

"Situating queer migration within (national) welfare regimes"

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Abstract

Building on recent criticisms within the literature on queer migration raised by Andrew Gorman-Murray and Nathaniel Lewis, the article explores 'unconventional' trajectories of queer migration: a Global North metropolitan area-Global North metropolitan area one and a Global North metropolitan area-Global North ordinary city one. Two very different migration patterns are analysed: the movement of young queer 'creative' Italians from different metropolitan areas (Rome, Milan, Bologna, Catania, Naples, Padua and Turin) towards Berlin (Germany) and the relocation of young queers from the major Italian cities (Rome and Milan) towards ordinary/small size towns. Aimed at highlighting the complexity of material and immaterial factors leading the decision to migrate in times of crisis, austerity politics and increasing unemployment, the article introduces the role of welfare regimes in shaping migration's choices. This way, queer migrants and their socio-economic status and possibilities find *materially situated* within national/local welfare regimes, thus challenging the teleological binarism of the 'coming-out' journey always presuming a rural/urban movement for queer subjects. Within such a framework, the ordinary/small size town can become a place for 'outness' and self-realization of queer migrants who create bridges and connections with the metropolitan areas, thus *queering* the provincial contexts.

Key-words:

queer migration- welfare regimes- Italy- Berlin- situatedness

1. Introduction

When considering the life histories and self-narratives of queer subjects, movement and migration appear to play a pivotal role, as they have been often associated with the process of 'coming-out' (e. g. Binnie, 2004, Castells, 1983, Weston, 1995). In this respect, specific trajectories have been overemphasized, notably i) the rural-urban one as favouring coming-out and opening up the possibility of living within 'your own' community (e. g. Gorman-Murray, 2007) and ii) the Global South-Global North one (e. g. Manalansan IV, 2006). However recent efforts within Anglo-American scholarship on queer migration have been addressed towards more diverse and variegated accounts of experiences and trajectories in order to question the uniformity and reductionism within the hegemonic narratives of the 'coming-out' rural/urban journey across the Global North while accounting the historical and geographical specificity of migration patterns under the influence of a multiplicity of factors (e.g. Gorman-Murray, 2007, 2009, Lewis, 2012, 2013, Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014).

This article builds on these criticisms, exploring 'unconventional' trajectories of queer migration: a Global North metropolitan area-Global North metropolitan area one and a Global North metropolitan area-Global North ordinary city one. Indeed two very different migration patterns are analysed: the movement of young queer 'creative' Italians from different metropolitan areas (e.g. Rome, Padua, Bologna) towards Berlin (Germany) and the relocation of young queers from the major Italian cities (Rome and Milan) towards ordinary/small size towns. Such a challenge to the fixed, teleological binarism of the 'coming-out' journey always presuming a rural/urban movement thus offers the possibility to show how ordinary/small size towns can become places for 'outness' and self-realization of queer migrants who create bridges and connections with the metropolitan areas, thus *queering* the provincial contexts.

When analysing these movements, the paper is aimed at highlighting and understanding the complexity of material and immaterial factors leading the decision to migrate in times of crisis, austerity politics and increasing unemployment. In this regard, the article contributes to existent literature on queer migration introducing the role of welfare regimes as both a push-factor and 'magnet'. While in other fields of research the relation between migration and the welfare system has received great attention—with the “welfare magnet” hypothesis, see De Jong and Donnelly, 1973, Frey *et al*, 1996, Giulietti and Wahba, 2012-, it has remained mostly unexplored within geographies of sexualities, a notable exception (albeit at the intra-national scale) represented by studies on HIV health-care provision as a push factor leading gay migration towards some US metropolitan areas (e.g. Berk *et al*, 2003, London *et al*, 2004).

How is the queer “quest for identity” (Knopp, 2004) embedded within specific welfare regimes? Why do many queer subjects decide to leave Italian metropolitan areas and move to one of the least wealthy metropolitan areas of Germany (i.e. Berlin)? What leads queer subjects to leave the 'outness' offered by a metropolitan area in favour of a presumed 'closeted' ordinary town?

We try to answer these questions by emphasizing the role of material conditions and welfare regimes in shaping the migration choices. This is not a form of economic reductionism: on the contrary, a multiplicity of factors (e. g. imagery, desire, affects, the 'quest for identity') is recognized to shape the decision to migrate, the analytical effort being to highlight how welfare sustains queer migrants' imagery of place when relocating. While literature on queer migration across the Global North has usually ignored the role of welfare regimes, the chapter *situates* queer migrants and their socio-economic status and possibilities within national/local welfare regimes. Indeed the configuration of welfare regimes can partially explain the movements under scrutiny

here. This appears particularly relevant and urgent for a country like Italy, currently affected by a strong economic and financial crisis and heavy cuts to the welfare system in the name of austerity. Moreover the Italian welfare regime has traditionally relied on (private) family intergenerational redistribution of wealth, thus making crucial to consider family expectations and relations when analysing life stories.

The first migration pattern (Italian metropolitan areas to Berlin) was analysed within the research project “The Queer Sound of Berlin” conducted between the fall of 2012 and the spring of 2013. Methodologically, the project was based on participant observation/observant participation across the main venues attended by Italian queer migrants in the German capital and in-depth interviews with 15 self-identified queer subjects. A call for participants was published on the Facebook pages of the communities of Italians in Berlin and the main queer venues/parties self-targeting as Italian (e.g. *Cocktail d’ Amore*, *La Froceria*) as well as on GayRomeo (profile active from September 2012 to May 2013). Six participants responded to these calls, the others were contacted through the participant observation/observant participation and then snowballing. The basic criteria for selection was that they should have been previously living in one of the main Italian metropolitan areas -those who accepted to participate were living in Bologna (2), Catania (1), Milan (4), Naples (1), Padua (1), Rome (5) and Turin (1) before moving. The mean age of the participants was 29.2, the youngest aged 24, the oldest 36; six were socially-identified women, nine socially-identified men. When interrogated about defining their gender identity and sexual orientation, six refused to label them, two self-defined as pansexual women, three as queer, one as gay, one as lesbian and two as ‘frocio’¹.

¹ In Italian, the word *frocio* means literally *fag* and it usually has a very offensive connotation. However the word has been strategically re-appropriated by many LGBT activists as a political claim against the use of both ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ (for further clarification, see xxx, 2014).

The second pattern (Rome/Milan to 'ordinary' towns) was explored through 6 in-depth interviews conducted in the first months of 2014 with self-identified queer subjects who have recently relocated in different ordinary/small size towns of (Central/Southern) Italy from Rome (4) and Milan (2), the two main Italian metropolitan areas, usually referred as the Italian 'Gay Meccas' together with Bologna and Torre del Lago Puccini (a summer holiday destination close to Pisa). The six participants were contacted through snowballing, the basic criteria for their selection being that they should have lived in the 'Gay Meccas' for at least three years before moving. The mean age of the participants was 28.6, the youngest aged 26, the oldest 32; four self-identified as gay men, two as lesbian girls.

Following Crang (2005) and Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2011b) we deployed a narrative analysis around the life stories shared with us by our research partners in order to emphasize the contextual and breaking-points within their self-narratives, challenging the unidirectional and linear account that some subjects tend to build when interrogated about their migration paths. Borrowing from Waitt and Gorman-Murray, we can say that our aim was "not to provide an intrinsic meaning. Rather, the reading was to examine the biographies in context" (2011b: 1246). We thus focused on re-listening to the interviews several times and going back to the transcripts in different moments to try to unveil different meanings and tensions. Moreover, in order to avoid the reductionism of oral language when narrating life histories, affects, emotions and imageries, we gave our research partners the possibility to use different tools (videos, pictures, etc) they feel more comfortable with.

In this text, when referring to queer migration, we use it as an umbrella term to include all those 'sexual deviants' exceeding the hegemonic forms of gender identity and sexual behaviour. This way, an open line is traced, since we believe no rigid divide can be established in people's lives and experiences around gender and sexuality.

The remainder of the paper is made of five sections. In section 2 we discuss the geographical literature on queer migration, highlighting how it overestimates certain movements included in the narratives and analyses of the 'coming-out' journey and the queer 'quest for identity'. On the contrary, we stress the need to follow the recent criticisms raised by Gorman-Murray and Lewis recognizing the complex and embodied character of queer migration processes through 'downscaling' migration flows (Gorman-Murray, 2007, 2009), while at the same time situating them both historically and geographically in order to understand how they influence the formation of identity/subjectivity. Section 3 *situates* the trajectories considered in this article through analysing the basic characteristics of the Italian welfare system, highlighting the main role assigned to family relations. This is particularly relevant for queer people, since individuals remain mostly excluded (heterosexual marriage is the only form of union recognized by the law). We then proceed exploring the role of the welfare regime within "unconventional" trajectories of queer migration. Section 4 focuses on Italian queers (who were living in Italian main cities) relocating in Berlin, as the data collected revealed the main importance of a more inclusive and universal welfare system in Berlin (compared to the Italian one) among a multiplicity of factors driving migration. A sort of opposite trajectory is analysed in section 5 through the cases of G. and V., as they moved from the Italian main cities to small, ordinary towns. Their accounts reveal not just how the family-led welfare system can be important when deciding to relocate, but also the way this process is experienced as opening up new possibilities challenging the dichotomy rural as 'closet'/urban as 'outness'. Finally in the conclusions we summarize the main arguments of the paper before calling for more complex and situated accounts of queer migration paths to understand the interrelation between diverse socio-economic, emotional and relational factors leading queer migrants in times of crisis and austerity politics.

2. Complicating queer migration through 'downscaling'

When considering the migration paths of queer people, the movement of migrating has traditionally been associated to the decision and process of coming out (e. g. Binnie, 2004, Brown, 2000, Fortier, 2001). Indeed, as stated by Lewis:

queer migration often becomes synonymous with leaving an unsupportive or unsafe place to disclose their true, already formed queer identity in a more appropriate, inclusive place characterized by a large queer community and less restrictive sexual and cultural norms. Coming out has frequently been framed as a locus around which these presumably linear migrations take place. (2012: 212)

This tight association between queer migration and the coming out process has then led to a rigid construction of the considered trajectories, the destination was assumed to be a place of 'outness', anonymity and freedom, as it has historically happened for the formation of lesbian and gay communities across the cities of the Global North (e. g. Adler and Brenner, 1992, Chauncey, 1995, D'Emilio, 1983, Hennessy, 2000). Queer migration then results as always involving a intra-national movement towards a metropolitan area because of its anonymity and offering multiple possibilities of encounters (e. g. Chauncey, 1995, Higgs, 1999, Hubbard, 2012) or, transnationally, towards the 'modern', rights-protecting countries of the Global North (e. g. Puar, 2002) although most national immigration laws remain deeply heteronormative (e. g. Luibhéid, 2008, Manalansan IV, 2006). This has led to the reification of certain biased narratives featuring cities as places of sexual liberation, possibilities and 'outness', while rural areas and ordinary cities find represented as closeted, 'backward' places.

This dominant model depicts the queer migrant as an actor who migrates from an area of greater coercion, in terms of how to express and experience sexuality, to an area of

greater openness (here the *urban* is meant as an utopic space related to a certain kind of queer futurity, promising queer subjects a rendition of the sexual life in the anonymous and at the same time diverse territory of the big city) and sexual freedom represented by the metropolis. As stressed by Gorman-Murray (e. g. 2007, 2009), this perspective is based on a certain teleology that fixes identities and classifies movements in a way that goes beyond the concrete practices lived by queer subjects in the big city. Moreover, if rural and urban assume a form per se in relation to sexuality, the rural (regardless of the specific place we are talking about, since this dichotomy has a teleological function) shall be the place of imprisonment of sexual dissidents that have to deal with various social constraints. By the means of the migration process, the urban appears thus as the place of openness, which confers to queer subjects the capacity of assuming a cosmopolitan queer identity, *global* and closer to the mainstream culture that pushes the rural *not emancipated yet* sexual identities to get out of closet, in order to consolidate urban sexual identities, maybe anonymous but ever emancipated.

These accounts of queer migration as a 'coming-out' journey have been often associated to the idea of *home* (e. g. Fortier, 2001, Gorman-Murray, 2009). For instance, Anne-Marie Fortier has shown how the evocation of *home* as *familiarity* often features the self-narratives of queer migrants in the construction of a *diasporic horizon*, defined as "the projection of (queer) belongings and culture within a spatio-temporal horizon defined in terms of multilocality, cultural diversity, dispersal, and conflict" (2001: 407). Adopting a relational and symbolic perspective aimed at understanding how queer subjects reconstruct the idea (and the consequent affective attachment) of *home* through migration paths offers the possibility to destabilize the uniform and monolithic account of the rural-to-urban 'coming-out' journey. In this respect, the work of Gordon Waitt and Andrew Gorman-Murray (e.g. 2011a, 2011b) on the relocation paths of gay and lesbian subjects towards Townsville, a 'ordinary town' of regional Australia,

highlighted the embodied character of queer migration through different places, scales and imageries: finding a place we feel like 'home' is a complex process that goes beyond the 'out' life offered by the big city and the 'closet' of the hometown.

These works reflect a more general concern within geographies of sexualities towards the need to decenter the analytical perspective that tends to assume what occurs in the main metropolitan areas of Anglo-American countries as the (modern) standard. Such assumption produces a hegemonic knowledge through the lens of Anglo-Americanism that excludes the Global South and post-socialist, Central and Eastern European countries (Brown *et al*, 2010, Kulpa, 2011, Moss, 2014, Visser, 2013), while building a monolithic account of the Global North, completely erasing the experiences of both 'ordinary cities' and cities/countries not following the Northern Atlantic trajectory (e. g. Brown, 2008, xxx, 2015, Lewis, 2013, Muller Myrdahl, 2013). Concerning the literature on the geographies of queer migration, such a renovated approach has led to pay more attention to the migration paths towards different types of localities, notably rural areas (e.g. Annes and Redlin, 2012, 2013, Smith and Holt, 2005, Waitt and Johnston, 2013). All these perspectives reinforce the connection between movement/displacement and the formation of identity, what Larry Knopp has conceptualized as the (queer) "quest for identity", meant as

personal (and sometimes collective, as in the case of nationalisms) journeys through space and time- material, psychic, and at a variety of scales- that are constructed internally as being about the search for an integrated wholeness as individual humans living in some kind of community (if not society). (...) Specifically, it is an effort to create order out of the chaos that is fractured identity combined with structures of power that discipline (and, too often for many of us, oppress) identity (2004: 122-123).

According to the Northern-American geographer, in the case of queer subjects, this occurs usually through distancing from families and contexts of origin in order to 'come out'. This process involves not only the creation of new communities and relationships but a sort of discovery of self-possibilities. Indeed, "it is also about testing, exploring, and experimenting with alternative ways of *being*, in contexts that are unencumbered by the expectations of tight-knit family, kinship, or community relationships" (*ibid*: 123).

These positions associating queer migration to the 'coming-out' journey or a "quest for identity" have recently received several criticisms, notably by Gorman-Murray (2007, 2009) and Lewis (2012, 2013). Gorman-Murray (2007) has stressed how these narratives have become almost *archetypal*, thus leading not just to underestimate other migration paths, but also to analyse them as "fundamentally similar" to the rural-urban one (p. 108-109). In this respect, he carries a deeply geographical critique to this literature around the *scale* considered to analyse queer migration. Instead of focusing on rural-to-urban trajectories or the (trans)national scale, analyses on queer migration should focus on the "motivations of individual migrants and the movement of the queer body itself through space" (p. 111). So the theoretical effort should be addressed towards a 'downsizing' of the scale of migration flows towards the *body* as this offers the possibility "to recognize diverse paths of migration without privileging one trajectory at the expense of others" (*ibid*). This reshapes queer migration as "*an embodied search for sexual identity- an individual search which can be materialized at differing, multiple scales and paths of relocation*" (*ibid*). In a following article (2009), Gorman-Murray extended his argument about the body as the primary vector of displacement emphasizing the role played by (embodied) affects, desire and intimate attachments in shaping queer migration.

More recently, Nathaniel Lewis has furthered this challenge to the idea of the 'coming-out' journey as linear and always leading to a urban community, stressing how central is

the relation between intersectional subjectivities and social contexts to understand the migratory path (2012). For instance, he has showed how the gay black males he interviewed did not feel any conception of urban emancipation or disclosure when moving to the new Northern-American cities analysed by the author. So “the supposed urban ‘homelands’ in which coming-out journeys might normally be imagined to terminate turned out to be incomplete answers to searches for emplacement” (*ibid*: 225). Indeed Lewis emphasizes the *relational* and *contextual* character of queer migration: “the segmented, discontinuous nature of coming-out migration, then, is attributable to men’s *ad hoc* negotiations of the social dynamics encountered in various places- as opposed to unilateral trajectories towards ‘out-ness’” (*ibid*: 226).

In a following article (2013) focusing on the migration narratives of 24 self-identified gay men living in Ottawa (Canada), he furthered the exploration of the relation between queer migration and social dynamics focusing on how place-embedded relational ties played a pivotal role for the interviewed men when deciding to relocate. His study then challenges a monolithic view of the factors presumed to influence migration choices (e. g. homophobia or intolerance), while emphasizing the role of complex dynamics of negotiations within networks and institutions. As he explains:

Moving to Ottawa was therefore less a means of escaping than it was a means of obtaining a social security net during the unpredictable process of coming out. In choosing to move away, men alleviated fears of being displaced or rejected, established new networks, and gave themselves the freedom to come out on their own timeline (*ibid*: 324).

Although based on a completely different methodology and context (France), the recent study of Blidon and Guérin-Pace (2013) appears to reinforce the analytical perspective discussed by Lewis. Through an online questionnaire returned by 3500 respondents

self-identifying as gay or lesbian all around France, they challenge the unidirectional narrative of the “escape to the city” by showing how lesbian and gay subjects tend to re-settle in contexts of similar size, pushed by several factors (work, affects, family and studies), far beyond the lonely will to live in the ‘Gay Mecca’.

When addressing this shift inside the literature on queer migration, it is crucial to *situate* both *historically* and *geographically* the displacement paths considered: this is the basic consideration driving Nash and Gorman-Murray’s recent study (2014) on the changes in the urban geographies of homosexual spaces in Toronto and Sidney. Adopting the “new mobilities” approach, they emphasize the “need to take into account actual physical movement, the stories or narratives told about what those movements mean (representations), and the practices that arise from these actual movements and meanings associated with them” (*ibid*: 762). Such a renovated approach offers the possibility to frame through the lens of mobilities’ practices the shift from the “great gay migration” of the 1960s-1980s, that led to the formation of ‘gay ghettos’ in the main Anglo-American cities, to the emergence of “queer friendly” neighbourhoods (e.g. Gorman-Murray and Waitt, 2009, Nash, 2013a, Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014) making several scholars proclaim the “demise of the gaybourhood” (e.g. Brown, 2014, Nash, 2013b, Reynolds, 2009).

This way, migration is reconfigured as an embodied practice depending on a series of structural, social, personal and relational factors, thus making necessary to adopt an intersectional perspective to analyse the relation between migration and the formation of identity/subjectivity (e.g. Valentine, 2007). Indeed neoliberal homonormativity (e.g. Duggan, 2002,), led by the mantra of promoting diversity, tolerance and creativity (e.g. Florida, 2002, Rushbrook, 2002) for economic growth, has reshaped the relation of queer subjects with the process of ‘coming out’. So called ‘post-mo’ (Nash, 2013) or “post-gay” (Brown, 2004, Ghaziani, 2011, 2014) emerging subjects do not assign

anymore a central importance to sexual orientation to define themselves, even refusing to use labels and attend venues targeted as gay. This seems to mark a generational divide between those who fought for equality against the stigmatization linked to the HIV/AIDS pandemic of the 1980-1990s and current young generations who do not perceive such diffuse discrimination anymore (e.g. Nash, 2013b). However several scholars have pointed how neoliberal acceptance is mediated by several factors and positions, in terms of gender, race, class, social and cultural capital, spending capacity (e.g. Browne and Lim, 2010, Nash, 2010, 2011, Nast, 2002, Richardson, 2005, among the others). So any analysis of migration patterns should take into account the complexity of personal and social factors enabling that choice even in the current historical phase in which 'outness' appears to be accepted in different locations beyond the 'gay ghetto' (e.g. Lewis, 2013).

Building on these contributions, we here want to enlarge the perspective through exploring the role of (national) welfare regimes in leading queer migration. Indeed both the *embodied* (emphasized by Gorman-Murray) and the *relational* (Lewis) situatedness of queer migration cannot be separated from the material conditions shaped by the configuration of the welfare system mediating our bodies, affects, desires and relations. Can welfare regimes influence the decision to migrate in times of austerity and crisis, when feelings of lack of opportunities for young people seem to prevail? In order to understand the role played by the welfare regime in the case of Italian queer migrants, we need to consider how the welfare system works in Italy, this being the object of the next section.

3. (Situating) the Italian welfare system

A rethinking of queer migration as an embodied and/or relational movement should take into account which material possibilities (or constraints) are offered by the contexts in

which these movements take place, in terms of both departure and destination. In Western Europe, the decades following the II World War saw a deep improvement of the living conditions of millions working-class people thanks to the adoption of large wealth-redistribution policies marking the establishment of solid State-led welfare regimes. According to the milestone classification of Esping-Andersen (1989), welfare states can be regrouped in three categories: liberal, conservative/corporatist and social-democratic. Within this frame, Italian welfare state is situated within the conservative/corporatist category together with countries like France and Germany. These groups are featured by social insurance instead of social assistance and a great role is accorded to the family system and religious institutions; in general, the State is seen to intervene when the families' capacities to service their members cannot be accomplished. Despite recognizing the importance of Esping-Andersen's classification, several contributions have moved a severe critique, especially addressing the need to recognize the specificities of a Southern European/Mediterranean model of welfare state, as these countries (notably Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece) challenge that classification (e. g. Castles, 1995, Castles and Ferrera, 1996, Ferrera, 2000, Flaquer, 2000, Trifiletti, 1999). What all the analysts remark as the main specificity of the Southern European model of welfare state is the central role of families in every aspect of societal production and reproduction, notably income and services. As the (heteronormative) family is the main responsible for reproduction and access to services, the role of women results pivotal, thus leading them to be the lonely responsible for care and domestic work, as proved by the lower rates of participation to formal employment (xxx and Salvati, 2015). According to some scholars, these countries are featured by a "familiaristic" conviction for which the family is able to provide better services and care than the State (e. g. Guillén, 1997). It results that most

assistance provided by the State in case of need is addressed towards (legally married, thus heterosexual) families instead of individuals.

In any case, this system is founded on the role of “superwomen”: indeed the growth in female participation to formal labour markets has not been accompanied by a decrease in their tasks within the household (e. g. Moreno, 2006, Trifiletti, 1999). In terms of the services provided by the State, Southern European countries are featured by a universal provision in the sectors of education and health, while social housing has traditionally been very weak (e. g. Allen *et al*, 2004, Castles and Ferrera, 1996). All these characteristics represent well the Italian case, where the lack of social housing, combined with an increased unemployment rate- especially for people aged under 30- and the absence of forms of money basic income distribution has made the situation extremely difficult in the current times of crisis and austerity measures adopted by governments and institutions to face the crisis. This way young people feel obliged to rely on family-based assistance and help, especially in terms of income and housing, making the decision to migrate to another city within the country more difficult- even for university reasons.

This situation can become particularly problematic for queer people, as Italian institutions are still perceived as strongly heteronormative and homophobic (e. g. Gasparini *et al*, 2012). Indeed in legislative terms, at the national level there has been no recognition in terms of rights (e. g. civil unions or marriage), with even a law introducing homophobia as an aggravating circumstance in the Penal Code being rejected by the Parliament in 2009 (Ross, 2008). As shown by Charlotte Ross (2009), the recent years of Berlusconi governments were featured by a pervasive homophobic discourse as a strategy to attract the favours of both Catholic voters and institutions. Nevertheless, Berlusconi's governments did not represent an anomaly concerning LGBT issues, as “the experiences of the LGBT population under Berlusconi fall into a

'legislative continuum' since their rights remained unprotected before, during and after this period" (*ibid.*: 204). On the contrary, the everyday life conditions of queer people appear to have improved in cultural and social terms, with increased visibility and feeling of legitimation/acceptation perceived especially in metropolitan areas (e. g. Ross, 2008, 2013, Trappolin, 2004).

This brief account *situates* materially the relocation choices of Italian young queers within specific contexts and conditions, as the decision to migrate cannot be separated from considering the welfare regime opportunities offered both by a (transnational) 'gay-capital' destination (like Berlin) and a ordinary/small size national town, as we are going to see in the next sections.

4. Moving to the "poor but gay" city

When we started the research project "The Queer Sound of Berlin" in 2012, we aimed at interrogating the diverse reasons why so many queer people move to one of the poorest cities of Germany (De Rosa *et al*, 2013). Although Berlin embodies several possible imageries and positions within the transnational urban networks linked to globalization –e. g. a wannabe global city, the growing heart of continental Europe, an "alpha world media city", a "city of talents", an ordinary city (Bader and Scharenberg, 2010, Cochrane and Jonas, 1999, Krätke, 2004, Ward, 2004)-, it remains one of the most problematic metropolitan areas of Germany in terms of income per capita and unemployment (Krätke, 2011). Nevertheless Berlin is one of the most attractive destinations for queer people transnationally because of its fame as a transgressive, counter-cultural and nightlife city. Italians follow this path, as showed by the proliferation of Italian queer parties in the city. What attracts so many queer Italians here? Which is the role played by desire and imagery in the decision to move here? Was everything about the possibility of easy sexual encounters and "be out"? This last question

appeared particularly problematic, as although the Italian context is often perceived as homophobic, the main Italian cities (where all our research partners were living before moving to Berlin) offer multiple possibilities for queer people.

Among the 15 people we interviewed, just one made a direct association between the decision to move to Berlin and the process of “coming out” (as gay in the specific case). All the others did not even mention this aspect, as all of them had already “come out” in some ways. On the contrary, as highlighted by Gorman-Murray and Lewis, they made reference to a variety of factors driving the decision to migrate: imagery, desire, cheap rents, the possibility to easily work in the art sector, among the others. For all of them, Berlin expressed the symbol of a personal possible futurity opening up opportunities that cannot even be imagined in the Italian context. We can consider for example the following account of Marco, 34, painter and self-making jeweller:

When I decided to leave Rome, I chose Berlin because for me it was like the place where you should be if you wanted to have any opportunity. In Rome I was paying 800 euros per month for the rent and the studio where I worked was very small, I needed to do many precarious jobs only to pay the rent, and I had no time and energies left to paint. In Italy it's simply impossible to think you can live through art, at least if you do not have any family or friendships' network assisting and helping you before starting your work.

In Berlin I'm paying 600 euros per month for the rent and the studio is comfortable and big enough to live there. I work in street markets a couple of days per week and that's all, I can dedicate all the rest of my time to my art. Indeed in Berlin I found back my creativity and the desire to produce, at the beginnings it was a process of discovering, new people, new places and many parties, so much sex, I knew Berlin is a city with infinite possibilities of encounter. (...) Which idea did I have of Berlin? The city of opportunities for any domain of life and I could say it was this for me (personal interview, authors' translation).

Like other self-narratives we collected, Marco's one points at a complexity of material and immaterial factors leading his choice, thus echoing the findings of recent literature, as discussed in section 2 (e.g. Blidon and Guérin-Pace, 2013, Lewis, 2012, 2013, Waitt and Goman-Murray, 2011a, 2011b). In his narrative there was no reference to the homophobia of the Italian context or feeling the need to move to Berlin in order to "come out". On the contrary, what appeared to join together all the personal trajectories was a certain reference to the German (and Berliner) welfare system.

When interrogated about the reasons to leave Italy, none of our research partners cited the German welfare system at a first glance, while mentioning the lack of services and opportunities provided to young people by the State and other formal institutions in Italy. The importance of the welfare regime emerged afterwards, when deepening the history of their relocation processes. Indeed the welfare regime in Berlin offers more services and opportunities than the Italian one especially for young (unemployed or in search of a job) unmarried people, notably a) in the housing sector through monetary subsidies and b) by providing specific forms of universal basic income. This has been largely acknowledged inside the literature on the varieties of welfare systems: in Italy families represent the main (private) channel for the intergenerational redistribution of wealth, while in Germany (like in other corporatist welfare regimes) the State and its institutions are in charge of it (e.g. Poggio, 2008).

In this respect, the welfare system appears to have given them not only the possibility to follow their aspirations, but also to feel an immediate and strong attachment to the city. This emerges clearly from the following account of F., 35, dj, producer and waiter:

When I arrived in Berlin, I realized that it was not easy at all to find a job, especially for me who did not speak German. At the beginnings I worked a bit, illegal and precarious work thanks to the Italians I knew here, then after some weeks I was told about public

aids, (...), you know as I was used to the Italian system, I could not even imagine such a support! (...) Thanks to the money I received, I had the possibility to look around to understand and valorise my skills and opportunities, (...), for sure the welfare state helps you to have fun (smiles). In Berlin it's always like this, people having as unique goals parties, sex and drugs do not have to worry too much since they can get public aids. (..) Me too when I arrived, I started to discover and experiment, because you don't go to Berlin if you want to do the same things you could do in Bologna or Rome, you come to Berlin because you know that everything can happen, you cannot even imagine all the experiences you are going to live. (...) Whether is this connecting me to the city? I have to tell you the truth, this over-sexualized scenario ends for reproducing a different norm, (...), in my case the chances offered by the welfare state led me to recognize this city as a comfortable place, where you have the chance to build a new path and a new life (personal interview, authors' translation).

These short accounts highlight what emerged within all the interviews realized: several factors drive people's decision to migrate towards the new "European queer transgressive capital", notably the lack of opportunities offered by the Italian welfare system. Although "poor but sexy", Berlin welcomes and keeps (certain queer) migrants through the welfare system, experienced as a material survival strategy to engage your time on what you prefer: the imagery and desire of the 'underground city' find themselves *materially sustained* by an inclusive and universal welfare regime. This is not a way to underestimate how these subjects own specific forms of (social, cultural and symbolic) capital offering them the chance to feeling welcomed when relocating, while other subjects in different positions (of age, social and cultural background, race, and so forth) may have lived a negative experience.

In this respect, the experience of young migrants in Berlin reminds some other well-known metropolitan examples, San Francisco having been the first to be analysed in

the field of (urban) geographies of sexualities, notably in Manuel Castell's milestone *The City and the Grassroots* (1983). Although the evident bias featuring the overall analysis -especially when referring to the male way of territorializing spaces opposed to the female one- Castells recognized the role played by a multiplicity of social, political and economic factors, notably low real estate values, for the formation of Castro. Indeed from the 1970s Castro had become one of the districts of the city inhabited by the gay community, made mostly of (working class) migrants from other parts of the country attracted by the liberal reputation of San Francisco. They settled in Castro because of the low real estate values: Castro was a typical case of working class district featured by rapidly declining real estate values. Despite widespread narratives highlighting how San Francisco is the first case of gentrification led by gay communities, Castells' analysis pointed how most of the gay people moving to Castro were low income, thus sharing flats and houses and engaged in a self-organized grassroots' renewal of the neighbourhood.

The spatial self-narratives we collected in Berlin, centred around the traditionally low-value, rapidly gentrifying neighbourhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukölln -mostly inhabited by migrants- thus echo Castells' analysis of Castro, emphasizing the importance of social support, welfare and a 'creative' environment. In the words of Nike, 28, artist, living at the intersection between Kreuzberg and Neukölln at the time of the interview:

I cannot imagine to live in a different neighbourhood, everything comes together here, *my affects are here, the community is here*, (...) just being around the neighbourhood you feel you are part of something, (...), everyday you learn something new, everyday marks a new encounter (personal interview, authors' translation, emphasis added)

Such a deeply spatial imagery reveals us how many different factors contribute to the construction of migrants' attachment to a new city (and specific neighbourhoods):

sustained by a supportive welfare system, the imagery on the underground, welcoming and creative city drives Italian migrants towards Berlin. On the contrary, which factors move the relocation towards an Italian 'ordinary' town? We are going to examine this migration path in the next section.

5. Back to the closet? Relocating in ordinary towns

Despite being relevant, the role of welfare regimes in driving migration from different Italian cities towards Berlin is mediated by a variety of other (material and immaterial) factors, as Berlin evokes a strong imagery as “city of talents” and “queer city”. On the contrary, if we consider national trajectories of relocation from the Italian two main metropolitan areas (Rome and Milan) to ordinary/small size towns, the role assumed by the family-oriented Italian welfare regime becomes prominent. Indeed these cities register an extremely high cost of life (especially for housing) and a concomitant lack of possibilities of (decent) employment. In these cases, we wanted to explore what happens when the family net you rely on pushes you to relocate in another (smaller and ordinary) city, where you can find more assistance and opportunities. Considering the foundational role of family in the welfare system calls into question the subjective positions occupied within family culture and schemes, for instance on the basis of gender, education and age relations. The *relational* side of queer migration discussed by Lewis (2012) assumes here a central importance.

As seen in section two, this 'unconventional' movement from the metropolis to the ordinary town has not been completely absent in the literature on queer migration, although the focus has mostly concerned the relocation of mature, retired queer subjects who opt for a calmer lifestyle, better responding to their identity's needs and self-perception (e.g. Annes and Redlin, 2012, 2013). However this movement opens up new questions when concerning young queer people, as they are usually (pre)assumed

to move from the 'closet'/ordinary town to the 'outness'/metropolis. How is the 'coming-out' journey shaped by these unexpected trajectories? Here we consider the histories of G. and V. as they unveil the complex and non-teleological character of queer migration. G. is a 29-years old guy who relocated in a small town of the Marche region (in Central Italy) in 2013 after having lived almost 8 years in Rome and a couple of years in Milan. G. comes from a middle-class family of Tuscany and moved to Rome when he was 19 for the university, graduating in Communication Sciences. A gay militant linked to a political party, he remained in Rome a couple of years after finishing his studies as he tried to look for a (fixed-term) job in the media sector, but he found only very precarious, short-term contracts, not giving him the possibility to self-sustain himself, thus he continued to rely on his parents' financial support. In order to be more independent, he finished by doing more than one job on the same time, but still he could not afford to cover all the living expenses. As a way to try to have more job opportunities, he moved to Milan at the beginnings of 2011 but even there he could not find much more than internships-type contracts, thus again he could not afford to cover all the expenses. Likewise in Rome, he was very active in the queer life in Milan (parties, venues, associations, etc), describing it as "exciting" and "intriguing" (personal interview). Nevertheless after a couple of years, he was given by some relatives the possibility to have a well-paid job as receptionist in a hotel close to the beach in the Marche region: he accepted to move there, thus leaving the "outness" of metropolitan areas like Milan and Rome to settle in a small town. When interrogated about the factors pushing him to move there, his explanation was absolutely *relational* (as in Lewis' study presented in section 2) but *embedded* in the materiality of the private-family-based Italian welfare regime. He stated:

Look, it is not a matter of obligation leading you to choose this, but it is your own choice, your family has helped and sustained you for so many years, (...), moreover they are

giving you the possibility to have a well-paid, not too hard job, in which you have holidays and a series of benefits you cannot find anymore so easily in the labour market. So you think: shall I remain in the big city, continue sharing the flat with two or three people and receiving financial support from my parents all the time? (...) Let's be clear, without my family I could not have done anything, because in this country you do not have any kind of right as an individual, no kind of economic support when you are looking for a job. With the work-contracts I had I did not have the right to the unemployment subsidy, when you are at university scholarships do not really exist, everything is conceived around family! (...) I know some people who decided to break up the ties with their families, but in my case I have a very good relationship with my family, I have always received support, (...), why should I break with them and leave my family net if everything is organized around family ties in this country? (personal interview, authors' translation)

And what about his sexual life? Did he perceive this journey as a "return to the closet" constrained by material conditions? Which is the impact of a migration trajectory from the metropolis of possibilities and encounter to a small town of ordinary sexual life? Once again the welfare system is described as offering new possibilities, in this regard it gave him the chance to discover new sexual worlds, communities and sociabilities:

(smiling) No way back to the closet! No closet anymore! Of course we are talking about a small town, so the gay and lesbian community is quite small, but I never thought of closeting me! (...) You have the chance to discover new places, step by step you enter the network of friends going out together, you build new ties and contacts, affect becomes stronger and deeper. (...) I feel the need to say that I re-discovered the pleasure of being together, having a small community offers you the chance to appreciate more people you have around and discover different situations that maybe you cannot find in the scene in Milan or Rome. (...) Of course the big city remains a

reference, maybe you go there for the weekend, I spend time with old friends, go for partying. (...) (asked if province towns are more homophobic than metropolitan areas) If I have to state how things are, I believe the level of homophobia is the same all around the country, of course there are different moments and places, of course the metropolis has a social variety that you cannot find in a small town, but uncomfortable situations, just like exciting and stimulating encounters, can take place everywhere (personal interview, authors' translation).

Through these words we see how G. has been able to “find himself” and a friendly and welcoming environment he feels attached to even in a small ‘ordinary’ town of Marche region, somehow echoing the life story of Harry analysed by Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2011a). Harmed by the homophobic violence of his hometown in rural Australia and then feeling excluded by the homonormativity of “gay life” in Sidney, Harry found *home* in Townsville, an ‘ordinary town’ with a strong heteronormative image in regional Australia. On the contrary, G. has been pushed to migrate to Marche to keep a close relation with his family- rewarding their expectations- and because of work, while he loved the possibilities offered by living in the ‘Gay Meccas’. However, likewise Harry, he has been able to establish a strong affective attachment to the new living place.

Pushed by different reasons, V. experienced a similar trajectory from the “crazy life of the big city” (personal interview) to the ordinariness of a Southern province-town. In 2011, when she was 23, V. had to leave Rome where she had arrived four years before to study and went back to her family town in the touristic area of Salento, in Puglie region. Indeed her father died and she was asked by her mother to go back in order to help her to manage the family business. When talking about the decision to go back, she stressed the role played by the family-oriented welfare system:

It was hard, you know, in Rome I was so happy, so many things to do, nice people and situations, it was like everyday I was experiencing something new, (...) but then it happened and I decided to follow my mum's suggestion and come back here. (...) I still feel like I really had no alternatives, I could not really afford to live in Rome without my family sustainment and at that time they really needed my help, we are so used to rely on our families that in some moments you really feel obliged to follow what they expect. (...) Family relations have always been quite problematic, many times I wondered about breaking with my family, just setting a new life by my own, (...) but then you face your everyday needs and you realize that in our country it's very hard to break your family ties (personal interview, authors' translation).

Concerning the social and sexual life, the experience of V. seems to follow the one lived by G., as she made reference to an "absolutely friendly and open" environment, "not diverging so much from the Roman scene. The scale is different, but you can have the same kind of experiences and find similar environments" (personal interview, authors' translation). This can be linked undoubtedly to the tourism-oriented character of the Salento area, but according to V., "there are not anymore those boundaries creating a *here* (Salento) and a *there* (Rome). There are so many exchanges in terms of parties, cultural scene, politics, it gets hard to find strong differences!" (personal interview, authors' translation, emphasis added).

So histories like the one reported by G. and V. reveal the material embeddedness of the migration paths of queer subjects within a specific family-led welfare system: different relational and contextual factors lead people to opt for "unconventional" trajectories beyond the metropolitan "gay heavens". These factors appear to influence personal choices unevenly, following different lines (gender in these examples): indeed V. was expected to give a direct help with the family business, while G. was pushed from the family towards a better employment and more stable situation. However both V. and G.

have returned the expectations and requests of their families, thus reproducing the usual forms of the Italian welfare system and relocating towards ordinary towns that are not anymore 'closeted' and disconnected from metropolitan lifestyles.

6. Conclusions: understanding the materiality of queer migration

Queer migration has become a prominent topic within geographies of sexualities, as (rural/urban or, more in general, from the closet to outness) migration has been connected to the processes of “coming out” and queer “quest for identity”. Following the criticisms recently raised by geographers like Gorman-Murray and Lewis, queer migration has been reconceptualised as an embodied, situated and relational movement involving a variety of trajectories and complex pushing factors. In this paper we tried to enlarge this perspective by *situating* queer migration within national welfare systems. Indeed welfare regimes play a pivotal role in orienting the living choices of population, including queer subjects; this role has been deeply overlooked within the international literature on queer migration. This lack of interest becomes particularly astonishing in contexts like the South-European one, where the influence of family ties on people lives, choices and possibilities remains central.

Focusing on Italian queer migration, we showed how a diverse and more inclusive welfare system can become an ulterior attractor towards a “poor but sexy and transgressive” foreign city like Berlin; however its role does not find reduced when considering intra-national “unconventional” trajectories like the one from Rome or Milan to ordinary/small size cities. In the Italian context, featured by a complete lack of social housing for young single people and very restricted forms of income distributions offered by the welfare state, framing queer migration as a “coming-out journey” or a “quest for identity”- without taking into account the material conditions shaping the context in which it takes place- would represent a form of essentializing it. Material

conditions- determined by both class status and the forms of the welfare system- combined with several other subjective factors (e.g. gender, age, race, disabilities, social and cultural capital) then make the migratory trajectories experienced by queer subjects complex, challenging the hegemony of the rural/urban, closet/outness ones. This is not to state that what is occurring among queer migrants in Italy is necessarily occurring among queer communities everywhere in the Global North, our study sharing the increasing concern towards the “de-centring of perspectives” that has characterized geographies of sexualities in recent times (e.g. Brown, 2008, 2012). However the massive increase of (queer) migrants in Berlin from different (Southern) European countries facing crisis and precarization marks the need to further explore these processes.

How do queer subjects respond to the dismantling of public-led welfare regimes as it is actually occurring in Western Europe? Which is the impact on family ties and relations? Which tensions are generated by increased precarization, poverty and unemployment? How will these socio-economic processes reshape queer living choices and possibilities? Which ties will queer people rely on? In order to respond to these open questions, future research should take a more intersectional, situated and relational perspective emphasizing a complex set of factors, including family ties, welfare regimes, the perception of homophobia and discrimination, and future perspectives of self-realization, among the others. So research should highlight how social groups (like queer people in their relocation choices) re-appropriate and transform the possibilities offered by a specific regulation system, represented by the welfare regime. In this sense, affects, desire, imagery, expectations, friendship and many other immaterial factors play a pivotal role in shaping social life: only through the exploration of all these aspects as interrelating and embedded within the material conditions of life, we will be able to fully account the complexity of (queer) migratory paths.

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