

## *Immigrant parents facing ‘Millennials’: new generational divides and parental roles at risk \**

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**Summary.** *In any migration process, it is now acknowledged that young people acquire cultural and linguistic skills more quickly than parents. The new language makes parents silent, because they often know and use it badly. Today a new feature stakes and undermines the parental role in emigration: the children of immigrants are digital natives and they use the Internet and the web easily, often transferring the off-line communication on internet. This relationship with the 2.0 communication is likely to broaden the gap with the parents’ generation. The article considers Moroccans and Egyptians living in Turin and investigates how the knowledge of the language and of the new technologies influences the parental role and the consequent family and educational dynamics.*

**Keywords:** *Immigrant families, generations, linguistic divide, digital divide.*

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## Introduction

The ICT opportunity to keep in touch from one country to another is just one side of the coin. The obverse deals with the increasing gap between a young generation (sometimes the second), which is able to jump from one social network to another, to strategically surf on internet, and an ageing generation (the first) which is illiterate in this field (Benítez, 2006). The language gap is one of the key issues on which literature about immigrant families' relations focuses, especially when children proceed more quickly than their parents to learn the host-society language or totally lose proficiency in their home-country language. This gap has increased with the development of ICT and new social networks, where young immigrants interact with their peers mainly in the host society language (and sometimes in English).

This chapter aims to describe and analyze relations across generations in immigrant families from both the language and ICTs points of view. Compared with the first generation of immigrants, second generations<sup>1</sup> demonstrate different aspects. According to recent studies (Zinn 2008; Università di Milano and Education and Culture DG 2010; Granata 2011), in fact, they grow up in the Italian society, are generally well educated, have Italian-language proficiency and are able to interact with local authorities. But their integration process may affect negatively relations with their parents (Adsera and Tienda, 2012).

Drawing on evidence from empirical research carried out in Turin on both Moroccan and Egyptian families, using an intergenerational approach, the paper describes first findings among a sample of parents and children by analyzing the use of language in domestic interaction as well as the role of ICTs in increasing (or not) generational divide.

The remainder of the chapter is as follows: Section 1 presents the context, introducing the issue of immigrant families in the knowledge society and their role in Italy. The following sections present the background and research findings, highlighting the influence of knowledge of the language and of the new technologies on the parental role and the consequent family and educational dynamics. The interviews gathered also

<sup>1</sup> In this article second generations are broadly defined, including those who were born in Italy and those who arrived by the beginning of primary-school age. According to Rumbaut's definition (1994), we consider 1.75 and 2.0 generations.

allowed to articulate a typology, obtained by crossing digital divide with linguistic divides.

### **1. Migrant families in the knowledge society, between the boom generation and the Millennials**

The number of minors has increased in the immigrant population in Italy, especially among those groups who arrived at the end of the 1970s, such as Moroccans and Egyptians. The proportion of immigrant minors, 22% of the foreign population, is higher in the North and reaches levels of between 24% and 27% in various provinces of the Lombardy region (Istat 2012). The presence of immigrant minors in Italy has now been an established fact of life for at least 15 years, highlighting the stabilizing character of migratory flows towards the country: a rapid evolution which first affected schools and then the whole society. Various studies (e.g. Barbagli & Schmoll, 2012, Besozzi et al., 2012) have investigated the characteristics of these minors and young people, mainly through their school participation, but also recently in other fields (identity definition, plans for the future). This young people, whether still foreigners or neo-Italians, are - just as much as their peers who are not children of immigration - part of a generation characterized by greater use of and familiarity with communication, the media and digital technologies (Strauss and Howe, 2000) which appear, in both international (Pew Research Centre, 2010) and national (Garelli, Palmonari, Sciolla, 2006; Buzzi, Cavallo, De Lillo, 2007) studies, different from the disenchanted and passive previous generation (i.e. the so-called baby-boomers' generation). This generation of young people seems to want to play an active role in society (Rosina, 2009) and to participate in new and creative forms of non-conventional political life, as evidenced by public demonstrations in recent years in various European and extra-European countries. On the other hand, their parents risk exclusion from the advanced information society: their electronic skills have not developed stage by stage during their infancy and adolescence; they are not used to speaking through chats and text-messages or using social networks to follow events and organize protests. Migrant families too take part in the inter- and intra-generational digital divide debate (Sartori 2006) which, in their case, is interwoven with the more-studied linguistic divide (Grillo, 2008).

The family, whether re-joined or started in the host country, divided or single-parent, far or near, is a key element both in the migratory process and in analysing the paths of young generations. In the former case it may serve as an indicator of, for example, stabilization, long-term migratory processes, of deferral of the idea of return. The family formed in the new country, on the other hand, represents an environment within which an individual grows and/or where he/she arrives, in which a child learns behaviour and rules, and also where conflicts grow and people split up. More likely they are families where

“both parents and children are involved in a parallel and interrelated process of change in self-definition, with ambivalent tensions between ‘over here’ and ‘over there’, towards the country of origin and that of residence” (Balsamo, 2003: 40).

The distance between parents and children may grow as a result of school attendance, language acquisition, frequenting friends and the context of the host society: young people in fact acquire cultural and linguistic expertise faster than their parents who often know and use it badly. And it is precisely because of these lacking skills that children often have to play the parts of translators and interpreters, even representing the family to the outside world, as the family’s ambassadors to Italian society.

So the parents are “forced into silence” and it can happen that their native language is looked down upon and banned because it is considered an obstacle to the children’s learning the language of the new country.

We should also bear in mind the opposite situation where children are competent only in the Italian language and therefore remain silent in their parents’ country, excluded from relations with parents and acquaintances. Parents react with embarrassment because their ‘Italian’ children highlight their (involuntary) abandonment of their original culture in favour of the assimilation process. Parents’ and co-nationals’ assessment of the children’s linguistic abilities is perceived as a criticism of parental authority in the emigration country.

This is not however just a matter of image and social judgment. Indeed in recent times the decision to return to the homeland, giving up the migratory project after years of residence in Italy, has brought to the fore the issue of mother-tongue maintenance (Ricucci, 2011). It is important to study returning Moroccan families and find out how young people experience the problem of intergenerational linguistic communication. Mothers and/or families returning home with children born and/or grown up in Italy reveal in a devastating way the generational gap between parents

and children – the latter, at school, being capable only of using Italian, having scarce knowledge of Arabic. But we do not have to cross borders to notice the communication barrier between parents and children. The use of, and recourse to, ICTs also contribute to widening the gap between the first generation of immigrants and their children, enabling them to live parallel lives in those contexts where they possess main-language skills.

Language is not only a communication and interaction tool, which is useful for maintaining social relationships in various countries: it often plays an important part from the religious identity point of view (Mackey, 2004). Linguistic assimilation therefore worries parents for religious reasons also; religious socialization and language learning walk hand in hand: therefore, parents' concern about children who use (and understand) only Italian is based on distancing from the family's religion and values.

A further aspect needs to be added to those already mentioned. The children of immigrants are digitally fluent, using internet and the web with facility and often transferring off-line communication on-line just like their Italian peers. They are digital natives (Prensky, 2001; Palfrey & Gasser, 2009), prosumers, i.e. active producers/consumers of digital contents (Tapscott & Williams, 2006), and netizens (Brettel, 2008), digital citizens who find in the web a public space, a place of citizenship (Mazzoli, 2009) where non-conventional political participation, either in an individual or associative form, can be exercised.

The personal homepages hosted in social network sites are therefore set up by young people as virtual spaces for consumption, production and spread of contents (Caneva, 2008; Domaneschi, 2009) and new platforms, not only "to be" but also to act and to present political and social demands (Castells, 2003), promoting new forms of participation and mobilization in the online and offline public space, different from that of their parents.

Their commitment is no longer just a matter of demands, like that of the first generation, but is constructive, and attention is no longer directed exclusively to their own community, but to the whole society (Guerzoni & Riccio, 2009). This is a new generation that "is no longer satisfied just to be online, but wants to actively participate in the construction of meanings and metaphors, as well as to offer its testimony. In short, a generation which claims its right to be involved (Totaro, 2007). They also obviously cross over family and ethnic-community frontiers, widening the gap between the old and young immigration generations with regard to sensitive subjects like identity, belonging, respect for rules and traditions, and language.

In conclusion, command of Italian and the use of new technologies risk further widening the gap between the new generation and their parents. It is not just that the younger people find it easier to orient themselves in this

new world but also because in this way they are able to cross both virtual and real borders, to manage cultures and to help their parents who are becoming less marginalized in the knowledge society.

## **2. Egyptian and Moroccan families: possible intergenerational exploration**

The article is based on the research project “Transmediterraneans. North African community in Piedmont between continuity and change” conducted by FIERI for which 60 qualitative interviews with young people, adults and elderly people of Moroccan and Egyptian origin were carried out from September 2011 to January 2013. The sampling was stratified according to gender, birth place and year of arrival in Italy. Given the explorative nature of our study and its qualitative design, however, the sample is not representative of the Egyptian and Moroccan migrant population in Italy. Accordingly, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the study sample. The average age of the sample is 35 years. Educational attainment is homogeneous and rather high: many of the interviewed migrants have completed secondary education or higher. As far as occupation is concerned, the first generation works mainly in the catering and cleaning sectors and in the retail trade, while the second generation is mainly represented by students. Finally, more than half of the sample has Italian citizenship. The interviews were conducted following a semi-structured approach (using an in-depth interview guide), which included various aspects of life and migration experience. In particular, participants were asked about the following topics: arrival in Italy, sense of community belonging and social participation, intergenerational relationships, transnational ties with Egypt and Morocco (in political, economic, family and symbolic terms) and new media use, opinions about the current situation in Egypt and Morocco, and return intentions and future plans. In this article parental role and educational relationships between first and second generations were investigated, along with the relationship of parents and children with the new technologies and the role they have in family and identity dynamics.

These two communities were chosen because they are among the first and largest groups in Italy. They are therefore groups which are now well established, with a high percentage of family units due to a process of gradual consolidation of the community, which has led to the birth of a second generation. Moreover the recent political developments in the countries of origin have represented important variables in the redefinition of present and future plans and attitudes among parents' and children's generations.

Italy became a destination for Egyptians beginning in the 1970s. The first migrants from Egypt, the "pioneers", were mainly male, highly educated, middle-class individuals, originating in urban areas (Cairo and Alexandria), who left Egypt as a consequence of the high unemployment rate in the country of origin. They left looking for new job or study opportunities and new cultural experiences.

Over time the composition of the population coming from Egypt to Italy has changed. From the mid-1980s the economic crisis in Egypt has put a strain on Egyptian families, driving new groups of men from rural areas with low levels of education, to look for work abroad. They come to Italy in fact not only from big cities but also from the countryside.

Egyptian migration consolidated during the 1990s, thanks to a system of networks of family members and acquaintances that attracted new compatriots and acted as a base in the settlement phase and in the search for a first job in the new country.

Over the years, the number of Egyptian women has also increased, largely due to family reunification and the formation of families, resulting in increasing births of children in Europe, the second generation.

In our sample the majority of the interviewees returned to Egypt to get married and subsequently they brought their wives to Italy. The first generation's cultural space, in fact, continues to be that of the homeland and their individual lives continue to be dictated by family ties and reproduction cycles (CeSPI 2005).

With the establishment of families, we find a consolidation of a second generation of young people who were born (or who arrived in their early years), raised and socialized in Italy. According to data from MIUR – Ministry Education University and Research (Dossier Caritas, 2012), 12,706 Egyptians enrolled in the school system during the academic year 2011–2012.

During the 1990s most Moroccans gradually entered the work market as employees in industry, construction, agriculture and services, going wherever work was to be found. At the beginning of the 1990s Moroccan

minors appeared, sons following their fathers to join them in street-peddling. This immigration of minors was accompanied by adolescent youths or young adults informally entrusted to relatives (or so-called relatives) and townsmen of the parents, who hoped to ensure work for the young people in the future and, at the same time, lay the foundations of economic assistance for their old age.

Little by little work guaranteed a steady income and families were reunited. The demographic profile of Moroccans resident in Piedmont thus became gradually more complicated. Couples were seen with their children, some born in Morocco and some in Italy. The presence of minors became important and many-sided. There are also elderly immigrants, some who were no longer young when they arrived here more than 30 years ago, others who rejoined relatives.

We are therefore in the presence of two stabilized groups, as second-generation data, the number of families and citizenship acquisitions and, in the case of Morocco, the limited number of elderly people indicate. They are also communities which – considering the closeness of the countries of origin – have maintained close contact with Morocco and Egypt, where many people spend their annual holiday and, recently, mainly in the Moroccan case, part of the family return while waiting for better working conditions in Italy.

### **3. Language as a family and cultural bond**

As is well known, all the basic aspects of identity are connected with the mother tongue, such as one's sense of self, dominating the world, defining emotions and logical structure (Song, 2010). Learning a language is never merely a question of grasping a set of grammatical rules but a long, arduous journey of discovering the world that the language relates, describes and animates. Similarly, losing a language means losing the world associated with it – in the case of one's mother tongue, losing one's original world (Song, 2010; Bleakley-Chin, 2011). Among the families interviewed, the language used at home depends on the children's characteristics: as a general rule, those born in Italy or who arrived here when very young tend to use Italian with both siblings and parents; while those born in Morocco and Egypt use Arabic with the admixture of some Italian words.

My brother was born here and is in the second year of middle school, so for him it is natural to speak Italian. He doesn't know much Arabic, a little more of our local dialect, but don't ask him to speak it. My mother speaks only our dialect so she talks mainly to me, and I translate. (19-year-old, Moroccan boy)

In any case I try to speak mainly 'Moroccan' with my parents so I don't lose it. I speak my own language everyday. For example, with my friend Nabil I speak mainly Italian but we end up saying a lot of things in Moroccan. It stronger than us and we can't stop it from coming out. Sometimes I'm not even aware of what language I'm speaking. There is no way of checking because perhaps sometimes I say the same thing in one language and then in another (24 year-old, Moroccan boy)

Sometimes Italian is used to cut out the parents. Language is a means of education. Sharing a linguistic code is essential in order to carry out the parental role to the full. Things were not always like that in the interviewed families, particularly – and this is an element to be underlined – when parents did not invest in learning the language of the immigration country and consequently cannot keep up with their children's linguistic progress. Indeed it is inevitable that scholastic experience tends to accentuate the use of Italian in the family too, even more so if there are siblings with whom to share the language. Fissures appear in child-parent relations, widening as the older children grow, since they are less and less able to communicate their deepest feelings and their problems in a common language, except in a simplified and superficial way (Portes & Hao, 2002).

We sisters prefer to use Italian among ourselves – that way it's better, we don't get confused. With our parents it depends on the situation. For example, if we are angry we speak Italian so that our mother doesn't know what we are fighting about because she speaks only dialect. Even when we are speaking on the phone with Moroccan friends, we often use Italian so that our parents do not understand... (20-year-old, Moroccan girl)

The parents' lack of second-language skills together with the children's declining respect for the language of origin creates a situation where it is impossible to have a fully educational relationship within the family. In situations where dialogue and discussion are obstructed by the lack of a common language, parental support in the various phases of growth is limited because

“the language of affection and the possibility of creating bonds through the original culture’s symbols, rites and language” (Gozzoli & Regalia 2005: 116)

have been cancelled by the migratory experience.

Many parents are trapped: their bodies are free to move about but their heads seem to be stuck in a cage, which is their homeland. It is the culturally weakest parents, who arrived in Italy illiterate or with very little education, who suffer most from the communication gap with their children, especially when the latter invest in the school and the language to find their own insertion and integration paths.

Having a common language is indispensable, especially in emigration. But it does not always come about. In some families the parents are no longer able to control their sons and daughters because the children do not understand what they are saying. It is not infrequent because many of our families are illiterate. (45-year -old, Moroccan father).

Language keeping is important so as not to lose one’s own culture and roots (Portes & Hao, 2002). This is why both Moroccans and Egyptians are interested in having institutions and tools for teaching Arabic. As the young immigrants grow up, Arabic language learning gains strength from attendance at ad hoc courses in the mosque or in associations. It is no longer just a means of communication but a distinctive mark of identity. As one parent remembers, it is an almost obligatory step:

Our children go to the mosque every week to learn Arabic. It’s part of our culture and our roots. Our children were born in Italy – some even have citizenship – but they will always be Moroccan by culture, Muslim by religion. Without Arabic they would always be foreigners in the only environment where they will always be accepted and don’t need to justify themselves – as happens in the society where the Moroccan-Italian is always considered a foreigner, an immigrant, even when born in Italy (45-year-old, Moroccan mother).

Language is not only a means of communication: it also unites and protects against social discrimination. Language is part of the ethnic capital which can at the same time reinforce the individual’s identity and facilitate his/her insertion into the host society or develop life paths exclusively within the community of belonging, for whom one works, with whom one speaks the original language and weaves relationships reproducing the

social structure of the countries of origin (Bleakley & Chin, 2011). This phenomenon of the community's closing in upon itself is not observable among Moroccans: rather we can see the young generation taking its distance from their parents' community and associative experiences – experiences which are not rejected outright but are interpreted in a new way according to

“modalities suited to the realities of our young people's lives, children of immigrants but born in Italy; European Muslims faithful to tradition but able to understand the necessity of finding new ways of living our religion in a country which is having a hard time accepting us” (Moroccan boy, representative of the Young Muslims of Italy).

Moreover, for the second-generation immigrants that have we interviewed, the discriminations of which they are often victims, the solicitations of classmates and, above all in the last year, the curiosity and attention towards their country of origin are all factors that have stimulated new reflections on their personal identity and religious affiliation. Young people often choose

“to go their own way, looking for compromises and new syntheses, asking themselves questions about the inherited tradition, living culture and faith in a personal and authentic manner and not on the wave of uncritical adherence” (Granata, 2010: 88).

In the Egyptian case, associations are interested principally in sustaining the local integration of migrants and the preservation of Arabic culture and language as demonstrated in Turin by the engagement of the Egyptian school, Il Nilo, which is considered one of the few important meeting places of the Egyptian community.

The school in this case is also a bridge between the first and second generations: first generation migrants are involved as teachers whereas the second generation learn their parents' language and culture and maintain important ties with their community.

Although parents are aware of the difficulty (or often total impossibility) of a permanent return of their children to Egypt, it is still important to them that their children maintain strong ties with their country of origin. For this reason they would like their children to attend Arabic schools, as in the case of some interviewees or interviewees' daughters and sons who went to the Egyptian school Il Nilo up to at least 14 years of age.

As for Moroccans it has been, however, the Moroccan government to establish programs for teaching Arabic language. The Ministry in charge of Moroccans abroad, the Ministry of National Education, the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco together with the University of Bologna (Faculty and department of foreign language and literatures), the Italian-Moroccan Association for Culture and Teaching for Integration and the Municipality of Bologna organized, in fact, a course in 2012 to train teachers of Arabic language and Moroccan culture for Moroccan children living in Italy. Also Moroccan respondents living in Turin took part in the course.

Then the Moroccan government has thought about this alternative: they realized that there are many associations that have been teaching Arabic to children for many years and they have organized this training course for Moroccan teachers who give lessons here. We know the language, Arabic, because we studied it also at the university, but we may not know the techniques of teaching, methodology, I miss what I have to give to the children as a teacher, and not just because I am Arabic language speaker. (32-year-old, Moroccan Arabic language teacher).

Previously only parents were interested in linguistic and cultural conservation, but now their children are also aware of its importance. The second generation has begun to realize bilingual skills are crucial with respect to their need to negotiate a life between two distinct cultures. In fact, it allows them to strengthen their own ethnic identity and to conform to the will of their parents and of the whole community and, at the same time, it permits them to actively participate in daily life, shaping multiple identities (Kasanitz et al. 2008).

#### **4. ICTs: the children's voice, parents' silence**

The children of immigrants are digitally literate, unlike their parents. The children are growing in a culture made up of Ipods, Ipads, social networking, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and so on. They write with hashtags, use smartphones and study by surfing the internet rather than turning the pages of books.

While it is true that to each generational segment corresponds a certain behavior in relation to new media, we find particular interest in the intergenerational relationships that come out from this relation. The data Istat (2011) show the correlation between the presence of a minor in the

household and the family inclination to technological consumption. For diaspora families, however, it is not simply a quantitative phenomenon linked to the presence or absence of technological tools.

The presence of second generations in the house is, in fact, a definite transnational advantage for the first generations, allowing them to strengthen and maintain relationships with the country of origin, through an empowerment process due to the strategic use of internet. The second generations in this sense act as a bridge to structure new diasporic relations, in relation to the interests and needs of the first generations.

Q. Do your parents use the internet?

A. Yes, for the news. Lately they had missed the speech of the new president and they watched later on the internet.

Q. And how did they learn?

A. Thanks to me (21-year-old, Egyptian boy)

This dual role of mediation and gatekeeping of the second generations (between the first generations and the digital tools on one side and the relations with their homeland on the other) turns out to be totally new and certainly interesting to understand their identity paths.

Q. Do your parents use the internet?

A. No. For information they use us, me and my brother! They do not use internet, they just watch the TV. Sometimes, when we read important articles, we'll talk about and we make them read. But it's me that look for news and information, they are not my parents (19-year-old, Egyptian girl)

Through the children, Egyptian and Moroccan adults may increase the frequency and quality of relationships with family and friends far away, they can keep informed in a new way, they can deepen elements of their identity and culture while away from Egypt and Morocco.

Q. Do your parents use the internet?

A. My father is starting to use it for work and my mother too. They are intriguing. There is my brother who is of 1999 and he teaches them. My father has become curious because sometimes I go there with my computer and I show him the news that controvert what we watch on TV. So he is interested and he goes to ask to my brother the computer to go to read the news, and things like that (20-year-old, Egyptian boy)

This certainly opens up a very important role for the second generations, able to use their skills to expand the social and cultural capital of the family: strategic and decisive elements for the migratory paths, if the parents will have no fear of them.

Internet is part of young people's lives. They grow in the web culture and if you haven't got a smartphone or a Facebook page you're nobody. They come here to the association, they chat online, they surf on internet to do their homework and, above all, they use social networks. There is no difference between Italians, Peruvians, Moroccans or Romanians. And their parents, especially those of a lower cultural level, are worried because they are not able to control either what they say or what they write (Association operator).

Obviously they are not all exposed in the same way to the virtual globalization of consumption and online relationships, as a recent study (Eve & Ricucci, 2011) about foreigners and Italian students in Turin has shown: the social-class effect rather than migratory background, in fact, can also be seen in access to the digital world. It is not only – or mainly – a matter of opportunity to own the tools (which are now easily accessible through various forms of contracts and leasing), but rather of cultural resources, which is to say the cognitive ability to understand their possibilities, to learn their alphabet, to pass over from being consumers to being prosumers.

Virtual forums seem to have replaced real forums, enabling the children of immigration to go in public demonstrating their point of view and asking not to be judged only on the basis of the past or their own or their parents' immigration. In the new arenas (social networks, specialized websites), young foreigners express themselves "loud and clear", not only adopting positions on matters which concern them here in Italy but also find themselves linked up with events in their home countries as it was the case of the Arab Spring (Premazzi et al. 2011). This may raise concerns in the first generations.

We followed on TV the happenings in Tunisia and Egypt and we read some things on Arabic internet sites. We ask ourselves whether our children are like those we see on TV. We are anxious because we don't know what they are writing, what they are saying to their friends, but we do know that those events affected them. We were worried about our children because they spoke too much Italian even at home with their brothers, sisters and friends, and now we are worried because they are writing in Italian on internet, posting their photos – even those of our daughters. We can hardly believe it. (45-year-old, Moroccan mother)

The aim is to create an Egyptian community (...) In order to demonstrate in the streets or talk to the Mayor, it is not enough to be on the internet. Internet simply serves to put us together (in a Facebook group or a conference call with Skype) and discuss among ourselves simply because we can't meet physically: I can not go every day in Milan but I can every day to switch on my computer and see what the others have written, comments, etc. (20-year-old, Egyptian boy)

So the web becomes a tool to build opportunities for socialization and organization. The web is not in this sense a channel of access to information among the many possible and usable, but, rather, a set of tools that allow them to have an active role and to develop relational strategies, precise and deliberate.

It is true that this movement excludes the great majority of parents who rarely use internet and even more rarely follow their children in their virtual demonstrations. Ironically ICTs, which bring faraway countries closer, paradoxically drive apart people living under the same roof. Digital divide hits immigrant families twice as hard: parents and children are driven apart not only because of communication codes but also because of the ways in which they reflect on their identity and how they present themselves to society.

With regard to domestic interaction, the children create on the web a world from which parents are excluded, both because of the skills required and the language used. It is not so very different from that which happens in Italian families, but once again the effect on foreign families (who add oral to written incomprehension) is more devastating (Wellman & Haythorunthweat, 2002).

The type of use is often linked to the authority that the specific tool has for the subject. In general, the first generations use more traditional media and especially the TV. This type of relationship is structured in part on a mechanism of habit and is linked to their own categories of use, also due to a lack of ability to use alternative media.

Our father wants us to watch Arabic programmes but we prefer Italian ones or music programmes on TV, and when we can go online to internet. Not always, because our parents don't want us to waste time "chatting", even though they have no idea what it means. Internet, to them, is useful only for talking to our relatives in Belgium from time to time (19-year-old, Moroccan boy)

Men who have been here for years have learnt only survival language, while their children go to school and a world is opened to them from which their parents are excluded: they use internet, they chat, they tweet, whereas their parents are limited to cell phones” (45-year-old, Moroccan father).

Between posts and tweets there seems to be a demand for facing up not only to the Italian reality, which has a hard time accepting them, but also to their parents’ generation, who seem to drift – even if unconsciously – further and further away the more cosmopolitan the children’s identity becomes in the age of web 2.0.

### 5. Between connections and barriers

From interviews and information collected from public operators and the private social sector, from relevant organizations as well as members of ethnic-cultural associations, we can distinguish four

groups among the families. Two elements are considered: the spoken language at home and the use of internet<sup>2</sup>.

		Who in the family uses internet (apart from skype)?	
		Parents and children	Only the children
<i>Who in the family speaks</i>	<i>Parents and children</i>	Connection between generations (1)	Digital divide (2)
	<i>Parents and children</i>		

<sup>2</sup> A preliminary version of this typology has been discussed at the Imiscoe conference (Amsterdam 2012, Ricucci R., I can not use more than a tweet”).

<i>Italian?</i>	<i>Only the children</i>	Language divide (3)	Language and digital divide (4)
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When observing habits regarding the use of the internet we did not take into consideration the use of programmes for making cheap telephone calls, including international calls (in particular the extremely popular programme Skype): in this case the fact that the communication occurs by means of PC is not of particular significance, when not accompanied by other uses of the net (for example reading online newspapers or using social networking sites).

The situation in which both parents and children use the internet on a daily basis and speak fluent Italian leads to easier connections between the two generations, as they share the same terrain, so to speak. In these cases, undoubtedly the rarest in numeric terms, the internet is one of the tools that contributes to a satisfactory potential for communicating, in all likelihood supported by a fairly rich social capital.

At the other extreme we can posit that a deficit in both language skills and the use of the internet (digital divide), affecting both parents and children, would give rise to significant difficulties in relating to society, leading to closure and self-marginalization. However this situation would not necessarily limit communication within the family unit, which in any case would be characterized by a homogeneous level of communication skills. This category was not considered in the type proposed, being viewed as a theoretical hypothesis.

Of greater interest (and more frequent) are situations in which the children alone possess a good level of internet use and proficiency in Italian. In this case we can distinguish between three groups, according to the position of the parents in relation to these two factors. Where the parents do not speak the language and are in a situation of digital divide, communicating with children is more difficult, although the latter take on the role of “mediators” between the family and the outside world. In this case the involvement of the younger generations enables the parents to interact with Italian society, for example when communicating with teachers or public offices, or looking for news – on the internet – from their home countries. On the other hand this role played by the children makes

educational relationships more difficult and can undermine the authority of the parents, as described above.

This does not occur, on the other hand, when parents have a good knowledge of the language but are not in the habit of using the internet: albeit limited to other, less “innovative” means of communication, they can still have a solid relationship with Italian society and do not require intermediaries. In these cases children often act as “instructors” when it comes to the new technologies, but this role is limited to this arena.

Lastly, there is the situation where parents are practiced in the use of ICT, but do not have a good level of spoken Italian. In this case we could talk about a language divide: once more it is up to the children to handle most of the interactions with Italian society, and once more the relationship between parents and children can potentially be more difficult.

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