characterizing the condition of young foreigners, we first need to distinguish between the various phenomenologies by which this status can be expressed; this distinction is necessary as they lead to different interpretive paths, depending on the different characteristics and problems involved. Regarding young foreigners, for example, Favaro distinguishes between<sup>7</sup>:

- born in Italy or *de facto* Italians: they either are born in our country or have arrived here in early childhood; their full path of socialization and education took place within the structures of the host country;
- born abroad and reunited the family: their education and socialization took place for some years in the country of origin;
- unaccompanied, *i.e.* those who come to Italy on their own looking for better life opportunities, mostly with an irregular status.

We must differentiate between the first two categories (young people born in Italy and those who are reunited to their family) and then between them and the latter (unaccompanied youngsters). The first two categories' research paths are focused on the "children of foreigners", or on that part of the immigrant population born in the country or which occurred as a result of family reunification: these subjects generally show fewer possibilities in terms of social equality in achieving the same goals (either in school, concerning self-realization, etc.) with respect to their native peers; it is implicitly assumed that young foreigners should have the same status as young

<sup>4</sup> Ambrosini M., *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2005(a).

<sup>5</sup> Sayad A., *La doppia assenza. Dalle illusioni dell'emigrato alle sofferenze dell'immigrazione*, Cortina, Milan, 2002

<sup>6</sup> Ambrosini M., *Oltre l'integrazione subalterna: la sfiga delle seconde generazione*, in Cacciavillani G., Leonardi E. (edits), *Una generazione in movimento. Gli adolescenti e i giovani immigrati*, Atti dell'VIII Convegno Nazionale dei Centri Interculturali, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2005, p.70.

<sup>7</sup> Favaro G., *Prove d'integrazione. I ragazzi e le ragazze delle "terre di mezzo"*, in Cacciavillani G., Leonardi E. (edits) *Una generazione in movimento. Gli adolescenti e i giovani immigrati*, Atti dell'VIII Convegno Nazionale dei Centri Interculturali, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2005, p.41.

natives, and therefore the same opportunities and protection tools<sup>8</sup>. The latter aspect is particularly important because it is known that youth condition is outlined to the extent that society recognizes and attaches to a given stage of life specific meanings and characteristics, and also to the extent that, for the same phase, acknowledges expectations and different forms of protection than for other members of society. It is no coincidence that much of the research on young foreigners focuses on school and, therefore, on a part of the young foreign population with paths and characteristics similar to those experienced by young people in contemporary societies<sup>9</sup>.

Concerning the youngsters of the first two categories, researches insist on cultural ambivalence, *i.e.* the difficulty of foreign students to put together the cultural references learned within the family with those explored in the various social and relational fields of the host society<sup>10</sup>. Clearly, also this line of research should highlight some differences: being born on Italian soil and reaching it in a second time leads to different integration difficulties; however, even within these obvious diversity, a decisive factor is common to the two conditions, namely the fact that for both there is a close family unit. This aspect is not trivial, since the family performs, as it happens for young Italians, an important “buffer” role with respect to the complexities that young people face in the context of the recipient society<sup>11</sup>. The existence of the family also allows the youngsters to better manage those identity issues typical of the juvenile and adolescent phase; in fact, these two categories of young people have more precise, less fragmented references, and the family is the medium where it is easier to develop the cultural distance between the old world and the new (*ibid*).

We must however exclude from this path some phenomenologies of the juvenile status, affecting those foreigners who arrive alone in the country of immigration, that is, without any family anchoring, *i.e.* those who are identified in the literature as “unaccompanied” youngsters. Their situation is indeed unique, not only concerning their life experiences, clearly different from those of other young foreigners, but also because these young people undergo what we might here define as a “double absence”. The first absence refers to the fact that their problematic condition is often ignored, because in the eyes of the institutions (and even of some researchers) they are not recognized as “young people”: their specific position in the labour market, the fact that they live alone or, in general, that they are autonomous, leads them to be

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<sup>8</sup> Dalla Zuanna G., Farina P., Strozza S., *Nuovi Italiani. I giovani immigrati cambieranno il nostro paese*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Tosolini A., *Ragazze e ragazzi stranieri nella Scuola Secondaria: Introduzione* in Cacciavillani G., Leonardi E. (edits), *Una generazione in movimento. Gli adolescenti e i giovani immigrati*, Atti dell’VIII Convegno Nazionale dei Centri Interculturali, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2005, p.245.

<sup>10</sup> Mantovani G., *Come possiamo pensare alle seconde generazioni di immigrati in modo davvero interculturale?*, in Cacciavillani G., Leonardi E. (edits), *Una generazione in movimento. Gli adolescenti e i giovani immigrati*, Atti dell’VIII Convegno Nazionale dei Centri Interculturali, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2005, p.103.

<sup>11</sup> Masullo G., *Le fenomenologie possibili della condizione giovanile migrante*, in Rauty R., (edit) *Il sapere dei giovani*, Aracne editore, Rome, 2011, p.466.

considered as “adults”. This invisibility also leads to much more serious consequences, and hence the second “absence”, because they are excluded from those forms of protection and support provided in kind for their foreign and native peers (*ibid*).

### **The theoretical reference framework: “queer migration studies”**

On the theoretical level, the distinction between the various possible phenomenologies of the immigrant juvenile status is important because it enables us to analyse the various social and living conditions characterizing these young people. We can also highlight the different repercussions over the identity, even with respect to those aspects of the self, such as gender identity and sexual orientation, that take on different meanings in each culture.

In fact today we place great attention on the intertwining of the issues relating to gender diversity and those raised by a society that is becoming increasingly multicultural<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, new and original points of view are developing, seeing the “doubly” stigmatizing status of being homosexual and immigrant as a “third way” to explore issues related to diversity in post-modern societies. The belief that the study of “otherness” should not be limited to sectoral approaches is gaining more and more strength; conversely, the interconnection of different approaches is seen as leading to an enrichment of perspective.

A connection between these perspectives could be found in the epistemological premises they share: both gender and migration studies today base their strength on the deconstruction of “otherness”, challenging the ways in which “ethnic membership” and “gender” are classically intended.

Proceeding to a detailed analysis of these paths (to rejoin them again at the end) we focus on post-colonial criticism. This viewpoint discusses the concept of identity as outlined by the Western view that, under the light of a differentialist racism, has framed both identity and ethnicity in essentialist terms, through “naturalising” labels, at the expense of the phenomena of hybridization. Said phenomena, on the contrary, clearly show the ability of self-definition of the foreigner, who builds his identity through numerous references, both from the original and the host society<sup>13</sup>. This logic leads to see the identity of the migrant pointing to the “process” as a complex construct that does not resolve itself in favour of and end or the other of the spectrum (the culture of the country of origin or that of the host society), but it is always the result of mediation, in which the elements are not blended, but remain distinct and can be retrieved as needed.

<sup>12</sup> Battle J., Lemelle, A., *Gender Differences in African American Attitudes Toward Gay Males*, “Western Journal of Black Studies” 26(3) 2002, pp. 134-139; and Green B., *Ethnic and cultural diversity among lesbians and gay men*, Sagem Thousand Oaks, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Mellino M., *Cittadinanze postcoloniali. Appartenenze, razze e razzismo in Europa e in Italia*, Carocci editore, Rome, 2013.

The path that leads us to reflect on the “borderline” character taken on by the identity of migrants can be extended also to gender, which for a long time coincided, at least in Western culture, with the strict limitations of the traditional binary interpretation of sexual orientation (homo/hetero/bi-sexual) and gender identification (male/female). Against this view, within gender studies, the 90s saw the birth of the queer theory<sup>14</sup>. The term is not synonymous with homosexuality, because it addresses all sexual subjects caught in the middle of the binary categories, the hybrid identities and bodily marginality: transsexuals, transgenders, transvestites, hermaphrodites, androgynous, etc. Generally, the term “queer” indicates otherness and outlines the contours of a precarious, fluid, and mobile identity, summarizing the struggles of those who fight against any binary opposition, questioning the system of compulsory heterosexuality as an expression of male power. Borghi does not consider the queer issue as limited to gender, but as the *trait d'union* in which to read all the otherness that are undergoing a bid towards “normalisation” through essentialist concepts<sup>15</sup>.

More recently, some theories developed within the overseas debate relate migrations studies and gender studies, reflecting on the condition of those individuals who have to manage in terms of identity their belonging to a double notoriously stigmatized identity. Pondering this issues within the same framework allows both theories to become aware of their own heuristic limitations. On the one hand, the perspective adopted by migration studies allows queer theory to reflect on other cultures, whereas before it was given to consider only the problems of the LGBTI Western population; on the other, queer studies exposes the heterosexism<sup>16</sup> existing in the categories with which we study migrations, opening to a broader understanding of the instances of those that in the host countries pose the question of recognition of gender identity as one of the reasons for migration.

In this context were born the first *queer migration studies* that focus their analysis on the strategies used by foreigners to manage two notoriously stigmatized identities<sup>17</sup>. These studies overcome the simplistic reading that sees the culture of the society of origin as opposed to that of the host society concerning the way of seeing homosexuality. Instead, by including the “transnational” perspective, they try to analyse the processes and the mutual influences. By doing so, they put the foreigner at the core of the research, seeing her as a social actor able to manage the numerous

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<sup>14</sup> Butler J., *Undoing Gender*, Routledge, New York and London, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Borghi L., Barbarulli, C., *Le forme della diversità: genere, precarietà e intercultural*, CUEC editrice, Cagliari, 2007 pp.10-12.

<sup>16</sup> Concerning this issue Rinaldi talks about institutionalized heterosexism, by which «the heterosexual configuration projects in the natural world and on other species, such as our, its representations hetero-normative and its structures hetero-sexist as the reference standard on which to build social expectations and design relationship forms (...) thus are constructed naturalization and essentialization processes that, both at the micro-social and macro-social level, turns into standardization, discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, and punishment structures and practices» (2012: 141).

<sup>17</sup> Harper P.B., McClintock A., Muñoz J.E., *Queer Transxions of Race, Nation, and Gender. An Introduction*, in “Social Text”, nn. 52/53, 1997 pp. 1-4.

facets of her personality in her various relational circuits. These studies also allow us to capture sexuality not only as a cultural issue, but also as the result of the intersection of power relations, which refer to class, ethnicity, race, and citizenship status. Living between different worlds, as citizens who embody multiple identities *par excellence*, foreigners develop diversified strategies depending on the relational contexts in which they move, and depending on the possibilities of expression offered by the society.

### **Between the society of origin and that of immigration: young migrants and possible sexual identities**

The point of view earlier analysed leads us not to take an “ethnocentric” stance, thus conceiving young foreigners as a category comprising similar experiences and expectations with respect to the way of thinking about gender identity and sexual orientation, but rather to open up to various ways of being and of reconciling the culture of origin and that of the host society. This is true also with respect to that part of the self to which young people – for different reasons – may harbour an ambivalent feeling, ranging from the manifest expression of one’s diversity, even in terms of its claim, to pretence, and also, in the more complex cases, to one’s sexual orientation.

As Breklus points out the strategies of gay identity in the post-closet era can be diversified: for some homosexuals identity is in essence a noun (corresponding to “what I am”), for others it is a verb (corresponding to “what I do”), and, for others still, it is an adjective (corresponding to “a part of what describes me”)<sup>18</sup>. For example, an identity conceived in terms of *gay lifestyle* typical of urban enclaves, understood as the subculture way of being “authentically gay”, not only does not arise for some young people from other cultures, but could also be strongly opposed or refused. This happens to those who come from a culture strongly influenced by religious precepts, such as Muslim culture, where the heteronormative view provides rigid expectations about what constitutes the male and female universes. Within the contexts of the societies of origin masculinity can take rather stereotyped contours, which tend to be constantly remarked in the scenic representation of one’s gender belonging. Here homonegativity becomes the “norm” not only among heterosexual people, but also among homosexuals themselves. Indeed it is not uncommon for gay children of immigrants to condemn the ways of conceiving and living sexual orientation in the host country, considered as too “visible” (understood as ostentatiously effeminate) compared to a manhood that in these cultures assumes a heavy symbolic value<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Breklus W.H., *Gay pendolari, gay integrati. Strategie identitarie dei gay di periferia nell’era post closet*, in Rinaldi C. (edit) *Introduzione alle sociologie dell’omosessualità*, Mimesis editore, Milano, 2012, p.188.

<sup>19</sup> Masullo G., *Gender Diversity, riconoscimento e inclusione sociale: il caso degli stranieri LGBTI italiani*, in Bartholini I. (edit), *Radicali, discriminazioni e narrazioni di genere nel Mediterraneo*, Guerini&Associati, Milan, 2015.

Certainly the different migratory stories profoundly affect the forms of identification, going to define different relationships with both the community of origin and the host country. As stated in the first part of this contribution, many youngsters have arrived in Italy with their mother in order to be reunited with their father (or vice versa), when they were in an advanced stage of their growth, that is, after spending their childhood and part of the pre-teen years in their country of origin, while some have come at an early age and have gone through most of their socialization path in our country; others still have arrived when already adolescents. Many others were born and raised in Italy and have known migration only indirectly, through the experience and history of the parents. These aspects, in addition to determining a different relationship between young people and normative standards, greatly differentiate the ability of the socialization agencies – family or next of kin – to exercise a function of control and sanction on the behaviour of the boys, particularly so for aspects of the sphere of feelings and sexuality.

In any case, for young foreigners (especially for those who are born in the country of immigration or have gone there at an early age) we should reflect on the management of the tension between the desire to live in it taking on styles of behaviour similar to their Italian peers and the obligation to repress themselves. This tension is exacerbated where the cultural standards of their countries of origin, often “transmitted” through the family, prove to be totally incompatible with visible manifestations of diversity.

Excluding special considerations that should be made for each of the possible ethnic backgrounds and cultural models of reference, it is possible here to draw some hypotheses – to verify empirically over the development of the research – on what may be the strategies of identity for LGBT teens. We will proceed below to analyse the data that emerged from a recent exploratory research which covered LGBT foreigners in Italy on these aspects<sup>20</sup>, in particular taking into consideration the life histories featuring young people, either the children of foreign immigrants in Italy or of mixed couples, or those who come here alone. In order to support the observation and interpretation of these cases we will take into account the findings in previous researches on the topic – albeit few – available in literature.

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<sup>20</sup> A research I carried out aiming at exploring the life in Italy of gay foreigners from the Maghreb region (in particular Tunisia, and Morocco). Respondents were aged between 18 and 44 years, either first- or second-generation immigrants in our country; they were personally contacted through Facebook, using some keywords, such as: "Gay Arab Italian". The interviews were carried out mainly through Skype. For matters relating to the method, see the most recent literature on biographical interviews and on the study of social representations through social networks (Masullo, 2014, Bichi 2002).

## Young North African gays and sexual identities in the country of immigration

Although several studies have paid attention to the issue of foreign children<sup>21</sup>, and some have pushed the boundaries in order to analyse issues related to gender identity and sexual behaviour, there are few the considerations that have taken into account the complexities posed by sexual orientation. In fact, at least in the Italian context, except for the research co-financed by the national Arcigay organization and the Ministry of Social Solidarity – I.O. *Immigrazione e omosessualità* (immigration and homosexuality)<sup>22</sup> – the issue has not yet been the subject of a thorough analysis. The reasons for this delay are to be identified in the persistence of an attitude that assumes “compulsory heterosexuality” as a natural fact and at the same time in the persistence of an “ethnocentric” attitude in believing that our country does not present major problems with respect to the possibility of living freely one’s sexual orientation.

The three life stories I have analysed include only a few of the configurations described theoretically, that is: two young North Africans aged 18-27 years, arrived in our country on their own, and a young man of Tunisian origin aged 18, born in our country and the son of a mixed couple (with Italian father). The ethnographic and descriptive cut of the research, the innovative and experimental study, the paucity of observed cases, taking into account also the difficulty in tracking down and engage a rather invisible target, recommend a certain caution in generalizing and applying to other situations the results obtained from these life stories. In this sense the results obtained should be understood as the first step of a reflection, rather as the final results; they will be subsequently validated on the basis of a proper representative sample.

The analysis of the strategies of identity referred to three important nodes in the experience of a young gay migrant – the same used by the Arcigay research – that is:

- coming out, the decision to openly declare one’s homosexuality;
- relations with the family - parents, siblings;
- social networks – friends and peers group, countrymen, Italian gays - and the ensuing definition of the self.

Each of these issues highlights the strategies implemented by young foreigners to live their life taking into account both the specificities of their culture of origin (such as the strong religious roots) and the culture of the country of immigration.

<sup>21</sup> Marmocchi P., (edit), Nuove generazioni. *Genere, sessualità e rischio tra gli adolescenti di origine straniera*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Arcigay, *Io, Immigrazione e Omosessualità*, in <http://www.arcigay.it/>, 2008.



## Being homosexual migrants in Italy: the case of North African young men

Coming out is an experience of profound, core significance in the life of a young homosexual man, not only for the psychological implications but also for the social ones, considering that this moment represents the need to see as acknowledged by his family and peers a constitutive side of the self, to which the subject attaches great importance.

With reference to the young migrants interviewed, the outing experience covered all three respondents, but in none of the three cases it was lived with family members. However, the reason given by the young men are not the same: Hassan<sup>23</sup>, for example, has decided to tell only a few friends, because he wanted to avoid conflict with the views of his family and save them a displeasure, therefore he does not consider useful to open up with parents who would not understand:

It's right, because it's a play<sup>24</sup>! No, I would never tell it to my parents. They wouldn't understand, they would suffer. They really don't understand these things, my father is so though too, also with my sister; then, even if we are not so religious, our religion is very strict on this issue of gays, so it's something I don't say, I keep it for myself (...) my best friend knows about me, and that's it!

Rachid<sup>25</sup> is instead very critical with respect to coming out, both because his parents would not understand, and because he do not feel the need for it; he considers his sexual orientation as a private sphere of experience that does not necessarily mean to be acknowledged by his family or peers; but this issue is also a way for him to distance himself from an outward sexual identity that does not correspond not only in the culture of his society of origin, but also in how to define himself as "homosexual":

I know very well what it means, and I do not understand this thing of saying it, but saying it to what end? Because for me it is something so intimate, I do not see the need of having to tell others who I sleep with, this wanting to flaunt about one's homosexuality is something typical of Italians, for us these things are more discreet and I'm all for it.

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<sup>23</sup> Hassan is 24 years old and is a native of Salé, a city of Morocco in the region of Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaer. He arrived in Italy on his own, rejoining a relative. He has a university education, although he has not concluded his studies yet. He came here with a tourist visa and then managed to find a stable job thus earning a regular residence permit. He regularly goes back to Morocco in his native city, where all his family of origin lives, with which he maintains regular and stable relations. He had several stable relationships, but affirms that he is currently single.

<sup>24</sup> Understood here as a synonym for "pretence", "camouflage" for the image of himself that one wants to give to others.

<sup>25</sup> Rachid is 25 years old and is a native of a small rural town near Fes, has a university education, and arrived in Italy 7 years ago, rejoining some of his countrymen already in the country. He currently has a valid residence permit. He maintains regular contacts with his family of origin to which he feels very attached. For business and economic reasons he rarely travels to his country of origin. He says he has no stable relationships.

Also Rami<sup>26</sup> believes the coming out not to be a fundamental issue, especially with his relatives. But he spoke of himself to Italian and compatriot friends – his peers – with which he attends regularly the gay scene:

my mother knows something about me, while my father in my opinion suspects something, but right now he does not ask and I do not tell him (...) Now I'm with a guy, I have both straight and gay friends who know it, I have no problem.

If it is true, therefore, that the outing even for migrant children is an important step for the definition of their sexual identity, it is also true that for them it can have different meanings: in some cases it is an almost compulsory step to take in order to live without pretence, at least with friends with whom they go out and share the evenings and leisure times; on the other hand, this step does not involve identity tensions with respect to the culture of origin. The youngsters do not *de facto* confront themselves with their parents, considering the outing as a non-functional aspect to their relationship.

The family, in fact, especially if it is present on the territory of the country of immigration, embodies for the youngsters merely tradition: they do not relate to the images that their culture of origin elaborated about homosexuality. In countries with a purely Islamic religious orientation, sexuality is trapped in a rigid grid of rules designed to strictly regulate sexual drives. These rules are crystallized into three main points: (1) the taboo of virginity, (2) strictly heterosexual sex acts (3) disciplined into the institution of marriage for purely procreative purposes<sup>27</sup>. Although things are starting to change, especially in the most urbanized contexts, the condemnation by the North African society against this practice is very clear and involves very severe penalties<sup>28</sup>.

However, the context of the country of immigration change for the families, and especially for the children, the bond they have with these references, which in the case of young migrants tends to be rather weak and does not seem to significantly affect their way to live, which is in some cases very similar to that of their Italian peers, as Rami points out:

In my country the culture forbids relationship between persons of the same sex, I went in the country of my parents on vacation a few times, but I'm not tied to their customs, I live religion very freely, often most for my parents who care about it.

<sup>26</sup> Rami is 18 years old and lives in Milan, where he was born, the son of a mixed couple (mother of Tunisian origin and Italian dad). At the time he has completed his high school education and is oriented towards a career in the show business, considering that she studied dancing and a bit of acting. He does not keep contacts with his relatives in Tunisia, where he went only a few times in the past during the summer season. He is currently in a relationship with an Italian boy a few years older.

<sup>27</sup> Patané V., *Gli arabi e Noi. Amori gay nel Maghreb*, Derive Approdi, Roma, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> As explained by Liggio, «Within Islamic culture, the behaviour regarding sexuality is regulated by the teachings of the Prophet Muhammed (571-632 AD). Homosexuality (*hudad*) is considered a serious crime against the divine law. Active homosexuals (both men and women) if they are single or unmarried should be punished by one hundred lashes and if they are married should be punished with the death penalty; in particular, if it comes to women the execution must be performed by stoning; while, passive homosexuals should in any way be punished with the death penalty» (2010: 170).

As shown, these youngsters adopt strategies that have little to do with the attempt to reconcile different views of homosexuality – considered that they do not have any relation with the culture of their country of origin – but at the same time they are very careful of controlling their self-image as it can be filtered by other countrymen, as in the case of the youngsters who are here without their family. We can thus detect two strategies: either they try to distinguish their friendships – the straight ones from the gay ones – resorting to the so-called identity surfing, or enact real simulations in order not to be discovered, as per Hassan’s words:

I put “engaged” on facebook on purpose, so that everyone knows that I’m with a woman. When I was in my country I used to get engaged to women, but of course I did not sleep with them, there it is forbidden before marrying them anyway, and then as soon as it became more serious I said I didn’t like them anymore, here they know that I’m with an Italian now.

For Hassan, the opportunities existing in our country, in terms of the variety of possibilities for meetings, allowed him to reconsider in a new way his vision of homosexuality:

At the beginning I was afraid to go in places frequented by gays, to ghettoize myself, like, when I got here at the beginning I met everyone through chat, then I slowly started to know more friends, Italian ones too, and slowly I attended the premises of the city, but I am always afraid of being recognized.

Although these higher and more numerous possibilities are recognized and acknowledged, this does not automatically translate in adhering to a more flaunted identity, as Hassan points out again:

Here I found much more freedom, and I like it, but I have doubts about some things, for example, about all those events, like the Prides and parades. Also, I am absolutely opposed to adopting children, we (i.e. in my country of origin) do not have this issues at all.

While this research does not allow to draw a parallel between the *modus vivendi* of young Italian homosexuals compared to the foreign ones, one has the feeling of a clear “homogenization” of lifestyles for these aspects, of course excluding the different socio-cultural starting conditions analysed until now. However, there is no lack of critics towards Italians – as is clear from the words of Rachid – opening the possibility to hypothesize possible alternatives in the way of conceiving themselves as both Arabs and homosexuals:

Italians live very openly, you often see them walk down the street holding hands or kissing, they do not care if people look at them, mocking them, sometimes I get the feeling that they do it on purpose, to show off, maybe not everyone, but many do. I do not like it, I think that we Arabs are more discreet, because this is something “private” we do not need to flaunt it, give a bad image, in my opinion.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the interviews allows us to draw some assumptions about identity and behavioural strategies used by the three young North Africans to live their sexual identity in the country of immigration. As defined in the theoretical part, when we refer to young foreigners is crucial to distinguish between young people who actually grew up in our country and young people who arrived later on, either alone or rejoining their family. In the first instance, the distance between the reference models of the country of origin and those of the host country becomes less obvious, since most of the socialization took place in Italy. While the youngsters tend to highlight their origins, they do it only in part, for some things and not other, and not for the issues concerning their sexual identity. We can thus confirm those characteristics that Simmel attributed to foreigners, namely their ability, by virtue of their dual membership, to assume roles of impersonality, objectivity and justice toward those values of their society of origin (as well as immigration) which they do not acknowledge and from which they want to keep their distance<sup>29</sup>. Thanks to these multiple memberships (whether real or imagined) young foreigners define themselves primarily as “individualities”, eager to experience all the dimensions of themselves, even those that belong to the sphere of their sexuality. Queer theory focuses very much on this aspect, namely the desire of the individual migrants to open up to the various ways of being they can meet and express in their host society, rejecting any form of pre-categorization.

Likewise, young people who arrive in our country by themselves experience some ambivalence concerning the cultural models of their country of origin, which we can suppose even stronger given that they lived an important stage or their lives in Morocco. This aspect is also apparent when considering the lifestyles of Italian homosexuals who, in their view, are too much exhibited and too little corresponding to the image they built of and for themselves, also according to the ways in which homosexuality is lived in their countries of origin: a dimension closely related to the private sphere. The latter issue calls for a broader theoretical reflection on gender diversity in Arab countries of the Muslim religion in the light of the ongoing processes of cultural globalization, the results of which, through the words of young migrants, were partly described herein.

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<sup>29</sup> In considering the objectivity of the foreigner Simmel explains that it represents his true freedom: «He is more free, both practically and theoretically, he embraces situations with fewer prejudices, measures them against more general and more objective ideals, and he is not constrained in its actions by habit, by pity, by prior events» (1989: 582).

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