

Migrating Bodies: The Effects of Transnational
Movement on Women's Bodily Practices in Later Life



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Abstract

When approaching old age, women's bodies face functional, esthetical, and reproductive changes that can represent a source of discontinuity in their lives. Moreover, women are constantly exposed to the social pressure of compelling stereotypes regarding their body image and functionality: from media to medical pamphlets, the feminine body is subjected to deep social observation and regulation. Given that the relationship between ageing and the body is socially mediated, how does the encounter with a different culture have an impact on it? In this research, migration has been employed to analyse the cultural aspects of bodily practices. Migration can be described as an embodied experience, in which a body is first displaced and then emplaced in two social locations—the community of origin and the culture of destination—a circumstance known as transnationalism.

Interviews were carried out with women aged between 59 and 74, divided in three groups:

RESIDENTS: women who were born in an Italian village and had lived all their lives there;

MIGRANTS: women who moved from the same village to London and are still living in England;

RETURNED: migrants who moved back to the village permanently after living in London.

Four dynamics were identified to regulate the interplay of ageing, bodily practices, and migration:

- **Assimilation:** encountering and integrating with the new community;
- **Acculturation:** observing, learning, and sometimes adopting norms and values of the culture of destination;
- **Acceptance:** the binding agent between body and self during the recognition of ageing;
- **Adjustment:** the set of changes in their habits that women put in place in order to accommodate transformations in their bodies and maintain social inclusion.

Moreover, a new conceptualization of transnationalism is proposed, which helps to frame how, after many years of negotiation between the culture of origin and the one of settlement, migrants disengage from social normativity, gaining an augmented sense of agency.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Ageing, the Body, and Migration

This research is positioned at the intersection of three major fields of study: ageing, the body, and migration. In particular, the interplay between ageing and migration, which are increasingly shaping contemporary societies, will be examined in light of its effects on older women's bodily practices.

Population ageing is a global phenomenon that has different causes and outcomes in different parts of the world. In most European countries, the ageing of the population has progressed since the mid-eighteenth century (Harper 2016; Harper, 2006). Demographers have identified two main causes: decline in fertility and prolonged life expectancy (Harper, 2006). The latter, reflects the improvements in the health provisions and living conditions of the population in this part of the world (Peace et al., 2007). Women represent the majority of older people worldwide but this gender imbalance is especially evident in Europe; in Italy, women made up 56.9% of the population older than 65 years of age in March 2017 (ISTAT, 2017.). Ageing is a complex social phenomenon that can be understood both as an internal experience and as a series of socially imposed events, such as retirement, and external characteristics

(Harper, 2006). Indeed, ageing has been studied widely in recent years, mainly producing two streams of research: the first analyses ageing in its structural aspects, with a focus on social systems and populations; the second explores ageing from the individual experiences of older people. This thesis is a contribution to the latter.

The field of cultural gerontology has emerged very recently, bonding together the study of ageing in the social sciences and the humanities (Twigg and Martin, 2015). This emerging field has aimed at shifting the focus on ageing from problematic aspects – such as medical processes or retirement trajectories – to a more diverse understanding of later life (ibid.). This turn in gerontology is consistent with the cultural turn that has involved all social sciences, after the postmodern and poststructuralist approaches revolutionized the idea that social realities could be known and analysed objectively. In particular, cultural gerontology focuses on those meanings of ageing that encompass the social science/humanities divide. Themes that have been analysed in this light include embodiment, social relationships, consumption, and leisure (ibid.).

This thesis seeks to contribute to the discourse on ageing and the body. The philosopher Grosz (1993) called the body a “hinge” (p.196) able to unveil the relationship between the lived experience and the social construction of exteriority. On the same note, Shilling (2012) adds that bodies are framed by “grids of meaning” (p.79) created from the social discourse. Hence, Harper (1997) has underlined, the changes in physical appearance that happen in old age and the way they are understood are connected to the idea of old age that is predominant in society .

The importance of appearance in later life has been emphasized by consumer culture (Rexbye and Povlsen, 2007). Indeed, although social identity has changed under the influence of postmodernity and has become more fluid and less embedded in structural factors, age ordering, understood as the cultural regulation of appearance in relationship to age, still persists in Western cultures. Visual signs of bodily change and dress choices are still used to interpret age (ibid.). This poses questions on the validity of postmodernism and how much it has permeated culturally constructed views on ageing.

Several researchers (Hurd, 1999; Paoletti, 1998; Ussher, 2006) report that older women never attribute the word “old” to themselves, underlining the sense of Otherness that still surrounds later life. When approaching old age, women’s bodies face functional, esthetical, and reproductive changes that can represent a source of discontinuity in their lives. Moreover, from an early age, women are constantly exposed to the social pressure of compelling stereotypes regarding their body image and functionality: from the media to medical pamphlets, the feminine body is subjected to deep observations and regulations. The medical focus does not help in understanding these dynamics: by centring the discourse on deviance and disease, the medical focus projects a non-existent norm of youth and masculinity on the ageing body of women (Harper, 1997) and is unable to underline the cultural aspects that affect the experience of ageing.

The social and cultural attention on women’s bodies is not harmless. Several studies in the field of psychology have underlined the dangers of self-objectification in women. Self-objectification happens when a person is constantly engaged in the activity of surveilling the body, by measuring and comparing it with culturally

imposed standards (Moradi and Huang, 2008). This internalization of norms can result in body shame, when a woman perceives herself as failing to meet the standards and fears the evaluation of others (ibid.). The risks for women's health is high: self-objectification can result in severe anxiety, eating disorders, depressive symptoms, and, even more worryingly, in the increased focus on body appearance over body functions (ibid.).

Since the social view on ageing is different in different cultures, the individual experience of ageing is significantly affected by ethnic factors (Blakemore, 1997). For this reason, this thesis has focused on the comparison between older women who have lived all their lives in one location and older women who have migrated to a different country in their adulthood. This comparison allowed to better discern those aspects of ageing that are culturally constructed and has also shed new light on the situation of older transnational migrants. Blakemore (1997) invoked the need for more research on the experience of ageing in migrants for this purpose. He explicitly suggested the employment of a comparative approach in order to be able to distinguish differences and similarities between the experiences of ageing of migrants and non-migrants (ibid.). In this study, the experience of ageing in transnational contexts is understood in light of migration. This means that this thesis acknowledges that the act of migration is not an event fixed in time but that it continues throughout one's life and that it continues shaping experiences even after many years have passed. This is especially true for those individuals who maintain relationships with their countries of origin. Dunn (2010) has underlined that employing a comparative approach in transnational studies has allowed geographers to ground their research in everyday circumstances of migration. He has also identified the body as a field of study that can benefit from this

approach, highlighting that different embodiment of ageing in different groups cannot be ascribed to differences in their bodies but in the different configurations of norms in each of their cultures.

1.2 A Tale of Two Sisters

The following vignettes will exemplify the differences in the life course trajectories of the women who migrated and the women who remained in their place of origin, highlighting how these differences have impacted the women's experiences of ageing, with a particular focus on bodily practices¹.

Maria and Renata are two sisters who were born in the small village of Borgo², located in the Apennine Mountains in the north of Italy. Maria and Renata were both born shortly after the end of the Second World War, a few years apart, and they were both raised in the village. The war left Borgo in poverty. In the 1950s, there was only one car in the village, proudly owned by the manager of the only local hotel and restaurant. Maria and Renata's parents were farmers and the family lived off the produce of the land and the small amount of money that was earned by selling fruit and vegetables at the local market. Life in the village was difficult after the war. Borgo was not well connected to big urban centres and a trip to the bigger town nearby could entail hours on a small bus, travelling along winding roads. There was a train station in Borgo but

¹ These aspects will then be discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.

² "Borgo" is a fictional name. In this thesis, the name of the village where the research was carried out has been changed to protect the identity of the participants. See also Chapter 4.

trains didn't pass very often and tickets were relatively expensive. The sisters attended local schools, went to church on Sundays, and their lives as children and teenagers revolved around their small community. Growing up, the sisters' social setting was limited and, most importantly, it was almost identical. They were exposed to the same influences and they learnt the same social norms and behaviours, shaped by their cultural background. This process of socialization³ produced in them the same understanding of bodily practices, for example how a body should be presented in different social circumstances, what rules regulate the functional aspects of a body, and how to manage the body to keep it healthy. As young adults, both sisters fell in love and married local young men. They all lived under the same roof with the sisters' parents. At this point in their story, Maria and Renata's lives took different turns.

Shortly after their wedding, Maria's husband was contacted by a man who was originally from the village but who had moved to London after the war. This man visited the village regularly every summer and was admired for his wealth. Indeed, he had made a small fortune in London with his restaurants and he was now recruiting young men to help them move to London and work for him as waiters. Maria's husband had not been able to secure a stable job in the village, which mainly offered seasonal work in the fields. The couple wanted to have children and build a stable future for them. They saw migrants coming back to Borgo every summer, and they all shared stories of success. In particular, Maria could admire the women who came back from London, their luxurious clothes, their elegant and refined outfits that hinted at their rich and exotic lives. Maria and her husband decided to leave Borgo and move to

³ Defined as: "a process of committing an individual to term of service in a group, by progressively confining his behavioural potentialities within an acceptable range" (Ryder, 1965, p. 852). See Section 2.5

London less than a year after their marriage. In London, Maria's husband worked as a waiter for more than 12 hours a day. Maria worked as well but soon had to quit as she became pregnant. Maria was frightened by London: she lived in a neighbourhood with other Italians and she rarely visited the rest of the city. Everything around her seemed ugly: the architecture, women of other nationalities, the traffic. Maria was surrounded by a social reality that she could not fully understand because, during her childhood and teenage years, she had been exposed to ways of living that were different from people's acts and appearances in the new environment. Indeed, Maria felt bewildered and estranged in the new country, where the norms and behaviours she had previously learnt could not guide her in establishing a successful social performance. Also, Maria was worried about her pregnancy. She did not speak English and, because she rarely left her house, she was not able to learn it, which meant that when she was visited by the midwife she did not really understand what was being said. Nevertheless, Maria gave birth to her first child, a daughter. Giving birth in an English hospital was shocking for Maria: she did not understand the midwife's instructions, they tried to communicate with gestures, but Maria cried and wished her mother were there to hold her hand. When she returned home after a short stay at the hospital, Maria was confronted with the difficulties of taking care of a baby. She did not have any support, as her husband, who was all her family in London, worked and was not able to help her. The baby soon fell ill and Maria was unable to cope. Before taking the baby to the doctor, she asked a friend to translate the names of the symptoms and wrote a few words on her hand but, during the visits, she did not understand what the doctor said. In the end, Maria decided that it would be better for the baby to live in Italy with her parents. She arranged for her parents to travel to London and to take the baby back to

Borgo. In the next five years, Maria only saw her daughter for a few weeks every summer. Both the traumatic experience of her pregnancy and the tragic feeling of being unable to take care of her child marked the beginning of Maria's detachment from medical practices. During most of her subsequent years, Maria rarely visited a doctor because of the difficulty in understanding the language and the English doctors' different approach to health. First, Maria learnt how to self-medicate for minor issues but soon this attitude became dominant and, subsequently, even for major changes such as the menopause, Maria did not seek any medical advice. After departing from her daughter, Maria found a job as a seamstress with other women. She was finally able to gain some independence and she began to speak and understand English. Maria became friends with some of her English colleagues. Their relationship, day by day, mitigated the sense of distance that Maria felt so powerfully in her first few years in England. As a result, Maria's outlook on the people that surrounded her changed. She did not feel the same sense of ugliness towards women of other nationalities, who slowly became, in her view, the norm. Maria started disengaging from the rules that had regulated her way to present the body, and she slowly started feeling "free". Maria and her husband had saved enough money to bring their first daughter back to London and, after a few more years, they were able to open their own restaurant. The business was extremely successful. Maria left her job and became a full time housewife. She gave birth to another daughter and the family moved from Clerkenwell, the traditional Italian neighbourhood, to a wealthy area on the outskirts of London. During her years in London, Maria had frequent contact with other Italians at the Italian church and at the Italian Community Centre nearby. She was also able to visit her family in Borgo; at first only in summer and then, after decades, two or three times a year. Both the

contacts with other Italians in London and with her compatriots back in the village allowed Maria to remember and re-enact those norms and behaviours pertaining the body that she had learnt during youth but that she did not apply when in London, in the presence of non-Italians. Indeed, the company of other Italians urged Maria to perform those codes of conduct that other Italians would understand as socially acceptable or, even better, successful. As stated before, after several years in England, Maria felt free to abandon the bodily practices absorbed in Borgo. Nevertheless, the presence of other Italians, their scrutiny, the fear of their judgement, and the desire to appear successful stimulated Maria to go back to those bodily practices that she still remembered well. However, after many years of switching between her freedom and her Italianness, Maria is now instinctually conscious that the norms related to bodily practices are rooted in the cultural context. Maria is now 68. Her husband has sold their restaurant, and his pension, together with a lifetime's savings, afford them a comfortable life in their big house where they now live alone as their children have married and left. Over the years, Maria has settled in London and now she loves living there. She likes the city and all the possibilities that it offers. She has two grandchildren and with them she visits museums or goes to the cinema. With her husband she often sees plays at the theatre. Maria often describes London using the word "freedom". To her, this term doesn't only entails the numerous possibilities of entertainment offered by a big city. "Freedom" for Maria means the liberty to practise her body without the restrictions imposed by the social norms and by the scrutiny and gossip of the village. Nevertheless, at the onset of the first mild frailties caused by ageing - e.g. muscular pain, heart issues - Maria started feeling the need for medical advice. Contacts with the doctors in London have been sporadic, therefore she usually makes appointments

with the doctors in Borgo, where there now is a renowned hospital, whenever she goes there for her holidays.

After Maria and her husband left Borgo, Renata remained in the house of her parents with her husband. He worked as a mechanic in a local workshop and she found a job as an administrative officer in the local school. The family was also able to save money, as they did not have to pay rent. Renata had her first child after a few years of marriage. She gave birth in a hospital located in a nearby village, a familiar environment where she already knew the midwives and doctors. While her sister Maria faced the difficulty of being pregnant and having a baby in a different country, with a different medical culture, unable to speak or understand the different language, Renata's pregnancy was not marked by issues or incidents. Moreover, Renata was also able to take advantage of the help and advice of her mother, who remained close to her during and after the pregnancy. Also, she was able to maintain her job as her parents could look after the baby when she was at work. The same happened when she had her second child. Renata missed her sister but was not able to visit her often. As soon as her children were old enough to travel, Renata's father became ill. She took care of him for several years, with the help of her mother, until his death. After a few years, her mother became increasingly frail and this time Renata was the only person who took care of her children and her mother. Renata lived most of her life in Borgo. She only travelled occasionally, especially in summer when she either visited her sister in London or spent a few weeks at the seaside with her family. Renata's closest friends were all women from Borgo, those who grew up with her. Sometimes Renata visited the cities near Borgo but the trips were still uncomfortable, as the roads had not changed much since her childhood. Clearly, during her entire life Renata was only

exposed to the life of the village. Her cultural background didn't change and she was never faced with the opportunity to closely observe different ways to practise the body. The village and its culture remained her only benchmark. Her friends from the village, the women she has been knowing since childhood, have always been her only basis for comparison. These close relationships have guaranteed a seemingly stable life, where the social and cultural norms and related behaviours are well known, but there is another side of the coin. Living in a small village, scrutiny is very close and the women participate in a very lively circle of gossip. Every woman is known and examined and this is, for Renata and the other villagers, one of the main forces shaping their relationship with their bodies. Women in the village are expected to act according to social rules related to their bodies and they know that failing to abide those rules means losing credibility in the community. At the onset of ageing, when the body changes, women are faced with the difficulty of maintaining the balance between looking at their best, which includes looking as young as possible, but not trespassing the limits imposed by the modesty culturally required from an older lady. Renata is now 65. She will retire soon and is sad to leave her job but she is comforted by the fact that, from the big window in her living room, she will still be able to look at children playing in the school back garden. Her mother died a few years before and she still lives in her parents' house, which has been renovated over the years, with her husband and one of her children, who is 31 and still unemployed.

Maria and Renata now spend more time together. They both smile when they talk about their relationship. Sometimes, Renata travels to London for a week. But their favourite time is summer, when they are able to spend weeks together, in Borgo or at the seaside. When they are together, they like to spend long days shopping, either in

the big shopping malls in London or in the little shops of Borgo and the nearby villages. Despite living such different lives, Renata and Maria look remarkably similar: they have the same hair colour, same haircut, and even like the same nail polish shades. Nevertheless, when they describe each other they tend to focus on the differences. Renata and Maria look remarkably similar but when they describe each other they tend to focus on the differences. Maria often repeats that, although her first few years in London were extremely difficult, she does not want to move back to Borgo.

1.3 Research Puzzle and Questions

By bringing together all the insights from the different fields involved in this research, this thesis seeks to explore the cultural aspects that influence the relationship of ageing and the body. In particular, the study focuses on how bodily practices, such as clothing choices and medical habits,⁴ change in ageing as an effect of the cultural environment and its norms. In order to do this, migration has been instrumental in pinpointing those aspects that are specifically cultural.

Starting from this research puzzle, the following research questions have been formed:

- What are the dynamics that regulate the relationship between the body and migration in later life?
- How do women describe their experiences of ageing in relation to their changing bodies?

⁴ See following section for a definition of “Bodily Practices”.

- What are the elements used by women to make sense of their ageing bodies?
- What are the drivers that lead to changes in bodily practices during ageing?
- What is the impact of migration on the interplay of ageing and the body?
- What are the characteristics of bodily practices in a transnational context, when migrants mediate between two cultures?

This study compares interviews carried out with three groups of Italian older women: those who were all born and raised in a rural village in Italy and moved to London in their adulthood; those who were born in the same village and lived there all their lives; those who were born in the same village, moved to London, and later returned permanently to the village. The selection of this particular sample is significant, as Italian migrants in London are invisible because they are white, and often the ethnic aspects of white older people are ignored in research, even when they belong to ethnic minority communities.

1.4 Definitions

BODILY PRACTICES: Bodily practices are those acts that have the aim of controlling the appearance and functionality of the body. The bodily practices that have been taken into consideration in this thesis have been selected as they emerged from the interviews. Women were not forced to discuss topics if they did not come naturally from their discourse. The bodily practices discussed have been divided into two groups:

- Practices of appearance management, which include clothing choices, make-up, hair dyeing, and plastic surgery.
- Medical practices linked to health, which include diet, physical exercise, and use of medications.

Some bodily practices could be included in both groups, depending on the motivation that underpins them. For example, dieting could be linked to the quest for better health as well as to the desire to look slimmer. It is also important to note that some bodily practices include several actions. For example, clothing choices also entails the practice of shopping.

The bodily practices described in this thesis are heavily influenced by culture and life course. For this reason, these practices were judged suitable to inform the research questions. Furthermore, these practices have been studied widely for their significance in understanding the social and cultural views on ageing, and therefore this thesis is in line with the sociological tradition of research on the body.

MIGRATION: Migration is not understood in this thesis as a demographic trend but as a life course transition. Rather than being a change of residency, or a movement of one body, in this thesis migration reflects the encounter with a new cultural environment and the reflection on distance from the culture of origin.

TRANSNATIONALISM: Glick, Schiller and Fouron (1999) define transnational migration as “a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders, settle, and establish relations in a new state, maintain ongoing

social connections with the polity from which they originated” (p. 344). In this study, transnationalism is understood as the condition of migrants who live far from their culture of origin but are still not completely engaged with the culture of destination. In this sense, transnational migrants are both displaced and emplaced in two different cultural locations. Their way of engaging with the two cultures will be examined.

LATER LIFE: In this thesis, the age range of participants was selected on the basis of previous literature. The lower limit, 60 years of age, was chosen both because it was the age of retirement for women in Italy at the time when the interviews were undertaken and because women over 60 had most likely experienced the menopause. The upper limit, 70 years of age, was chosen to avoid interviews becoming too focused on medical aspects, as women below the age of 70 were less likely to be affected by frailty and age-related illnesses. This range was modified during the data collection to include relevant participants.

1.5 Thesis Outline

The following is an outline of this thesis:

Chapter 2 - Understanding the Body and Ageing in Transnational Contexts: This chapter will present a review of the literature about and at the intersection of three major fields: ageing, the body, and migration. First, the literature review will review theories on the body in contemporary societies. Then, the way women are particularly

affected by the cultural construction of the body will be analysed. Theories on ageing will then be explored, with a focus on the Otherness that surrounds this stage of life. Lastly, concepts pertaining to migration will be explored, with a particular focus on the concept of transnationalism.

Chapter 3 - Historical Background and Social Context of Women in Italy and in the

UK: Given the contextual nature of this research, particular attention will be paid to examining the cultural background of Italy, in relation to those aspects that have influenced women's culture of the body. This chapter will examine how the strict normativity of the Italian Fascist regime on women's bodies has imposed its legacy, even until today, influencing several generations of women. Then, a comparison of the salient aspects of the discourse about women in Italy and in Britain after the Second World War will be presented. Finally, the Italian community in London will be described, concentrating on the influence that a different social and cultural context had on the women who migrated.

Chapter 4 - Methodology: This chapter will present the qualitative approach informed by grounded theory and the reasons why it was adopted for this thesis. The locations where this research was undertaken will be described, as well as the characteristics of the three groups of women interviewed for this research: Residents, Migrants, and Returned. All the phases of this research will be presented and linked to relevant theory: research design, sampling, fieldwork, recruiting techniques, qualitative interviews, and data analysis.

Chapter 5 - Assimilation: After analysing the cultural background of Italy and its differences with Britain, it will be argued that the contextual differences had an impact

on the life of women who migrated from Borgo to London. Accounts from the interviews will be analysed, concentrating on migration as a life course transition and reporting the importance of factors such as age at migration, schooling paths, and second language proficiency. Then, the description made by women of their lives in London and in Borgo will be examined and questions of belonging will be investigated.

Chapter 6 - Acculturation: Living in a different social context, members of the Migrants group encountered new social norms and habits and learnt new ways of practising their bodies. This chapter will describe how the participants reacted to this encounter, negotiating between their two geographical, cultural, and social locations.

Chapter 7 - Acceptance: The dynamic of acceptance, defined as a connecting agent that resynchronizes the body and self in later life, will be discussed in this chapter. Both self-acceptance and social acceptance will be discussed, and the chapter will conclude with a description of the relationship between the two.

Chapter 8 - Adjustment: Adjustment refers to the set of changes applied by women to their bodily practices to adapt them to their changing bodies and different social status. Particular attention will be paid to the forces propelling such changes.

Chapter 9 - Conceptual Framework: In this chapter, the relationship between the four dynamics regulating ageing and migration – Assimilation, Acculturation, Acceptance, and Adjustment – will be presented. Building on the empirical findings, a new aspect of transnationalism in migrants will be proposed.

Chapter 10 - Concluding Remarks: This section will summarize the key findings emerging from the data analysis. In concluding, problems and limitations of this

research will be identified and reflections will be made about its contribution to the field and possible future developments.

Chapter 2: Understanding the Body and Ageing in Transnational Contexts

2.1 Introduction

Although population ageing is a reality in all Western countries, the concept of “oldness” is nevertheless complex and often refers to “the Other”. This is especially true for women, who seem to chase an eternal adolescence throughout their entire lifespan, starting from childhood. There has been a renewed interest in the relationship of ageing and the body in society that has highlighted a semantic emptying of the word “old” from all its positive connotations.

This phenomenon creates a distancing effect: because the word “old” is only loaded with negative features, when people reach later life they tend to distance themselves from this category. The result is that “old” is always the Other, which also means that those who are socially recognized as old are marginalized by their communities. Moreover, the belief that “old” means “negative” produces a cognitive disorientation when an individual reaches later life, and is induced to taking a distance from this category. The confusion is also augmented by the image of older people in the media,

who do not bear any sign of ageing thanks to modern technologies of image alteration as well as practices of modification of the personal appearance, such as make-up and hair dyeing. Indeed, the media, and advertising in particular, has taken advantage of this situation, contributing to the complex relationship between individuals, society, and later life. Wolf and Snyder (2003) have introduced the concept of ageless marketing, to indicate that selling strategies increasingly avoid targeting their actions towards specific age segments but rather are focused on values and feelings that are shared across different generations.

The word “teenile” has recently emerged on social media and marketing as a portmanteau of the words “teenager” and “senile” (Cesari, 2012). Teenile can indicate different things, such as a person who wears clothes that are considered inappropriate for their age, but it is mostly used to underline the similarities between the lifestyles of the young and the old: they have more spare time, are usually keen to spend their money, and spend time with their peers (ibid.). Crucially, they also have an increased need to belong to their community, as teenagers are trying to find their space while older people struggle to maintain their status as valued and productive members of the society in which they live.

In this chapter the rapidly growing literature on how the body is perceived, understood, and shaped in society will be analysed. Then the issue of ageing as a fracture in the context of the ever-changing concept of “oldness” will be discussed, with a particular focus on the body and related practices. Because ageing is heavily influenced by the context in which it is experienced, the case of migrants, born and raised in one context before moving to a different one, will be discussed in an effort to closely look at how the interplay between the culture of origin and the culture of settlement can affect the

experience of ageing. The importance of studying older women's bodies in society and the related processes lies not only in the possibility of understanding such social phenomena but also in the opportunity of limiting those tracts of older women's social identity that produce marginalization.

2.2 Thinking the Body in Society: An Overview

This section will take into consideration the evolution of sociological thought about the body as being culturally shaped. The body has not always been an important field of study in social sciences. Nevertheless, in recent years the interest in the topic has progressively grown, under the influence of several inputs that will be analysed throughout this chapter.

In 1978, "The Civilizing Process", written by Norbert Elias in 1939, was translated into English. In his work, Elias recognized the need to contextualize bodily practices in their historical context. The author examined the evolution of good manners in Europe from the middle ages to the present, concluding that the growth of civilization has been achieved as a result of a collective effort to control emotions and the consequent shift in social expectations (Elias, 1978). Elias also argued that bodies are not isolated but are all connected and interdependent (ibid.). Around the same time, Michel Foucault highlighted the link between the body, knowledge, and power. In "Discipline and Punish" (1977) and "The History of Sexuality" (1979) he draws a distinction between two types of power that are used over the body: the first, sovereign power, is held by the state in the form of laws; the second, disciplinary power, is a

form of micro-control applied by public surveillance.¹ Later, Foucault (1977; 1979) also identified biopower, or the power over health, illnesses, and all primary bodily functions). The consequence of all forms of power on the body is the emergence of bodily practices, which Foucault called “technologies”, aimed at training, confining, and shaping the body, and making it “docile” to power. For example, clothing is a form of discipline of the body that limits its expression in a realm of possibilities considered socially acceptable. Foucault’s theories on the body developed in his work and became less focused on the oppression of the body – which was reduced to a discourse, a mere passive object that obeys to the rules imposed by society – giving more space to the concept of agency. Nevertheless, agency was often related only to the marginalized.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that the body is not only an object but is an experience lived every day by the individual. He used the word “embodiment” to indicate a circular relationship between the body, the observer, and the observed, where perception plays a predominant role and where the body generates meanings and practices. In his discourse on the phenomenology of the body, Merleau-Ponty also uses the classical categories of space and time to describe how the body can be lived differently in different contexts (ibid.).

Along the same lines, Bourdieu (1984) recognized that in the work of structuralist thinkers, such as Foucault, the concept of agency was limited. Rejecting the idea of subjectivism that sees human actions as arising from an unconscious self, the author uses a concept of practice that is described as being adaptive to the context but also

¹ This distinction will be of particular importance in this study, as the disciplinary power applied by social surveillance in small communities has been observed, analysed, and recognised as one of the most powerful social agents affecting women’s public and private behaviour. (See Chapter 7)

strategic for change. This concept, named “habitus”, is the action that stems from the dialogue between the present and the internalized dispositions acquired during childhood through socialization². Dispositions, Bourdieu argued, are also generative as they prepare the individual for creating new forms of actions. Thus, habitus is neither a habit nor a numb repetition, Bourdieu stresses, but is a dynamic concept, a disposition that interacts with the existing contingencies to create new contents ((ibid.).

In 1984, Bryan Turner was the first to introduce the term “somatic society”, in which the body is the location of the problematization and expression of personal and political problems. He argued that the body had become more prominent in western cultures and, by consequence, invited social scientists to revive their interest in the field (Turner, 1984). Turner argued that the images of bodies had become prominent in society due to the use of human figures in the media, especially advertising. Along the same lines, Featherston (1982) analysed the obsession of consumerism with the body, arguing that individuals in contemporary society are compelled to develop performance skills in order to master their public image and live up to their narcissistic expectations.

Consumer culture has indeed shaped most of what a body is expected to be today. John Berger has uncovered how vision is central to defining the place occupied by an individual in society in his work “Ways of Seeing”, a four-part television series that later became a book (Berger et al., 1973). In particular, one chapter is dedicated to the images of women’s bodies, from classic art to modern commercial advertising. Berger argues that women are subjected to a constant observation from men and that the

² For a definition of “socialization” see Section 2.5.

images in the media reflect their consciousness of this gaze (ibid.). Male gaze is not central to this study but what is interesting to note here is the acknowledgement that women have been the subject of social scrutiny for centuries and increasingly since technology has allowed the manipulation of images of the body. Similarly, in his essay “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, Marshall McLuhan (1968) looks at the rapidly growing phenomenon of commercial advertising and defines it as a “magical environment”, stressing the importance of the technological revolution that at the time was allowing a profound transformation in the way the media portrayed human bodies. McLuhan also argues that clothing, as the embodiment or extension of a human faculty, is able to create what he calls an “environment” or a new realm of perceptual and symbolic tools that are not completely accessible by the individual but that are able to affect the human experience of the world. On the same topic, a sense of disorientation is expressed by philosopher Giorgio Agamben. In *The Coming Community* (1993), he dedicates one chapter to the female body and its usage in commercial marketing and consumerism. Recalling an advertisement for stockings shown in Italian cinemas during the 1970s, Agamben investigates the concept of happiness in relation to the body. Since the process of commercialization started investing in the human figure, he argues, the body has been both subjected to norms and released from its utility as functional object. In fact, the figure of the body in advertising has been manipulated with technology, creating a dissonance with reality, and has replaced the image of God, in the sense that, if once humans were believed to be created in God’s own image, now the bodies shown in the media have replaced the theological model and have become the new archetype, especially in the aspiration of women (Agamben, 1993). Human bodies now must not resemble God or animals, but

other human bodies. But what human bodies? Bodies that do not exist or that are artificially created not just as representations but as brand new bodies. In fact, Agamben continues, “what has been technologized was not the body, but its image” (ibid. p.49). The image of the body, particularly the female body, has been manipulated and reinvented. In this sense, advertising gave the promise of a “whatever” body,³ one that is neither universal nor singular and one that defies both the limits of divinity and those of materiality. This body becomes an aspirational model, although it is an unachievable model by nature, as it does not exist in reality; it is only an idea.

In recent years, social scientists have tried to rethink the body according to the growing importance of its representation in the media. Drawing upon the difference established by Barthes (1986) between the work, as a material object, and the text, as a methodological field existing only in a discourse and defined only as activity and production, Csordas (2002) delineated a distinction between the body and the textuality of the body. These two aspects are complementary and not mutually exclusive: “the body is a biological, material entity, while embodiment can be understood as an indeterminate methodological field, defined by perceptual experience and the mode of presence and engagement in the world” (p. 241). The notion of “somatic modes of attention” (ibid.) brings together perceptual consciousness and collective practice, reinforcing the idea that the way an individual attends the world to and with the body is influenced by society. Similarly, Donna Haraway (1997) has

³ Agamben describes “whatever” as coming from the Latin word “quodlibet ens”. A whatever body is not a body that can have any feature, but rather is a body that is “such that it always matters”. “The whatever singularity exists in a zone of indistinction between the universal and the particular, nature and culture, proper and improper, image and thing, animal and human. It exists between potentiality and act, between having and not having, between being and not being.” (Murray and Whyte, 2011)

pinpointed the difference between the body as a “social actant”, which refers to the mere materiality of the body, and the body as a “social agent”, which indicates this materiality as an ineluctable element in the practices of self-expression.

The focus of the media on the body has caused a postmodern problematization of categories such as gender, disability, and ethnicity, which have led to a renewed interest and better understanding of the social individual as a corporeal entity, bounded to others by social, political, and cultural norms. As a consequence, the concepts of identity and agency have become central in social sciences, to reflect a more fragmented society where the individual is central. Although the discourse about the body is about all social classes and crosses the divides of gender, race, and sexual identity, the category of age has long been neglected and has come to the forefront of social discourse only in recent years.

Twigg has noted that “biomedical accounts occupy a privileged and dominant position” in how the ageing body is understood in social science (Twigg, 2004, p. 60). On a similar note, Small (2007) argued that predominance of medical discourse about ageing is dangerous because the negative attitudes towards old age are more difficult to shift when they are related to mental and bodily decline. The difficulty is augmented by the fact that these developments have taken place in the context of a consumer culture, where the body has become a site of self-identity and reflexivity (Twigg, 2004). The next paragraphs will focus on the idea that the concept “old” is constantly pervaded by a sense of Otherness that can be damaging for those who enter or are already in what we call “later life”, as older people try to distance themselves from this category, fearing marginalization.

In their effort to redefine embodiment as a framework that “encompasses all those actions performed by the body or on the body which are inextricably oriented towards the social” (Gilleard & Higgs, 2015, para. 1), Gilleard and Higgs have also discussed the relationship between corporeality and society. The authors’ predominant focus on ageing and the way it is performed allows them to underline that all the actions of the body towards society must be considered in their personal and historical context. In fact, they emphasize the need to end the thought of ageing as a universal experience with an intrinsic value and univocal development. In their work, Gilleard and Higgs also argue that embodied practices are not only used as a form of expression but can also ignore or mask certain traits of an individual’s identity. The ageing body itself has been considered a mask for a younger - or even ageless - self, an idea launched by Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) that has since become a central motif in the discourse about ageing and the body. Yet, Harper has argued, “the changing physical appearance is more than a physical mask, it is the whole construction that we have placed on the chronological age of the body” (Harper, 1997, p. 161). The concept of an ageing mask reflects the constant tension between the body as an internal experience by the individual and the cultural construction of the exterior of the body (ibid.). When the emphasis is stressed on the bodily aspects of ageing, inevitably the world “old” assumes a negative meaning. Moreover, when the ageing body starts showing signs of decay, it cannot escape the label “old”, therefore it becomes a source of negative stereotypes about ageing: old age is entirely perceived as a loss.

Indeed, the body links the self to others in ways the individuals are only partially aware of: they are perceived via the body, and they perceive the world through the body. Thus, it can be argued that the body is the surface on which the self and culture meet.

Society bears a complicated game of images: the artificial image of older people in the media, the image that older individuals try to project, and the image that society reflects back to the individual. When the three do not coincide, the collision creates a distancing effect. In this context, bodily practices of self-presentation are invested of great importance. Recently, psychologists have adopted concepts such as “enclothed cognition” (Adam & Galinsky, 2012), which links the symbolic value of clothes and the individual experience of wearing them, showing that what individuals wear can affect their psychological processes. Nevertheless, a great body of literature has shown that if clothing is a code, it is a uncertain one, where meanings are not univocal and the semantics is weak (Twigg, 2013).

In the discussion between those who believe that when women perform beauty practices they are submitting to social objectification and those who believe that those women are exercising a free choice (Davis, 1995), one argument had been left almost undiscussed until recently. Women act inside a realm of choices that are not infinite but limited; constrained by society. In this sense, if, for example, a woman undergoing plastic surgery were to be considered free in her actions, we should consider that her freedom had been confined by her social upbringing and her actual situation and, perhaps even more importantly, the availability of different choices would be determined by what is materially available and morally acceptable in her society.

The latest turn from social to cultural gerontology has allowed social scientists to fully embrace the postmodern turn of identity, which is now fluid and more influenced by cultural phenomena rather than power structures, and to locate the ageing body in its context. Indeed, cultural gerontology has shifted the focus from ageing as a problematic period of life to a more diverse one, which is more centred on the concept

of agency rather than on a structuralist approach (Twigg & Martin, 2015). Taking into consideration inputs from social sciences and humanities, the discourse on the ageing body is focused on meanings that are historically, culturally, and socially constructed (ibid.).

2.3 Women and the Body

In 1949, Simone De Beauvoir was the first to bring gender to the forefront of the sociological and philosophical discourse, analysing the situation of women in Western culture and highlighting the idea that women are considered the Other (Beauvoir, 1997). In recent years, Grosz (1994) has revisited the notion of “docile bodies” introduced by Foucault, calling women’s bodies “volatile”, a term that challenges the Cartesian divide between mind and body with the notion that the two cannot be separated. The author rejects the “somatophobic” idea that women should be considered only for their inner world, and calls for a corporeal feminism to be added to the discourse about the differences between men and women.

As highlighted in the previous paragraph, biomedical accounts in western culture occupy a privileged and dominant position in the literature about ageing; still, even if the centrality of the body is unquestionable, it is important to recognize that the body is socially and culturally constructed (Twigg, 2004). This is particularly relevant when researching women, traditionally seen as the negative and obscure part of nature. Indeed, the body is often a source of discontinuity in women’s lives. On the one hand, there are experiences such as menarche and menopause, which are considered leaps in

a complete different corporal and social identity, rather than smooth transitions into a constant flow, making the life course less steady. On the other hand, pregnancy is described as a change of the body that happens at the same time as the transition into a new realm of social identity, as the pregnant body translates on the outside the unequivocal transition of the self to the new social role of mother. In her study, Bailey (1999) found that a change in identity was experienced by pregnant women partly because of the new way they conceptualized their bodies.

Gerontologists use the term “reminescence” to designate “how older adults socially construct the meaning of their lives” looking at the past (Covan, 2005, p.9); however, the process of looking ahead and trying to predict the future, called “preminescence” is equally important for the construction and adaptation of older women’s identity (ibid.). Similarly, Ruble and Brooks-Gunn, in their 1982 study, highlighted the importance of preparedness in young girls coping with menarche. They found that girls who were not well prepared to face the onset of menstruation reported negative initial reactions and more symptoms (Ruble & Brooks-Gunn, 1982). Interestingly, they also found that being unprepared had a negative impact on the girls’ self-image. Ruble and Brooks-Gunn call “adjustment” the process of transforming the self to prepare it for a new bodily and social status (ibid.). A similar word, “adapting,” is used in disability studies to indicate the process of “altering life and self to accommodate to bodily losses and to reunify body and self accordingly” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 1).⁴

If the beginning of the fertile period seems to be problematic, its end does not seem any easier. Although nowadays there are more women living a long life after

⁴ For the definition and use of the terms “adjustment” and “adaptation” in this research, see chapters 1, 7, 8, 9.

menopause, becoming older is still difficult for many of them. The media advertises anti-ageing products and tell women that looking younger is an obligation; moreover, feminine bodies face functional changes, and their frailty and weakness can compromise independent housekeeping. Menopause is a moment of permanent transition from the role of potential mother that requires adjustment, especially in a postmodern world where not all women are willing to conform to the traditional role of grandmothers. And even those women who would like to become grandmothers often have no grandchildren, due to decreasing fertility.

In her work on Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and its correlation with the lack of working discipline, Martin (1988) underlines the medicalized attitude towards PMS, considered to be a recent phenomenon typical of Western societies. Equally, the social discourse about menopause needs to be contextualized. Menopause is a natural stage of women's life, but it is often discussed as if it were an illness: there are symptoms that women suffer and there are medicines to cure this condition. In her study about the menopause in North America and Japan, Lock (1993) highlights a significant difference between how the two societies understand menopause. The Japanese use two words to indicate menopause: the word "hekei", which refers to the end of menstruation, and the word "konenki", which describes a life passage, and can be related to men as well. Interestingly, the two concepts are not related and one does not imply the other. The author explains that if the term "menopause" in Western societies is becoming increasingly medical, the word "konenki" is more varied, and include a wider range of signs and bodily processes (Lock, 1993).

Processes of adaptation have also been described in relation to the body image of older women. Liechty and Yarnal (2010) describe how some of their interviewees overcame

concerns about body image by adapting or adjusting to their new condition rather than trying to actually change their bodies. One good example of adaptation is the endorsement of an achievable model of body image which replaces an ideal that may be more desirable but is unfeasible (Ferraro et al., 2008). As previously discussed, the representation of older women in the media is often ambivalent and problematic. Although there has been a slow change and older women have lately featured more often in fashion magazines, it must be noted that these women are usually beautified using the same stereotypes applied to younger women. They are thin, fit, have luminous skin, and long, healthy hair. A recent trend has also seen younger models colouring their hair grey, which makes the social expectation on women even more confusing. Women of all ages are expected to look the same. Nevertheless, these representations are often paired with columns specifically indicating the best outfits for women in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. It is interesting to note that lately these columns have suggested how to adjust the same outfit, or the same garment, for different age groups.

As Twigg (2009) argues, the link between clothing, identity, and the self remains strong during the entire life course. For this reason, clothing choices are an important site of study of the ways in which the body and the self interrelate with the social and cultural expectations (ibid.). Clothing choices are deemed appropriate or inappropriate for a member of the community according to these norms, and a great part of a woman's social identity is expressed with appropriate choices that can demonstrate her capability of being a functional and valuable member of the society. The concept of "age ordering" (ibid.), defined as the social norms that regulate what clothes are appropriate or inappropriate for an individual according to his or her age, is particularly

relevant in this research. There is evidence that clothing evolves, especially in women, throughout the entire life course, reflecting the relationship between individual perceptions, bodily changes, and norms that are socially and culturally constructed and shared. Changes in the historical contingencies as well as in the personal sphere are reflected in clothing choices (Twigg, 2009).

The attitude of the media towards women's bodies has a double interest, as it can be a source of information on how society understands age but it also serves as inspiration and aspiration for women, orienting their clothing choices as well as their attitudes towards their bodies. The "symbiotic relationship" (Twigg, 2010) of certain fashion magazines, such as Vogue, and consumption culture has today pervaded all the media. In Italy, as well as in other western countries, TV personalities serve as aspirational models for women of all ages. In their documentary "Il Corpo delle Donne" ("Women's Bodies" translated by Serena Povia), Cantù, Malfi Chindemi and Zanardo (2009) have exposed how television in Italy constantly objectifies women and their bodies. The bodies of women of all ages are subjected to the same unrealistic expectations of perfection and even journalists are shown to have made extensive use of plastic surgery, to the point where their facial expressions become unintelligible.

With postmodernity, social identities have become more fluid, and categories such as gender and class are less likely to play a role in how women present themselves to the world. Nevertheless, age seems to be still relevant in this sense. Rexbye and Povlsen (2007) have researched how postmodernity has affected the way women read and interpret visual signs of ageing, including biological indicators such as skin, eyes, and hair colour as well as dress codes. They have concluded that signs of ageing have not been affected by postmodernity and the consequential fluidity, and their symbolic

value remains fixed. An extensive body of literature indicates that women do not abandon concerns about their appearance as they age (Armstrong, Saunders, & Roberts, 2009). The changes in women's clothing choices sometimes reflect changes that happen to their bodies. At other times, changes are imposed by the social context and are related to the image that the woman wants to project of herself as a member of the community. These are the changes that can inform how society understands the concept of oldness.

The term "beauty work" (Rexbye & Povlsen, 2007) emphasizes that the final purpose of all practices aimed at modifying the body and its appearance is the adherence to a specific concept of beauty, which has been conceptualized by women over years of exposure to social conditioning. In the game of the social gaze, every woman is at the same time active and passive; observer and observed. Every woman looks at other women, and imposes her judgement on other's bodily practices. At the same time, every woman is the focus of a verdict imposed by other women. This situation is made even more complicated by the fact that norms are not homogenous and are often ambivalent.

2.4 Ageing as a Fracture

As discussed in the previous section, women are considered the Other. This section will focus on the way old age is also linked to the idea of Otherness, which makes older women at risk of being affected by a double stigma. As Twigg has noted, "old remains eternally Other" (Twigg, 2004, p.64). There's a discontinuity in women's contemporary identity, which is emphasised in the discourse about the body. The body

represents the “here and now” of the individual in society. It is possible to “remember” (give a new body to) memories of past selves and, therefore, to incorporate personal memory to the present self, but it is not possible to escape the present body (Marzano Parisoli, 1999). As a result, changes in the body can be a source of discontinuity, creating a moment of fracture in the continuity of life. Moreover, the way the body changes is, at least in part, out of our control. Although plastic surgery, dieting, tattoos, or various practices such as hair styling give the contemporary individual a sense of power over the body, this perception can easily be uprooted.

In her 1998 study, Paoletti (1998) found that women rarely attribute the word “old” to themselves and that, when they do, they use the word to justify their limitations, therefore linking it to negative aspects of their lives. Moreover, the word “old” is often implied rather than explicitly mentioned. Old people described “oldness” as being lonely, marginalized, forgetful, and sad, but these attributes have been ascribed to others, often the institutionalized elderly. Distancing is used as a coping mechanism to maintain the ability of projecting a positive self-image (*ibid.*). The negative connotation of the word “old” makes it an undesirable feature and one that must be avoided. The fact that membership of the category “old” is always postponed means that the relationship between one’s own self and the concept of oldness is constantly renegotiated. This process is both a cause and effect of the social conceptualization of “old” as the Other.

The literature about how women distance themselves from the word “old” is constantly growing. In particular, Hurd’s (1999) work on the notion of ageing suggests that women as old as 90 negotiate the meaning of age in order to maintain membership of the category “not old”. The process seems to be circular: women refuse to refer to

themselves as old both because negative values are attached to the social image of old people and because they see positive aspects of their lives as discordant with their idea of life as an elderly person. In other words, since later life is categorized as negative, when a woman lives a fulfilling life she will not be able to recognize it as the life of an older person. This process is influenced by and influences stereotypes and contributes to the conceptualization of oldness as Other. Interestingly, this process also creates a distance between the concept of oldness and chronological age, reinforcing the link with negative stereotypes.

A new representation of an ageing woman has become popular in the media in the past few decades, especially in women's magazines; it is one of an attractive and confident mid-life woman. As Ussher (2006) has stated, the new message that the media conveys is that a woman should not disengage from social life at 40. The older woman can be depicted as a reassuring yet sporty grandmother, a good-looking but modest wife, a sober and conscious fashion victim, but, as described before, new stereotypes can also be surprisingly similar to those pertaining to adolescents. If in the 1950s a woman, after marriage, could just wear an apron and cut her hair short, now she has a new, demanding model challenging her. It is only the last of the clichés a woman will find in her life but this one comes suddenly, almost unexpectedly, in peculiar continuity with the previously learnt feminine features. The constant message that women receive from the media is that looking younger is desirable and can be obtained with discipline (Coupland, 2009). Consequently, looking younger is an obligation for social acceptance and failing to hide one's age leads to stigma, as it signals the inability of the individual to follow social norms. Such contradictions have serious consequences: age is deprived of its qualitative meaning and the onset of a new standard exposes

women to ferocious comparisons. As a result, when reaching midlife, a woman's self can become dysfunctional when feeling detached from the changing body. Anti-ageing products are sold as a solution to the problem (Coupland, 2009), supporting the idea that age in years and age in appearance do not have to match and thus deepen the confusion about what "old" means.

As Small (2007) has pointed out, every conventional negative stereotype of "old age" is counterbalanced by an equally well-known positive one. For instance, it is interesting to note that the word "old" does not have a fixed meaning, but it is used with different meanings in different contexts. In fact, in institutional settings, such as health services, it can become a positive feature, when it allows access to special services (Paoletti, 1998). Old age is obviously a period of life loaded with expectancy, promises, and mystery. It is almost impossible to consider it as just one period of our life. In "States of Injury", Wendy Brown (1995) describes what she calls "the plastic cage", a series of definitions made by others that imprisons weaker individuals in definite roles. It is impossible to escape from this prison, because even refusing social definitions reinforces them.

Is this what society is doing to old people? And what are the risks of enclosing our old selves in a plastic cage made of negative preconceptions? A better understanding of old age is needed. Hagestad (2001) underlines the importance of acknowledging that ageing is part of life, which is entrenched in a constantly changing social environment. Looking ahead to the future, the individual feels the need to find a sense of continuity and of "sameness" across life; "making sense" means that, looking ahead, we have some basic predictability (Hagestad, 1986).

2.5 Socialization and Transnationalism

As seen in previous paragraphs, in social science, ageing has often been represented as a mere bodily process, with a focus on medical issues, as if the experience of ageing was not mediated by culture and society. Recently, the focus has shifted and there is more consciousness about the idea that the society in which women grow up determines the way they experience and practise their bodies throughout their life course, including old age (Twigg & Martin, 2015). Linking the micro and macro analysis levels, the Life-Course perspective encompasses the social dynamics linked to the process of ageing that take place at both levels (Bengtson, Burgess, & Parrott, 1997), therefore, it is an important framework to understand how ageing is created by “social contexts, cultural meanings, and social structural location” (ibid.).

The concept of socialization is defined in the Life-Course perspective as “a process of committing an individual to term of service in a group, by progressively confining his behavioural potentialities within an acceptable range and by preparing him for the types of role he will be expected to play” (Ryder, 1965, p. 852). In other words, every society instils rules of behaviour in its members and the internalization of the moral and social codes builds the individuals’ social identities, making them part of the community. In this sense, socialization becomes a social act when an individual lives inside a community and abides by its social rules. The process of socialization is accomplished by society through several agents, such as school, family, peer group, the media, religion, etc. from childhood, and continues throughout the entire life course. It is clear that individuals, their behaviour, and how they make sense of the world are constructed historically and culturally by society (Pilcher, 1994).

Socialization is not a stable process; it changes during history as successive generations are exposed to different agencies, education, and historical experiences. Being a cohort “the aggregate of individuals (within some population definition) who experienced the same event within the same time interval” (Ryder, 1965, p. 845), it is important to underline that socialization is cohort specific, as sharing the same life experiences creates the same frame of mind or world view. A generation can be defined as an embodiment of a birth-cohort: a group of people who received the same socialization. Even if generation is a term technically related to familiar relationship, it is generally used also outside of this context. Indeed, generations emerge from the rhythm of human existence (Pilcher, 1994) but then they exist and operate in the world. Socialization is deeply rooted in its historical context. Individuals change their beliefs and attitudes in response to major social movements or events. According to Mannheim, experiences are not accumulated in the course of a lifetime through a process of summation or agglomeration; they are dialectically articulated. In any case, Mannheim (1936) suggests that the experiences acquired in youth are predominant and will always play a role in what we learn later. Moreover, “contemporaneity becomes sociologically significant only when it also involves participation in the same social and historical circumstances” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 298). “Cohort persistence” refers to the idea that individuals maintain most of the characteristics acquired during childhood with socialization (Van den Broek, 2009). Recent studies have taken into account the fact that the lives of older people have changed drastically in the past fifty years. Compelled by consumerism, older people today engage more with society and are also expected to maintain an active role in their communities. Moreover, as discussed before in this chapter, in order to maintain a positive social status, older

people today need to challenge negative stereotypes and keep up with unachievable positive representations in the media. Fingerman and Pitzer have analysed the importance of agents of socialization in later life, such as past and present relationships, and culture. The latter is controversial, as the authors see culture as less relevant in later life than in previous ages but they focus on a vision of ageing as centred on tradition and disability and believe that the media principally targets teenagers (Fingerman & Pitzer, 2007). However, they argue that images of older people that are shared through the media may affect individuals. In this sense, they see that culture can affect ageing and may cause low self-esteem as an agent of socialization when the representations and stereotypes of older people are negative. In their work, the authors acknowledge that further research is needed in order to understand the influence of social milieu on older people's behaviours, beliefs, and emotions (ibid.). Understanding socialization in old age requires the acknowledgement of both the positive and negative changes that occur in later life, as well as the recognition of the accumulated knowledge from previous experiences.

Socialization is usually a process of continuity, as one step is produced by previous steps, but what happens when two cultures, with two different sets of accepted norms and behaviours, meet? In his work, Ryder (1965) has analysed examples of immigration and colonialism and has concluded that, at a macro level, when two cultures suddenly coexist in the same geographical location cohorts experience what he calls an "experiential chasm". He describes the intersection between two cultures in this example:

The European immigrant arriving in the New World identified himself with an ethnic group resembling the culture in which he was raised. His children went to American schools, chose

American playmates, and often escaped from the subculture. The parents' inadequacy as a basis for orientation toward the new society reinforced the children's resort to peer groups. Similarly, the impact of western culture on primitive peoples is likely to yield disruption of family life, changing mutual evaluation of the generations, and ideological identification of youth with resistance (p. 21).

When an individual migrates to a different country, he or she leaves behind places, objects, and people. It is not possible to leave behind cultural norms, values, and socially constructed behaviours that have been learnt and practised since childhood. The culture of origin follows migrants to the new place of settlement and deeply conditions the very experience of migration. In their classic study on Polish immigrants in America, Thomas and Znaniecky (1927) argued that, when conceptualizing a social and cultural community:

Even if we imagined a group lacking all internal differentiation, *i.e.*, a group in which every member would accept all the socially sanctioned and none but the socially sanctioned rules of behaviours schemes of his own conduct, still every member would systematize these schemes differently in his personal evolution, would make a different life-organization out of them. (p.1127)

In their analysis, Thomas and Znaniecky theorized the process of Acculturation, as the origin of new attitudes that originate when individuals come into contact with the world outside their community of origin (*ibid.*).

The way individuals use and perceive their body is heavily influenced by socialization. Shilling defines the socialization of the body as “involving the hiding away of natural functions and the transformation of bodies into a location for and an expression of codes of behaviour” (Shilling, 2012, p. 175). He also argues that the body is increasingly social and that its natural functions are hidden with the help of

technologies and objects – such as razors, make-up, toilets. The body in contemporary western societies is defined by Shilling as a “civilized body”, to underline that it is controlled and invested with new meanings through a process of rationalization that is progressively becoming more entangled with the social, cultural, and physical location of the individual. As described earlier in this chapter, Elias (1978) has showed how the process of rationalizing the body is historically embedded. It is interesting to note that the body and related practices respond to social needs of the cultural environment. When migrating, an individual experiences an ambivalent difficulty in the new geographical, social, and cultural location: living everyday life according to the set of norms learnt in the culture of origin is impossible and, at the same time, applying the norms of the new social context entails a deep knowledge and understanding that is acquired only during a lengthy period of settlement. The new norms slowly integrate or replace the old norms in a process that can take more than a generation. It is also crucial to remember that it would be a mistake to imagine culture as made only of knowledge and experience. Many material objects can be part of this: clothing items, medicines, traditional remedies, and books, are some examples of objects that maintain a social value that might either be imported and become cultural symbols or, more often in the past, are unavailable altogether in the receiving country.

The body and its appearance carry the first signs that regulate the social interaction between two individuals. Individuals recognize each other as members of a certain community when they perform and share the same practices. The women who participated in this study present somatic traits that are fairly similar to those of the British natives. Indeed, these women were born in the north of Italy, which means that their skin is fair and their hair is dark to light brown. Because of this, personal

appearance plays an even greater role in signalling their status as migrants than in the case, for example, of women whose skin tones are darker. On the one hand, it is easier to become accustomed to the new norms and less recognizable as migrants; on the other hand, any discordant sign is more visible.

When an individual leaves their place of origin and migrates to a new country, the social structure of rules needs to be transformed, as the receiving society where the individual is settling is based on different social norms. In this sense, social performance is transformed by migration to avoid social conflict and make everyday life easier for the migrants. It is thus clear that a migrating individual, who has already been socialized inside one specific community, needs to undergo a new socialization process in the receiving society: a re-socialization. Bodily practices can thus be seen as strongly linked to the geographical location in which the individual lives. Furthermore, the socialization of migrants is efficient not only for the individual but also for society itself, as it creates an individual that is functional to the community, therefore minimizing the onset of problems and conflicts. The new expression of the self in the body takes shape under a moment of “openness”, when the migrating individual is ready to absorb and embrace a new way of life. This situation can create internal conflicts but is necessary in order to achieve a certain degree of assimilation in the new community. It can be argued that, in this situation, abandoning social bonds and devaluing cultural norms from the community of origin is essential in order to attain an easier existence.

As discussed before, in contemporary western society, social identity tends to be more fluid, as new technologies of telecommunication allow the circulation of different habits – especially true for practices of personal appearance – and young generations

are more open to experiment with different norms and behaviours. The women who took part in this study migrated in a time period when this was not possible. At the time, the eradication from their community of origin and settlement into a new cultural group were drastic. Women were not able to go back to their village very often and means of communication were scarce. These circumstances had two consequences: first, the women arrived in London with a fresh look on a new culture, not having had contact before; second, women had few occasions to share norms and behaviours from their community of origin, when they met with other women from the same place.

In “Techniques of the Body”, Mauss (1973) argued that although when babies are born they use their bodies following their instinct, adults have no natural way to manage their bodies. He explains that each society develops particular techniques for the use of the body that are acquired from youth and permeate the individual to the core of the self. The norms that regulate the use of the body are communal and are transmitted by learning and imitation. Mauss takes into consideration very basic movements that are experienced daily, such as walking: the way human beings put one foot in front of the other is the result of the cultural selection of one particular type of walk amongst unlimited possibilities (Mauss, 1979).

Glick Schiller and Fouron (1999) define transnational migration as “a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders, settle, and establish relations in a new state, maintain ongoing social connections with the polity from which they originated”. This concept has traditionally been applied to the political engagement of citizens but it is increasingly applied to the social normativity that regulates norms and behaviours pertaining to the body. Moreover, for Levitt (2003), migrants are able to keep ties with their country of origin even during the long

process of assimilation into the receiving country. The literature about the body in transnational contexts is extremely limited. Some studies are focused on ethnic minorities and health but not all consider ageing (Akhtar 2011; Mirza 2013); other studies come from the field of the body in post-colonialism (Puri, 2002); other consider gender in transnational economic spaces in the same nation (Tolentino, 1996); most studies are focused on health and the medicalization of the migrants (Inda, 2000; Lanari & Bussini, 2012). Moreover, the analysis of returning migration has been limited to researches on economic and workforce movements, with only a few studies focusing on individual experiences (Christou, 2011). This gap in literature will be addressed with this research, bringing together ageing, bodily practices, and transnationalism.

2.6 Conclusions

This chapter started with an overview of the sociological theory about the body and its practices in society. Authors taken into consideration have described how society influences the way individuals experience, understand, and negotiate the body, with a particular focus on the postmodern turn of society, which has made social identities more fluid. The point has been made that consumerism and the growing importance that images of the body have gained in the media have had a profound effect on the social experience of the body.

With regard to gender, it has been argued that women have historically been considered the Other of society, particularly because of their bodies. A few key

moments of bodily transformation have been considered: menarche, pregnancy, and menopause. These transitions have been described in relation to their importance for the social identity of women. Moreover, the discussion on the importance of the representation of women's bodies in the media has focused on the ambivalence of the aspirational models. Ageing is another form of Otherness, and even more in recent years, as the term "old" has undergone a process of semantic emptying of all its positive connotations, apart from some that pertain to inner qualities. When the discourse on ageing is about the body, negative stereotypes tend to prevail. Consequently, older women tend to renegotiate the term "old" as they age, in order to distance themselves from it and maintain their association with the category "non-old". In this sense, ageing has been described as a fracture in an individual's social identity, as there is no preparation for becoming old.

The Life-Course perspective is employed to better understand the lived experience of ageing, in order to reduce the Otherness surrounding later life. In this framework, socialization is the process through which a society imposes norms and behaviour on its members. Socialization is cohort-specific, which means that it changes over time, and it is also specifically located in one society. But what happens when two cultures, with two distinct sets of rules, meet? The lives of migrants have been called "transnational", as they maintain their ties with their culture of origin while being assimilated into the society of destination. Only a few studies have focused on the body in transnational contexts. This gap will be addressed in this research, bringing together ageing, the body, and migration.

Chapter 3: Historical Background and Social Context of Women in Italy and in the UK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relevant historical and social elements that have shaped both the discourse on and the culture of Italian women in Italy.

The first section of this chapter will explain why it is still important, when discussing the condition of women in contemporary Italy, to talk about the Fascist Regime.

The next section of this chapter is dedicated to the Fascist Regime and the many ways in which it monitored, utilized and regulated women's bodies. A particular emphasis will be placed on the specific social circumstances that made the influence of Fascism particularly relevant and durable in Italy, and on the alliance of the Regime with the Catholic Church. Curiously, most of the literature about the use of women's bodies during the Fascist Regime is not Italian, which reflects the lack of awareness in the Italian society about these issues.

Then, considerations about women in Italy after the Second World War will be made, focusing on those aspects that can be of particular interest for this thesis, such as the culture of “la bella figura”, the importance of media and the experience of feminism.

This will set up the discussion of Italian migration to London, where the analysis will focus on the flows of migration from Italy after the Second World War and elements such as Italian spaces and businesses in London.

3.2 Relevance of the Fascist period in contemporary Italy

The women who participated to this study were born five to ten years after the end of the Second World War. Thus, including the history and legacy of the Fascist Regime and its attitudes towards women as part of their cultural background could seem inappropriate. To the contrary, it should be noted that these women were born and raised in families who experienced Fascism first hand, with mothers and fathers who grew up during the Regime and were consequently greatly influenced by it. In addition, as analysed in the next section, the profound normativity imposed by Fascism on women's culture survived well beyond the end of the Regime and still has an influence on contemporary Italian society.

The following is an extract that has been used in schools right up until today to exemplify the sentiment of comic:

I see an old lady whose hair is dyed and completely smeared with some kind of horrible ointment; she is all made-up in a clumsy and awkward fashion and is all dolled-up like a young girl. I begin to laugh. I perceive that she is the opposite of what a respectable old lady should be. (Pirandello, 1960)

This piece was written by Luigi Pirandello and first published in 1920. Written at the dawn of the Regime, when in Italy the Fascist sentiment was reaching its peak, it clearly exemplifies the attention given to women's bodies that was already present at the time of its publication. This attitude became more intense in the years that followed, until it became one of the focal point of the politics of Mussolini and the Fascist Regime. Nevertheless, this piece is still used today in schools, and its depiction of women, or the attention shown on women's bodily practices, are neither questioned nor found problematic.

It will be argued in the next section that the fascist period transformed the way women perceived their bodies in relation to the state and the public sphere. Medical experts, journalists, singers, writers and Catholic campaigners are only a few examples of the figures who had an impact on the way women practised their bodies under the Regime. Such a wide spread consensus on the regulatory attitude on women's bodies had a permanent impact on the Italian society, as all social strata were first reached and then permeated by this approach. Moreover, although the Fascist period is now regarded as a dark and negative historical age, it is important to underline here that this normativization was somehow retained by Italians even in the decades that followed, creating an underlying regulatory structure that lives on generations, even those who did not directly experience the Regime.

Elizabeth Dixon Whitaker (2000), in her account of how Fascism has changed motherhood in Italy, focuses particularly on how the Regime has imposed peculiar practices related to motherhood and, more generally, to women's bodies, that still persist in Italian everyday life. In this sense, she argues that "by participating in scientific breast-feeding and motherhood in general, women incorporate medical knowledge and connect themselves, however unconsciously, to their own nation's history" (p. 288). A vast body of literature has indeed argued that Italian women tend to have a unique attitude towards bodily practices, including fashion and medical habits, and that these inclinations can be associated with the history of the country. Although the normativization of women's bodies is an international phenomenon involving all Western countries, the obsession of Italian women with measuring and scaling their physiology, as well as regulating their bodily practices, was shaped by the permanence for more than twenty years of a Fascist Regime, which initiated a large number of actions to regulate women's health and fashion. Indeed, Chang (2015) argues that Fascism was a formative period for the history of Italian culture and a great body of literature shows that the consequences of how the Regime ruled women's bodies are still present in Italy today. It is clear that, when studying Italian women's attitude on their bodies, reflecting on the historical legacy left by the Fascist Regime is crucial. Therefore, this thesis will discuss the rules and regulation imposed by the Fascist Regime on women's bodies, even though the women who participated in this research did not directly experience the Fascist period.

3.3 Ruling the Body: Women and the Fascist Regime

The Fascist dictatorship in Italy (1922–1943) was particularly interested in the regulation of the family. In fact, the family itself was seen as a “basic cell in the body politic and as an institution organically linked to the state” (Naldini, 2003, p. 50). Several countries have experienced, at some point in their histories, a dictatorship. The unique conditions surrounding the onset of the Fascist Regime have made Italy’s experience distinctive. In Italy, the birth of Fascism came at a time when the middle class, already well represented in the rest of Europe, was still a minority. As a consequence, the ideology attached to middle-class families, which strongly affirmed the separation between the public and the private sphere, was very limited (Wilson, 2004). In fact, the majority of Italian women were still living in large households with extended families. Not only did Italian women have little to no influence in the public sphere, they also rarely left their houses or land owned by the family (De Grazia, 1992). This situation frames the attitude of the Regime towards women. It is clear that the roles of women were largely those of mothers and wives and, as such, their bodies were regulated as a political tools in order to attain the high fertility rate desired by Il Duce. Women were confined to their houses and work outside the family was considered acceptable only when necessary, mostly limited to unregulated jobs in sectors such as agriculture or paid house-related work that allowed women to stay close to their houses and their primary duty of caring for the family. Moreover, the Regime issued laws aimed at discouraging and limiting women’s access to jobs in public services and the industrial sector (Naldini, 2003). Also, the division between upper and lower class and the virtual absence of a middle class contributed to limit the diffusion of new models of femininity that were rising in other European countries.

Whereas in France and England young women started parting from their parents' lifestyles, in Italy young women were limited by socio-economic as well as geographical factors (ibid.). It is true that young women of the upper class living in urban settings were able to experiment with a multitude of life-styles, all similar to those found in other countries: more interested in the interaction with their peers, less interested in traditional home crafts and aesthetically more masculine than their mothers (the trendy hairstyle at the time was called "maschietto", little boy). Nevertheless, for the majority of young Italian women in the early 1930s, life still revolved around their families.

Something that is also worth considering in order to fully grasp the unique nature of the Fascist Regime is how differences between men and women were strategically used by il Duce in his public speeches, in order to pursue his goal of an ideal population. For Mussolini, the biological differences between men and women embodied different roles in society. To pursue this, the Regime established a series of laws and agencies dedicated to instituting control over women's bodies. In particular, the Regime was concerned with reproductive practices. In doing so, the regime was also reinforcing ideas of male control over the family and traditional models of family. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that during the Fascist Regime, as well as in many other instances of dictatorships, "biology itself was a cultural construct, used to legitimate inequalities between men and women which did not derive from biological differences" (Passmore, 2003, p. 5). While Nazi Germany wanted to achieve a population of a certain quality – pure in race – the Italian Fascist regime saw the issue of population more as a quantity problem. In this sense, il Duce often emphasised that the role of women was primarily to be mothers. Moreover, where the Nazi regime

considered racial imperfections in the German race as the result of mixing with other ethnicities, researchers in Fascist Italy blamed women's modern lifestyles for generating abnormal offspring (De Grazia, 1992). In this discourse, clothing had a special role as a factor that could signal a woman's ability or willingness to conform to il Duce's views. In 1927, Italy saw the launch of the first organization specifically set up to control fashion, the Comitato Nazionale per la Correttezza della Moda (National Committee for the Correctness of Fashion), funded by a fervent Catholic. The organization became a National institution in 1933, with the name Ente Nazionale della Moda (National Fashion Body) (ibid.). In 1936, the Regime issued a fashion dictionary in order to reduce or remove the use of foreign words for clothing items. In this sense, we might also remember that a simple piece of clothing, a black shirt, became such a strong symbol of association with the National Fascist Party that its members were referred to as Black Shirts, the very name of the garment (*camicia nera*). The Regime also issued a campaign aimed at consumers urging them to 'buy Italian', with the dual aim of reinforcing the moral code of a superior state and protecting the internal market from the growing intrusion of products coming from other countries. These efforts show that female aesthetic was considered an important indicator for the belonging of a woman and her family to il Duce's ideal nation.

Table 1: Organizations for Women during the Fascist Regime

ORGANIZATION	PURPOSE	YEAR OF FOUNDATION
Gruppi Universitari Fascisti - sezione femminile	Group of female Fascist academics.	1919
Piccole Italiane: up to 14 y.o. Giovani Italiane: 14 - 18 y.o. Giovani fasciste: 18 - 21 y.o. Fasci Femminili: from 21 y.o.	Integrate children and young women in the programmes of the Regime. Coordinate the work of all women's associations.	1921
Opera Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanzia (National Organization for Motherhood and Childhood)	Supporting and regulating pregnancy and childhood.	1925
Ente Nazionale della Moda (National Fashion Body)	Regulation and control of fashion.	1933
Massaie rurali (Farmers' wives)	Group for peasant women.	1934
Sezioni Operaie e Lavoranti a domicilio (Association for labourer and home workers)	Group for women working in factories and at home.	1938

Although at the beginning of the twentieth century a feminist movement was well developed in Italy as in other European countries, the sharp divide of classes made it less widespread. Members of the feminist movement were typically upper class and most of them had non-Catholic backgrounds; they were Jewish or Protestant and better educated than their Catholic peers. In addition, although the discourse of feminists was centred on gender equality, the family was still seen as the place for women, whose predominant roles were those of mother and wife (Willson, 2010). Although most of the Italian literature tends to focus on feminist figures who were committed to the fight against Fascism, a significant number of feminists had a role in the Regime, especially

in the early period of the movement (Passmore, 2003). This fact also brings to light a significant point: women were not mere victims of the laws imposed by the Regime. Most of them were convinced by the words of Mussolini and felt that their duty to the nation lay in their traditional roles. Many women believed that emancipation could be reached with the support of the Regime. In fact, the constraints imposed on women were gradual, ambiguous and accompanied by creation of initiatives such as fitness programmes aimed at including women in the public sphere. Thus, it would be wrong to think that the Fascist Regime did not support the development of a more modern form of femininity but, at the same time, the Regime's efforts at regulating women's lives and bodies cannot be ignored.

By the late 1920s, countries such as the United States of America and Great Britain had numerous birth-control clinics and information about contraception was available to women. Crucially, during the same period in Italy, a law declared illegal the possession, display and distribution of material publicizing the prevention or interruption of pregnancy. Indeed, in 1927 Mussolini launched his demographic campaign, which was largely based on the affirmation on the figure of the mother. Prior to this, in 1925, the Regime had established a special institution, OMNI (*Opera Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanzia* - National Organization for Motherhood and Childhood). The main objective of OMNI was the inclusion into the system of all those mothers who were not supported by a traditional family structure, such as unmarried mothers, widows or those women whose husband could not support the family. While supporting women during their pregnancies, OMNI came into contact with doctors, midwives and a number of officers, creating a network that supported a new and modern way of giving birth and raising children. In this sense, OMNI was crucial to

launching the medicalization of childbirth (De Grazia, 1992). The Regime's fascination with modernity was soon applied to birth clinics and, although it reached only a minority of women, this futuristic vision of pregnancy and labour has remained popular in Italy, as will be explained the following section.

The influential presence of the Roman Catholic Church is another factor that needs to be considered when describing the unique configuration of Italy as a state governed by a totalitarian regime. The relationship between Mussolini and the Vatican saw different phases and this ambivalence constituted the perfect background for the growing normativization of women's bodies. In the early 1920s, il Duce promoted gender roles that the Church considered "modern paganism" (De Grazia, 1992). Mussolini depicted himself as the embodiment of masculinity, while strong and virile portraits of him as a harvester, pilot or boat commander were common sights in the country. At the same time, il Duce described women as saviours of the nation in their role as mothers. As we have seen above, institutions such as OMNI were created with the intent of supporting mothers and increasing birth rates in Italy. Moreover, Mussolini supported social policies such as prizes of cash for newlyweds. Catholic activists advocated for a private model of family and therefore saw the possibility of state interventions or welfare programmes as threats to their sphere. The Church had women's groups that represented an alternative to the "fasci femminili", the women's group organized by the Regime, but although there are some examples of Mussolini warning women against "the bigots", it is still unclear if there was rivalry between the two (De Grazia, 1992). What is clear is that there was a substantial difference between the issues taken into consideration by those feminists who followed il Duce and those who were under the organization of the Church. The former were concerned about their political role,

advocating for the suffrage issue and trying to gain freedom from male hegemony and the latter were more focused on issues relating to culture and morality, always maintaining the attention on popular habits (De Grazia, 1992).

The Lateran Accords, signed in 1929, brought the Regime and the Church closer. In the Accords, the state recognized the holy nature of marriage. Even more importantly, the agreement included religious instruction in state-run schools and granted to bishops the right to choose who would impart such education. Hence, from that moment, the Church was able to count on public schools to spread its doctrine, which added to the already widespread network of active congregations and popular publications. In the mid-1920s, the Catholic Church, worried by modern women and their liberal approach to sexual behaviours, started a series of actions advancing new principles of female models and moral codes. Sexual transgression was medicalized, and the punishment for contravening the norm became concerned with the physical more than the moral: “Hence, masturbation produced tuberculosis, impotence, and spinal maladies; birth control caused neurasthenia, urinary tract infections, and sometimes fatal cases of peritonitis. Lipstick led to lip cancer, and casual physical contacts, such as occurred in kissing, bred disease” (De Grazia, 1992, p. 137).

The influence of the Church also impacted how women were allowed to play sports. In the 1920s, when the Regime was established, women both from the upper and the lower classes were largely engaging in organized physical activities, although certain sports such as fencing or motor racing were still predominantly male. Moreover, during the 1920s, Italian sportswomen competed in European championships with the support of the Regime (Gori, 2004). In the same period, the Church campaigned actively in the media against women in sports. The biggest concern was the danger of

mixed-sex groups, especially in sports like swimming and cycling. The pressure of the Church became more prominent after the Lateran Accords, as the Regime tried to keep a good relationship with the Church. During the 1930s, under the authority of the state sports federation, women's access to such sports was restricted and sports attire for women heavily regulated in order to make it less revealing. As a result, in 1936 there were only about 5,000 women involved in sports in Italy (ibid.). This change shows how influential the Vatican was, as the restriction on sports was openly against physical regeneration of the population, which was one of the main goals of the Regime. Il Duce's complicated agenda created a contradictory norm for women: "The Fascist 'new woman' had to stress and combine antithetical values in different ways: respect for tradition came to mean spirituality and tenderness, while modernity meant physicality and ruthlessness" (Gori, 2004, p. 2). The Church was not wrong in thinking that the interference of the Fascist Regime could have a profound impact on women's lives. As a totalitarian regime, Fascism pursued a new socialization of the country, actively using women's bodies as a site of normativization carrying profound meanings on women's roles and duties. The goal was to promote a more public lifestyle and limit citizens' private sphere. At the beginning, the propaganda promoted women's participation in society by encouraging them to become healthier, stronger and more emancipated. In order to do this, the Regime used different institutions, each created with a very specific purpose. In this sense, we can talk about a 'nationalization' of women in Italy under the Fascist Regime. Soon, every aspect of women's lives was under the control of a specific institution. As we have seen before, in 1925 the Regime created a specific agency, OMNI, with the aim of regulating motherhood. In the early 1930s, after facing controversies about the role of women in sports, Mussolini tasked

scientists of CONI (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano - National Italian Olympic Committee) and FIMS (Federazione Italiana Medici dello Sport - Italian Federation of Sports Medicine) to research and decide which physical activities were suitable for women. In addition, families were encouraged to send their daughters to health resorts. Set on the coast or in the Alpine regions, the resorts represented not only a way to make sure that the younger generations were growing strong and fit, but also served as a means of propaganda. Of course, girls and boys were kept separated during their stay, and every aspect of what was supposed to be a holiday was heavily regimented. Moreover, in its organizations for women, the Regime imposed a strict age segregation. The Fascist Regime imposed a political division of age. Women were divided into groups with different activities depending on their age: “the *leva fascista* marked the advance at fourteen from *piccole* to *giovani italiane*, at eighteen from *giovani italiane* to *giovani fasciste*, and at twenty-one, with special rites of passage, to the *fasci femminili* and full-fledged party membership” (De Grazia, 1992, p. 119)

Crucially for this research, it is interesting to note that different age groups wore different uniforms, marking a different status. It is also interesting to note that the political age segregation imposed on young women from an early age by the Regime was almost identical to the one imposed by the Catholic Church in its youth groups. The creation of the *fasci femminili* could lead to think that there could be an active role in the political life of the Regime for women. In fact, many bourgeois women believed that fascism and feminism could coexist and join forces. In reality, the statute of the *fasci femminili* forbade women from the political life of the country (Horn, 1994). Women’s tasks were thus confined to the fields of propaganda and social work.

Perhaps, as Whitaker (2000) suggests, the strength of fascist ideas and the endurance of the Regime's legacy lie especially in the contradictions that saw the movement rising. The vast majority of women who had children belonged to poor households and were not able to put in practice all the strict regulations imposed on women's bodies, including those on breastfeeding. In other words, the women who were least affected by laws were also those essentially tied to traditional families. For this reason, the medicalization of women bodies was mostly practised by a minority of women (those who belonged to the upper class) and for this reason the practice of a scientific femininity became entangled with the image of a woman with higher social status. This is one of the reasons why, while naturalistic and regimented models of motherhood coexisted, the latter survived the Fascist Regime and continues to inform motherhood in contemporary Italy. The ambivalent approach of the Regime towards women was embodied by a stereotypical figure that emerged in the years between 1931 and 1934, during the onset of commercial culture, called "donna crisi" (the crisis woman). This archetypical character was mentioned in medical essays, political dispatches, comic strips and even popular songs, and was described as the typical modern figure arising at the time in Europe and America: a physical model – androgynous, slender – with a new fashion style – short hair, wearing trousers and shorter dresses – as well as a lifestyle model – she dared to smoke in public – the new woman embodied modernity and was as far as possible from the curvaceous epitome of traditional, maternal women. In the mid 1920s, when the Fascist Regime was rising and consolidating its power, this new type of young woman was tolerated. In fact, during those years, Italy saw a proliferation of several models alternative to the traditional role for young women: disinterested in traditional home crafts and duties,

young Italian women were more interested in the company of their peers than were previous generations (De Grazia, 1992). Nevertheless, if it is true that the sharp divide between classes favoured a proliferation of styles to be experimented with by modern young women, it is also true that, by the 1930s, Italian young women's lives still gravitated around their families (ibid). As already mentioned, this multifaceted ambivalence created a conflictual yet strict regulation on women's bodies. Women were exhorted to forget the American model of womanhood, epitomised by blonde movie stars, with their slender bodies and their free and easy manners, in favour of the Mediterranean model of flourishing and modest womanhood, symbolised by broad hips and round breasts that, it was supposed, favoured maternity. The new style was rejected under the influence of the Catholic Church as well as the irritation of older women. The newly-born model of the emancipated young woman was named the "crisis-woman" (Chang, 2015). However, at the same time, women had to make themselves fit and strong by doing physical education and sports, both at school and in the new state's organisations, in order to produce strong children for the Fatherland.

The figure of the crisis woman is uniquely Italian and, unlike other representation of modern women appearing in other Western countries – such as the flappers – it is constantly denoted as a negative model by the Regime (Chang, 2015). In fact, the overlapping semantic of the aesthetic of the crisis woman and the modern woman might lead to believe that these two female types are the same but they are not to be confused. Although the physical descriptions are similar, the crisis woman was constantly described not only by her aesthetic but by the moral values that her choices of self-presentation represented. The crisis woman was often associated with sexual promiscuity, disease and bodily deformations caused by her bad habits. In this sense,

this woman was considered directly accountable for the decline of the race. Campaigns against the crisis woman and her unhealthy behaviours tried to banish this figure from the Italian press or to make it explicitly ridiculous (Chang, 2015). Meanwhile, the Regime invented and favoured a different modern woman, called “*donna nuova*” (new woman); slender but not too thin, physically fit thanks to her gymnastic routine, the new woman might sport short hair and short skirts, but “with a sense of moderation and always in the service of health and hygiene” (p. 36). In a social and cultural context largely influenced by positivist science, where scientists like Lombroso and Pende used anthropometric measurements to determine specific traits of personality as diverse as the inclination to commit a crime or the propensity to become mothers (Maura, E.; Peloso P.F., 2009), such contradictory and ambivalent semiotic flourished and became extremely popular.

As Horn (1994) highlights, throughout the fascist period the female body and practices related to it was a site of surveillance and intervention. Accordingly, the figure of the crisis woman shows how women’s bodies and their choices in self-presentation were loaded with the regime with a burden of national frustrations, fears and aspirations. The historical shifts that were taking place at the time, such as the change in gender roles, the rise of urbanization and consumer culture and the fear of cultural influence coming from other countries, were all reflected in the practices of self-presentation disapproved by the Regime. Moreover, it is important to underline that the body and its presentation were first and foremost sites where moral deviance showed itself. Against the pathological, self-disciplinary actions were considered obligatory for any woman who wanted to be a healthy part of the community.

3.4 Women in Italy after the Second World War

After the Second World War, Italy underwent a process of industrialization during the 1950s. Even after the end of the Regime, the typical Italian family was far from the European model. Instead, a model of family and kin interdependencies was prevalent, and in it women were expected to carry all the responsibilities (Naldini, 2003). Women were instrumental in maintaining this structure, which meant that their roles had to be controlled. Motherhood, as explained earlier, was especially regulated in Fascist Italy. The Regime introduced medical practices that became popular especially among the elite but remained virtually unknown to most mothers. Medical experts especially recommended “doppia peseta” (weighing the baby before and after lactation in order to measure the milk intake) and “orario” (precise timetables for meals, baths and rest). Moreover, childbirth was heavily medicalized. These practices transformed gestation and lactation into a national ritual and affirmed the idea that a medical expert was needed to help a woman become a mother. These practices persist in contemporary Italy and even though the general public has a better knowledge of medical issues, health experts’ authority has increased (Whitaker 2000). The Church is still involved in shaping the figure of mothers. After the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962–1965), the language of the prayer “Hail Mary” was changed to indicate that Jesus was the fruit of the Virgin’s breast, rather than her womb (ibid.). The fact that the practices of scientific motherhood are still popular in contemporary Italy shows that the culture of the Regime endured (ibid.). The contradictions between modern and traditional did not diminish the power of fascist ideas but acted as a base for regimented motherhood. In fact, because the vast majority of the population was illiterate and had many children, most mothers were not able to participate in scientific lactation, the practice

of measuring how much milk was eating by weighting the baby before and after breastfeeding. Because of this, the practice became entangled with the image of a more sophisticated, more competent mother, educated and part of the upper class. It is not surprising then that the scientific style of motherhood was, and still is, considered more beneficial, both for the mother and for the child, and has only been challenged very recently, although most practices are still recommended in public Family Counselling Centres today.

As seen earlier in this chapter, the beautiful woman or, more appropriately, the woman who pays attention and carefully attends to her appearance was seen as a threat by the Fascist Regime, as an unsuitable mother. In the 1980s this idea resumed by Catholics as well as Italian demographers, who blamed women's egotism for a decline in fertility (Saraceno, 1994). The marked interest in clothing during the Fascist Regime was connected with a more general culture particularly concerned with "la bella figura", the good figure. This concept, still crucial to contemporary Italy, indicates that the system of meanings that a member of a community conveys in a public space must be positive and beautiful, ultimately covering up any dark secrets that the person or their family might want to keep hidden.¹ Where men were encouraged to demonstrate traits linked to masculinity, such as physical strength and bravery, women could make la bella figura by controlling how they presented themselves in public. The concept of "la bella figura" (Nardini 1999) can be described as a quality of self-consciousness that is aimed at enhancing one's best features and disguising flaws in the eyes of the other members of the community. It is the effort made at looking impeccable, both in appearance and in behaviour. This practice is executed by conforming to strict,

¹ See Chapters 7 and 8

articulated and sometimes conflicting cultural norms that are related to concepts of morality. Nardini identifies three moments in Italian history when the concept of *bella figura* played an important role. The first was during the Renaissance (1350–1550), when the writer Castiglioni, in his ‘Book of the Courtier’, defines the principles of being a perfect courtier and lady, and where *bella figura* principally means balance. The second period is during the Baroque (1550–1750), when the same concept became a symbol of the compensation for the shame and sense of ineptitude of a country dominated by others. Finally, the third period is during the Fascism Regime, with its attention to aesthetics in various fields, such as architecture, military uniforms, propaganda (Nardini, 1999), and, as seen above, female clothing. It is important to keep in mind that the concept of *bella figura* does not only pertain to appearance but is also related to a person’s behaviour and self-presentation. At the same time, clothing and personal appearance bear a series of moral and cultural implications and, because of this, play crucial roles in the social judgement of a member of the community. Interestingly, Nardini identifies the concept of *la bella figura* in a female transnational setting at the Italian ladies club in Chicago, similar to the ones that are active in London.²

The so-called “economic miracle” happened in Italy between the 1950s and the 1960s, and featured the growth of exportation, consumerism and mass media (Hellman, 1987; Malagrecà, 2013). In particular, television assumed a central role in the lives of families and became an instrument of modernization for Italian subcultures, reducing the North-Center-South divergences, imposing a national language over regional dialects, and leading the emergence of the new middle class (Malagrecà, 2013). In the

² See Chapter 9

1960s, trapped between the Catholic doctrine that celebrated the rural past as an idyllic time for the family, and the left-wing parties that interpreted women's demands for better domestic appliances as an endorsement of bourgeois models, in working-class families the male authority went unchallenged (Bimbi, 1999). In fact, men and women of the main left-wing party considered feminism a bourgeois phenomenon (Bono & Kemp, 1991) while the Catholic Church opposed abortion and any form of female emancipation. Therefore in Italy, feminism was close to the extreme left-wing, Marxist groups. It should be mentioned that women's participation in the labour market has risen constantly since the 1970s but the majority of women were engaged in part-time jobs or unreported employment, as domestic workers or in agricultural and seasonal jobs (Naldini, 2003). Therefore, women's life was still predominantly focused in the private sphere. In Italy, only in the late 1960s did women became active in the political world. Thanks to the protests of 1968, women found a platform, later than other Western countries (Hellman, 1987). The discussion about women's rights became known in the 1970s as the "questione femminile" (woman question). In the public debate, the woman question in Italy included childcare, health, and welfare provisions, which shows that women were still seen as mainly instrumental in the private sphere, namely in the family. Moreover, the question of women was never posed as oppression from men or the patriarchy but rather as a consequence of the lack of support from the state for what was intended as women's natural duties inside the household (Hellman, 1987). Saraceno (1994) underlines the principles that underpin the welfare state in Italy to be in continuity with the regulations of the Fascist Regime, allowing benefits to women only as mothers or wives rather than citizens or workers. In other words, women are defined by the State as family-centred. The State fails to recognize that

women actually fill the gap of the welfare state: they cook lunches for the family as there is a lack of cafeterias at schools and work places; they care for older and disabled people due to the scarcity of at-home care provisions; and their work is scheduled around school programmes, as the vast majority of children have classes only in the morning (ibid.). Bimbi (1999) reinforces this point when she argues that the welfare state has not challenged the family paradigm. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that in Italy most children live with their parents until they get married (ibid.).

Several aspects of Italian feminism are unique, compared to feminist movements in other Western countries. First, if British feminism was “conscious-raising”, Italian feminism was focused on the concept of “autocoscienza” (self-consciousness) and struggled to connect with other disciplines (Bono & Kemp, 1991). Another important difference with other countries was that feminism in Italy was not institutional but remain mainly political until very recently (ibid.). Indeed, after the political campaigns that led to the establishment of public Family Counselling Centres in 1975 and the decriminalization of abortion in 1978, many feminist groups during the 1980s became even more autonomous and founded independent missions aimed at very local and specific goals. Moreover, national conventions were rare and not well attended (Percovich, 2005) and women’s cultural centres and feminist journals were often self-funded (Bono & Kemp, 1991). The main groups were in Milan, Bologna and Rome. Until the 1990s, women’s studies were mostly carried out by women academics within other courses, mainly Sociology of the Family, or even outside institutions. For example, a few courses of women’s studies were offered by trade unions in larger cities to adult, working women. Nevertheless, feminist scholars wished to be included in more formal educational settings, especially at universities (Balbo, 1981), although

academics who taught women's studies did not necessarily call themselves feminists (Bono & Kemp, 1991). Gender studies were not recognized until the late 1990s, with a rector's delegate in every university for gender studies only established in 1999 (Magaraggia & Leone, 2010).

The lack of women in the public sphere has led to another consequence that has been widely debated in the past ten years. In 2009, the documentary "Women's Bodies" highlighted the use of women's bodies in Italian television, indicating that women on Italian television are portrayed under a male gaze that has become an aspirational model for women (Cantú, Malfi Chindemi, & Zanardo, 2009). Furthermore, Gribaldo and Zapperi, suggest that there are only two female models on Italian television: the mother, considered the moral example, and the show girl, a woman who looks beautiful and young, regardless of her age (Gribaldo & Zapperi, 2012). The few Italian female politicians who have been under the spotlight since 1945 have been openly criticized for their appearance and often stigmatized for choosing a career that is considered incompatible with the care of the family.

3.5 The Italian Community in London

The history of Italians migrating from the valleys in Emilia-Romagna can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when permanent migration was not common and migrants moved around Europe for several years at a time, before returning to their villages. People from the valleys used to emigrate for only a few years, to become street performers or petty traders. The main area of destination was already London (Palmer,

1977). This pattern was stable for centuries and it was only in the nineteenth century that permanent destination became a mass phenomenon in Italy. The Apennine mountain region in Emilia was the main sending area to Britain during the nineteenth century. This area is at the juncture between Emilia, Toscana and Liguria (ibid.). Located in this area is Borgo, where at the time the lack of job opportunities, coupled with the proximity to the port of Genoa, one of the largest in Italy, created a constant flow of young people moving in search of better opportunities especially to the United Kingdom, South America and the Northeast region of the United States of America.

Between 1861 and 1961, Britain saw a period of mass immigration from Italy that was mitigated by a few factors over the years: in 1905, the Aliens Order introduced for the first time in the United Kingdom controlled and registered immigrants; in 1914 the Alien Restriction Order imposed further constraints during World War I; in 1920 the Work Permit System required alien migrants to hold a permanent job, which they were not allowed to change without permission of the government, and had to register with the police for four years before being allowed to request permanent residency (De Blasio, 1979). Moreover, the Depression in the 1930s and the Fascist policies that limited emigration from Italy slowed the arrival of Italians in England before the Second World War. The second half of the twentieth century, however, saw rapid growth in the Italian community (King, 1977). Peaks in Italian migration to Britain were reached in the years between 1955 and 1957 and again between 1961 and 1962 (ibid.).

Table 2: Italian-born Population in Great Britain

YEAR	POPULATION
1951	38,427
1961	87,250
1971	108,930
1981	89,000
1991	91,011
2001	107,244
2011	141,205

Source: British Census 1951–2011.

Italian-born migrants were in the top ten of non UK-born residents in every census from 1951 to 2001. After the accession of Britain to the European Economic Community in 1973, Italians were no longer considered aliens and restrictions on work permits no longer applied to them. Nevertheless, because of the economic recession and its effects, during the 1970s there were more Italians leaving Britain than moving into the Country.³ Indeed, it is estimated that 20% of Italian migrants moved back to Italy permanently (Colpi, 1991; King, 1977). These years became known as the period of “returning migration” (Colpi, 1991). Nevertheless, in 1977 Italian-born migrants in Britain accounted for 8% of Italian migrants in Europe (King, 1977). Indeed, in his 1979 account, De Blasio argued that Italians were one of the largest non-coloured migrant groups in London, excluding the Irish and Polish, but they were the most stable

³ See previous section.

group, having a long history in the city (De Blasio, 1979). Over the decades, on average of 30% of the Italian-born population of the United Kingdom was located in London, where the area of Clerkenwell was chosen as the centre of residence by the majority of migrants. Although Clerkenwell still retains a number of Italian restaurants and cafés, and the only exclusively Italian church in the city, Italian immigrants after the 1960s spread to different areas of the metropolis (Colpi, 1991). This is one of the reasons why Colpi argues that this generation of Italian migrants is different from the previous generation. They are, in fact integrated but less assimilated into British society (Colpi, 1991). They are also the last generation of unskilled workers to mass-migrate to England, as from the 1980s migrants were mostly skilled managers or students who wanted to learn the language (*ibid.*). These characteristics make the group studied in this thesis unique and particularly fascinating. Another reason that makes Italians in general interesting to study in the context of the UK is that, being white, they are invisible as migrants (Fortier, 1999), especially in a city like London which was/is increasingly multicultural.

In the diverse metropolis, there are two places where Italians meet to practise their national culture and make themselves visible in the community: the two churches of St. Peter in Clerkenwell and the Mission of Padri Scalabriniani in Brixton. The first was founded in 1863 at the heart of “the hill”, in what used to be London’s Little Italy (Fortier, 2000). The practice of a religion that is centred on traditional family practices (such as weddings and holy communions) makes it the preferred church for Italians (*ibid.*). Moreover, the church is exclusively Italian and evidently so, as it is located next to the Italian Community Centre, with large Italian flags signalling its presence on the street. The church of Padri Scalabriniani in Brixton was founded in 1968 and is

now multicultural, offering Mass in Italian, Tagalog (for the Filipino community) and Portuguese. Its presence is less obvious and almost unnoticeable, and does not bear any distinctive Italian sign (ibid.). Both churches serve as a meeting point for Italians, both for regular events such as Sunday Mass and for special occasion like religious processions. Fortier argues that the cultural environment that Italians create in the two churches is a “space of belonging” (Fortier, 2006, p.67): the place belongs to Italians and the space is also where they can perform and experience collective belonging to Italy (ibid.).⁴ Furthermore, during the 1970s, a conspicuous number of smaller clubs emerged, grouping Italians from the same region. The club of migrants from Borgo is one of the most well-known in London⁵.

Just as the churches represent more than religious spaces, Italian restaurants and coffee bars are also more than places where food can be eaten and shared. The catering industry has always represented a large part of business for the Italians in England, and the success of Italian food and beverages has permitted Italians to mark the city with traces of their presence since the nineteenth century (Sponza, 1988). During the 1960s and the 1970s, coffee bars became very popular in London (Colpi, 1991). After the ice-cream industry was threatened by British corporations and Italian restaurants saturated the market (Palmer, 1977), coffee bars in the 1970s became the new trend. Offering the experience of real Italian espresso and cappuccino, which has become extremely popular since then, coffee bars became places of leisure where Londoners could meet and spend time, rather than just consume drinks (Morris, 2005). During the 1980s and the 1990s, owners of successful coffee bars opened new branches, starting

⁴ More on St. Peter’s Church and the Italian Community Centre in Chapter 5.

⁵ See Chapter 5 for a description of the club of migrants from Borgo.

fruitful chains. Migrants from Borgo were the most successful at opening and expanding coffee bars, with husbands running the businesses and wives recruiting from families back in Borgo, helping them to emigrate to London and open new branches.

The movement of people from Borgo to London has been described as chain migration (Palmer, 1977; Colpi, 1991). The village was mainly sustained by agriculture and did not offer many other opportunities. Winters could be especially hard, with harsh cold weather and reduced produce from the land (Palmer, 1977). Information about job opportunities in London spread in the valleys thanks to previous migrants, who had succeeded in transitioning from farmers in their village to successful businesses owners in London (ibid.). Migrants from Emilia, the region where Borgo is located, have traditionally been active in the catering industry (Palmer, 1977) insofar as some of their names have become extremely popular in the UK, thanks to the success of their businesses.

Migrants often returned to Italy for holidays over the summer. They built villas in their villages, testifying to their success in London (Colpi, 1991). In his account of the returns of migrants from London to their village in Emilia, Palmer argues that migrants use strategies to project a wealthy image (Palmer, 1980). Migrants used to travel from London by car, showing off the latest models. Also, migrants “ensured that their children, especially their daughters, were as well dressed and well-behaved as themselves” (ibid., p. 279). Palmer describes a close yet particular relationship between the migrants and the residents. He argues that seeing each other only during the summer, when residents were rarely engaged in their agricultural work and

migrants were on holiday trying to make a good impression, misled their mutual perceptions. In particular, they all tended to generalize from this limited contact and considered migrants and residents as more different than they were (ibid.).

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has provided a few elements to understand the discourse on women in the Italian context. First, the period in which the Fascist Regime ruled the country was examined. Before the Regime took power, a feminist movement was beginning to spread in Italy. The Regime targeted women as strategic sites in order to reach its main goals: maintain society focused on the traditional family and increase the country's birth rate. For this reason, il Duce emphasized the importance of the state in reinforcing the role of women as mothers. Motherhood was indeed deeply regulated, and the specific institution of OMNI was created (Opera Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanzia - National Organization for Motherhood and Childhood). Women's modern lifestyles were considered one of the causes of decreasing fertility and therefore even fashion was controlled under the Comitato Nazionale per la Correttezza della Moda (National Committee for the Correctness of Fashion). Women had limited involvement in the Regime and never held power. The development of women's emancipation in Italy was stopped by these heavy regulations, and the image of a new, modern woman, which was becoming popular across Europe, was ridiculed by the propaganda and named "crisis woman". The involvement of the Catholic Church, especially after the Lateran Accords were signed in 1929, made the discourse on women, imposed by the

Regime, even more powerful, as the Church provided a platform from which to disseminate the propaganda through their own organizations and public schools. The Regime's project to socialize the country according to the State's needs found fertile ground in the specific social structure of Italy at the time. Indeed, women in Italy were still mostly involved only in the private sphere, and the middle classes, which were becoming prevalent in other European countries, were very small in Italy. For these reasons, the habits connected to the Regime and its profound normativization remained mainly connected to the upper class and became synonymous with culture and wealth.

The next section then focused on the conditions of women in Italy after the Second World War. A model of the family centred on kin interdependencies was still prevalent after the war and a number of practices imposed by the Regime still regulated women's bodies. In particular, the concept of "la bella figura" (the good figure), still prolonged the idea that the way women present themselves in public was connected to the status of her family. During the 1970s, women in Italy were still mostly housewives, and those who worked were employed in part-time or irregular jobs. Although there were active pockets of feminism in bigger cities, especially in the North, feminism never succeeded in becoming a national movement and women's studies were only officially established in universities at the end of the 1990s. Moreover, the use of women's bodies in Italian media is particularly problematic, as the only model proposed is heavily influenced by the male gaze.

Finally, the Italian community in London was analysed, referring to migrant flows before and after World War II and the special characteristics of the migrants who moved to Britain in the 1960s and the 1970s: these migrants are different both from the previous generation of migrants, as they are less assimilated into British society,

and from the following generation, as migrants from the 1980s onwards were skilled workers. Two aspects have permitted the Italians to be a visible and tight community in London: the two churches offering Mass in Italian, the smaller clubs of Italians who are originally from the same areas, and Italian restaurants and coffee bars, which have been particularly successful. Italian business were one of the most important resources for migrants from Borgo. Indeed, most Italian migrants moved to London with the promise of a job in a restaurant or café owned by a previous migrant. This dynamic is called chain migration. Since 1973, when the UK joined the European Economic Community, migrants often returned to Borgo for their holidays, maintaining an unusual relationship with those who stayed behind and being particularly engaged in showing off their wealth and maintaining an image of success.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the aims of this research and how these were addressed in order to achieve satisfying and coherent results. First, the objectives of this study will be discussed, starting from the main research puzzle and then detailing the research questions that have been at the centre of the research. Then, the methodological approach will be examined, as well as the motivations that make it most suitable for this research. Next, a section will be dedicated to the details of the sampling process, which was directly informed by theory, as suggested by the methodological approach. The methods of data collection, focus group, and in-depth interviews will then be explained.

The chapter will then delve into the description of the fieldwork, starting from the preliminary work, which entailed building connections to find possible participants as well as carrying out a collection of preliminary data. Then, the locations of the fieldwork will be described and the final sample presented. The description of the process of data analysis will follow, including considerations about the validity of the

study. To conclude, remarks about reflexivity on the position of the researcher as well as on ethical aspects of the research will be presented.

4.2 Research Aims and Theoretical Approach

As shown in Chapters 2 and 3, the topic of women's bodily practices in later life is an under-researched area in Italy. Moreover, the effects of migration on bodily practices has been left to a few studies focusing on ethnic minorities. In this research, the element of migration was instrumental in the effort to acquire a better understanding of how the body is socially and culturally constructed throughout the entire lifespan.

This study sought to explore how ageing affects bodily practices in later life and if and how migrating from a rural Italian village to London can have an effect on this interaction. In particular, the research was focused on the following aspects:

- What are the dynamics that regulate the relationship between the body and migration in later life?
- The elements that women utilize to make sense of their ageing bodies;
- The concept of agency as experienced by the participants;
- The forces that lead to changes in bodily practices during ageing;
- If and how women prepare and adjust to bodily transitions such as the menopause;
- The impact of the encounter with a different culture as experienced by migrants;

- Bodily practices in a transnational context, when migrants mediate between two or more cultural frameworks;
- How returning migrants give meaning to the experience of migration in their daily bodily practices;

This research intends to open new possibilities in the study of ageing and the body in light of migration and the encounters of different cultures. Furthermore, the focus on Italy could shed light on the cultural understanding of the body specific to the Country, which is documented by a large body of literature.¹ As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) point out, transnational research poses particular methodological questions, focused especially on the changing intersection and network of migrants and those who remain. Moreover, the methods must reflect the orientation of the migrants towards both the place of origin and the location of destination.

This research stands at the intersection between three fields: the body, transnational migration, and ageing. In line with the tradition of all three fields, this study applies qualitative methods. Indeed, the study of knowledge and patterns of meanings is better achieved when the voices of the individuals directly affected by a social phenomenon are brought to the forefront of the research (Coombes, Allen, Humphrey, & Neale, 2009; Gubrium & Sankar, 1994; Silverman, 2013). Moreover, the qualitative approach is better suited for those studies centred on the cultural context of the subjects (Marshall, 2011) as one of the aims of the approach is to locate a social phenomenon in space and time (Silverman, 2013). In particular, the methodology has moved from

¹ See Chapter 3

a social constructivist approach with a specific focus on the corporal turn of this framework.

When using qualitative methods, the researcher is faced with “a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (Geertz, 1975, p. 10). Thus, outlining the theoretical framework will allow for a better understanding of the following chapters. In their seminal work, “The Social Construction of Reality”, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) take a stance on what was to later become the sociology of the body. They point out that, since the human body is not completely formed when born, important developments take place not in the mother’s body, as for other animals, but in an environment that is both natural and cultural. The baby, they underline, does not only exist in the environment but is also already connected to the world. As the authors put it: “the human organism is thus still developing biologically while already standing in a relationship to its environment” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.73). Hence, the human being interacts with a social order from the very early stages of its existence, and its relationship with the world is mediated by significant others. Therefore, the authors highlight, social order does not only determine the survival of the human being but also controls the direction of the developments of the organism (ibid.). Berger and Luckmann call the relationship between body and self “eccentric” and they explain that “man’s experience of himself always hovers in a balance between being and having a body, a balance that must be redressed again and again” (p. 77). The importance of the body for the study of society and human activities is then

stressed: “An adequate understanding of any human phenomenon will have to take both these aspects into consideration” (p. 77).

If Foucault’s (1980) social constructivist approach understands the body as originally textual, as he believed that the body is known from social discourse and cultural norms that are shared in a community, Berger and Luckmann’s approach was heavily influenced by Schutz (1970), who was Berger’s mentor, and his intent to bring phenomenology to the forefront of Sociology. Schutz introduced the concept of “life-world”, which can be defined as the intersubjective social and cultural environment that is perceived as natural by an individual. The author argued that the life-world predates the individual, who is nevertheless able and willing to change it. Also, the life-world encompasses several fields of existence that are different for each individual. As Atkinson (2010) has pointed out, life-world in Schutz is an ambivalent concept, as it is both collective and individual: on the one hand, it is shared by all members of the same cultural background; on the other hand, the life-world is experienced individually. Therefore, “while the actual articulation of experience is particular to the individual, it remains patterned by the material and cultural conditions of existence and field effects associated with his or her positions” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 9). In this sense, Schutz bridges the gap between social constructivism and the concept of embodiment.

Bourdieu (1984) focused on the practice of the body and defined “habitus” as a series of dispositions, or trained aptitudes at using the body, that are culturally constructed. In this concept, agency is described not as conscious but rather as an effect of the limits imposed by social class since childhood; “silent censures” that are unconsciously transformed by individuals in the dialogue with the present. By understanding the life-

world in individual terms, Schutz allowed for a vision of the body in society that is at the same time culturally embedded, intersubjective, and individually perceived (Atkinson, 2010). As a consequence, the concept of agency is considered as a conscious experience, a notion that will be crucial in the next chapters. The intersection between the cultural background and the individual perception also explains why social codes such as clothing are not exact codes, in the sense that they are semantically weak (Twigg, 2013). Indeed, shared meanings are applied to garments differently by different women as a result of their individual experiences of their cultural environment.²

This bond between social constructivism, phenomenology, and embodiment has guided the methodological framework of this research. In particular, the focus has been placed on understanding the body as both an individual experience and as a social object invested of and constructed by meanings.

It is important to note that this approach is particularly appropriate for this research as it takes into consideration both the sociocultural environment and the personal life course of the individual, allowing for a better understanding not only of how the Italian and the English cultures affected the perception and conception of the body in women but also enabling the introduction of migration as a life-changing event in the existence of the women who participated in this study. Moreover, the concept of life-word is seen as a precursor that modelled the notion of socialization. In this research, socialization is understood as “a process of committing an individual to term of service in a group, by progressively confining his behavioural potentialities within an

² More on this in the next paragraphs and in Chapter 9.

acceptable range and by preparing him for the types of role he will be expected to play” (Ryder, 1965, p. 852)³ and is here applied to how the body is performed.

The qualitative approach of this study was informed by grounded theory, given the insufficiency of literature about bodily practices and migration in later life. Grounded theory seeks to generate or discover a theoretical model from the systematic collection and analysis of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which makes it particularly well suited for exploratory research such as this. Grounded in the data rather than in literature, the results obtained from this approach are acquired by a constant comparative analysis of the narrations collected, which are examined without any previous hypothesis (Silverman, 2006). Nevertheless, previous literature can play a role in constructing a grounded theory, as this helps the researcher acquire what Glaser (1978) called “theoretical sensitivity”, or the ability to find meanings and discern what is pertinent in the data.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) were the first to establish grounded theory and formalize its use. Their study on the awareness of death in institutions allowed them to argue that exploratory studies could be used to generate a theory rather than to verify previous ones, a process from which they developed what they called a “substantive theory”, linked to the context of the research, to “formal theory”, where concepts are generalized outside of their context.

Analysing the data throughout the research is the most important feature in developing analytical interpretation: collection and analysis are simultaneous. This constant analysis allows a comparison of data from the same subject, data from different

³ See also Chapter 2

subjects, and categories obtained from different subjects, and compare categories and concepts that emerge. Furthermore, theoretical sampling is crucial in the construction of a formal theory, as subjects are selected because they can bring new concepts.

Charmaz (2000) introduced a constructivist approach to grounded theory which will be used in this research. She argued that studies should put an “emphasis on meaning, without assuming the existence of a unidimensional external reality” (ibid., p. 521). Indeed, data are not treated as reality but as an interactive process embedded in their temporal, cultural and structural context. As narrations are constructed through the interaction between the subjects and the researcher, it is important to be able to specify in detail all the aspects of the research and the qualities of the researcher that had an impact on the generation of the data (ibid.). For this reason, matters of reflexivity will be discussed in this chapter.

4.3 Sampling

Sampling should follow a strategy appropriate to the aims of the research (Flick, 2007). In this research, the starting point was what Silverman (2013) calls “purposive sampling”, where subjects are not selected randomly from the population but are rather chosen because of their specific relationship to the phenomenon studied. In other words, participants have in common specific parameters that are of particular interest for the research. Following this direction, this research adopted the technique of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), or, in other words, a purposive sample that was theoretically defined. The sample was selected based on the

literature about women, ageing and the body, and the limited studies on bodily practices and migration, with the purpose of critically identifying those subjects who were more likely to have experienced the phenomenon studied. Additionally, the sample was kept open during the data collection in order to include subjects based on the contextual analysis of the data (ibid.), until the achievement of data saturation. Firstly, the need for a group with homogeneous socialization had to be addressed. As socialization is cohort dependent (Ryder, 1995), the women had to be in the same age range and from the same geographical location. Additionally, to address the questions raised by migration, the sample had to include women with the same characteristics who had moved from their place of origin to a different country. The choice of the sample was modelled on the understanding that including only migrants in the sample would provide a unilateral representation, the risk of which could be avoided by including the voices of “non-migrants” (Boccagni, 2012). In other words, two groups of women were needed: one of women who were born in one location and lived there all their lives, and another of women who were born and raised in the same location but moved to a different country during adulthood. All these women would need to have received the same socialization but would now be experiencing ageing in different social contexts and personal conditions.

A large group of Italian migrants was identified in London as a potential source of participants. Coming from a rural village in the mountains in the north-central region of Italy, the group was well established in London’s Italian community and known in their home village, Borgo.⁴ After receiving confirmation that it was possible to recruit women via the Italian Community Centre in Clerkenwell, a contact was also made in

⁴ The name of the village was changed to protect the identity of the participants.

the village of Borgo where it was possible to identify possible sources of recruitment (see following paragraphs).

The ideal sample included both women from Borgo who had lived all their lives in the village and women from Borgo who had moved to London during adulthood. A third group of returning migrants emerged during the research.

Second, the age of 60 to 70 years was identified as ideal for several reasons:

1. At the time of designing this research, 60 years old was the minimum age of retirement for women in Italy;
2. At this stage of their lives, women had most probably gone through the menopause and had had enough time to put in place potential adjustments;⁵
3. At this age, women were most probably still independent and not affected by physical frailty and/or cognitive weakness. This would prevent the discourse from becoming centred on medical issues.

4.4 Methods of Data Collection: In-Depth Interviews and Focus Groups

As this study works on an under-explored topic, a heuristic framework has guided the choice of the data collection techniques. In research there is a continual dialogue between theory, intuition, and method. The research projects advances on all fronts at once, while acquiring more data, discovering more on the field, and having a better idea of what results will look like (Abbott, 2004). A heuristic approach allowed a

⁵ The average age for the onset of menopause is between 45 and 50 years old (Pescetto et al., 2004)

continual questioning over the practicality, theoretical consistency, and feasibility of every stage of the research.

Two instruments were used for different purposes:

- a **focus group** was used in the preliminary stage of the research as a method of refining and testing the list of topics to be used in the interviews;
- **in-depth interviews** were used to collect the final data.

In both instances, narration was understood not as objective realities but as the product of an interaction; a negotiation of the features of the social encounter of all the participants, including the researcher. Indeed, participants to the social interaction orient themselves according to how they identify others. Moreover, the context also plays a role in constructing social interaction. It is important to consider the spatial features of the location where the focus group or the interview takes place. Furthermore, with migrants, both the location of origin and the location of destination can play a role in how respondents narrate their realities (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012).

All participants received and read an information sheet and a consent form before the beginning of the recorded discussion (Appendices D and E). The first detailed all the relevant information about the research (aims, procedures, contact details of the researcher and the institution, possibility to withdraw at any point without consequences) (Gubrium and Sankar, 1994); the latter was signed by the participant in order to confirm their understanding of the research and their voluntary participation (Silverman, 2013; Boulton, 2009). Moreover, all participants were given the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions before beginning the recording (Boulton,

2009). The focus group and the interviews were audio recorded, with the agreement of the participants, and were all then transcribed and translated by the researcher.

4.4.1 The Focus Group

Before collecting the final data, a preliminary exploration of the topic of this thesis was undertaken using a focus group, aimed at clarifying the themes and topics to be discussed during the interviews. Indeed, focus groups are used in the preliminary stage of research to test the “construction, utility or validity” of the tool of data collection (Foster-Turner, 2009).

A pilot focus group was organized with four women who live in a small village, with similar characteristics to the one where this study was based. The women were selected from the personal contacts of the researcher in order to gain better and quicker access, as suggested by Silverman (2013). A smaller group was judged best suited to allow more time for each participant to talk, as they were considered expert in the topic of bodily changes in later life (Foster-Turner, 2009).

The decision to carry out a focus group was led by the belief that a group discussion can bring out more spontaneous views (Brinkmann, 2015). Furthermore, the researcher can directly intervene in the discussion. This, paired with the interaction and discussion of the group members, helps to promote self-disclosure. The focus group helped the researcher to learn more about participants’ opinions on a topic as they challenged each other’s views: the dynamic of the group should stimulate comparisons and discussions (Foster-Turner, 2009).

4.4.2 The In-Depth Interview

An in-depth interview can be described as a verbal interaction between the researcher, who has a topic to explore, and an interviewee, who was chosen because of their knowledge or experience on the topic (Coombes et al., 2009). The main feature of this kind of interview is in its flexible structure: the researcher asks open-ended questions, leaving most of the conversation to the interviewee, allowing topics to emerge spontaneously. During the interview, the researcher is engaged as an active listener. The conversation is an active deed that requires time and generates meaning and knowledge through the conceptualisation of what was originally lived spontaneously. Indeed, in narration, the biggest effort is not in the historic reconstruction of events but in the composition of their meanings.

Face-to-face interviews are very popular in the media today and are considered a natural occurrence, although their actual form is the result of an historical development (Silverman, 2013). Nevertheless, the discussion that takes place during an in-depth interview should not be considered a natural occurring dialogue. The researcher should rather maintain awareness of positionality⁶. As Brinkmann (2015) has suggested, the interviewer should be positioned as a stranger both in the field of research and in the interviewing process, but always paying attention to the interaction. One of the strengths of in-depth interviews is that they allow the collection of rich and contextualized data. Moreover, given the presence of the researcher, participants are able to directly ask clarifying questions (Coombes et al., 2009).

⁶ See paragraph 4.9

Interviews carried out for this research were not considered objective accounts; rather, the focus was on the pattern of meanings and themes emerging from the interaction. A list of themes and topics to be discussed during the interview was constructed after the formulation of the research aims and the selection of the group of people to be interviewed, based on inputs from the focus group and the continual analysis of previous interviews⁷. The list served as a guide for the researcher, to be checked mentally during the interview to confirm that all topics had been covered. The order, the details, and the wording of the open-ended questions depended on how the interview developed, allowing for a more spontaneous conversation (Kaufman, 1994). The open questions were asked to stimulate lengthy descriptions and were not suggestive. Furthermore, the final question of every interview asked whether there were any more relevant topics to be touched upon. Although the interviews were not structured, a funnel approach was preferred when possible: a broad question was asked at the beginning of the interview, while more detailed questions were allowed to emerge from the conversation.

4.5 Preliminary Work: Exploratory Fieldwork and Pilot Data Collection

An exploration of the fields was deemed necessary in order to test the feasibility of the study as designed. First, St. Peter's Italian church. Located in the district of

⁷ See paragraphs 4.6.1 and 4.7

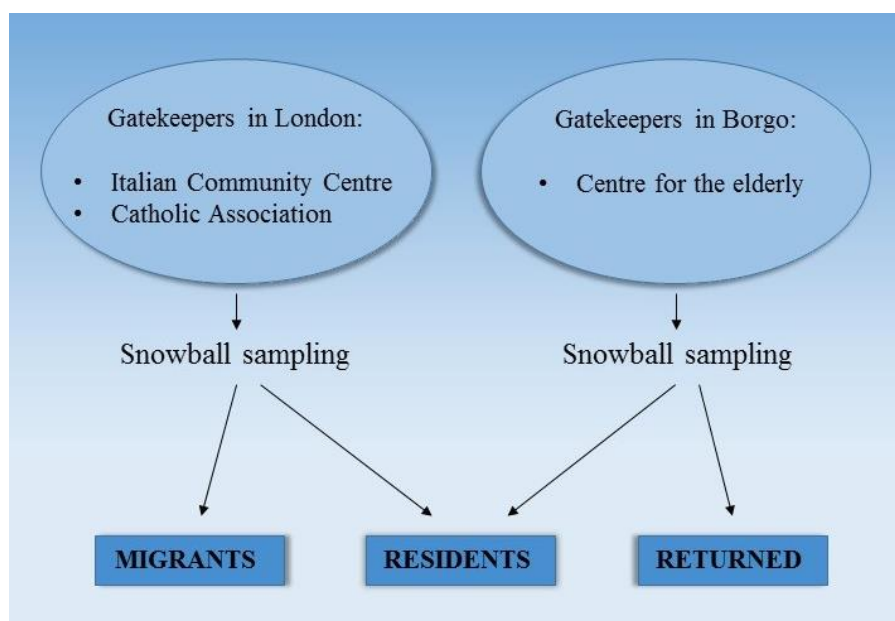
Clerkenwell, in London, was visited several times in order to gain access to gatekeepers. Many Italians in London attend Sunday Mass at the church, which is located next to the main Italian Community Centre in the city. As the migrants from Borgo are numerous and particularly active, it was easy to gain access to the first two women who were willing to participate. Then, a snowball sampling approach was adopted, letting the best candidates emerge from word of mouth. Migrants provided mostly contact to other migrants and a few Residents, as a result of the frequent interactions between the two communities.

As described in Chapter 3, not all migrants participate in the Italian community or the church, therefore the snowball sampling was crucial in order to achieve a more varied group. Although in other cases a snowball sampling could produce a homogenous sample, in this case the direct contact with the migrants was crucial to reach those members of the Italian community who are more marginalized. The migrants who attend the Italian church are usually those considered “successful”; i.e. those who were able to achieve a wealthy lifestyle thanks to their business successes, especially in the catering industry. Nevertheless, these migrants are often still in contact with those who were not as successful, as they used to be friends, neighbours, or colleagues in their early years in London. Some friendships are still solid, although the less successful migrants live in poorer areas and do not attend the Italian church in Clerkenwell. For this reason, being able to access the personal network of migrants, rather than gaining contacts only through the Italian church, allowed to diversify the sample in this regard. Migrants who have not achieved a prestigious status in the community were also contacted thanks to the mediation of one officer of a Catholic charity, which is based in Italy but has branches in many cities around the world, including London. The

charity has helped Italians in need of financial or administrative support since 1974, therefore is well known and trusted by migrants.

Next, a period of two months was spent in Italy, to explore possible sources of recruitment. A member of the town council of Borgo, responsible for the relations with charity associations and cultural events, was contacted. After three meetings with him, the Town Mayor, and another member of the council, access was gained to a local facility for older people. The centre, which has more than 300 members, mainly women, is owned by to the Town Council but is run by a charity association that organizes daily recreational activities for older people. The director gave access to the centre and became a negotiator for the recruitment of possible participants. With more than 300 members, mainly women, the centre provided contacts for most of the women who were interviewed in Borgo, the remaining being contacted thanks to the intermediation of other participants. In Borgo, the snowball sampling was useful to contact Residents and Returned.

Figure 1: Gatekeepers and sample



Before the beginning of the research, preliminary work was carried out in order to test the techniques employed to collect the data. Moreover, the list of themes and topics to be addressed during the interviews needed to be refined and enriched from the voice of women as it had only been gathered from the existing literature on the sociology of the body.

A pilot focus group was carried out with four women, aged between 60 and 70 years, living in a small village with similar characteristics of Borgo. The focus group allowed the exclusion of themes that were not considered relevant, such as those pertaining to frailty, and narrowed the attention to more specific topics such as the menopause, body shape, clothing, and the use of medication.

To conclude, two pilot interviews were carried out in London with two migrants originally from Borgo. These interviews were crucial in developing the focus on issues of migration and transnationalism. Indeed, after a preliminary analysis of the data collected, the comparison between the discourse carried out by the participants of the focus group and the themes brought forward by the migrants made immediately evident the differences that would then be considered crucial in the data analysis.

4.6 Locations and Recruitment

The data were collected between April 2011 and September 2011, with a first stage in London, a second stage in Borgo, and a third stage again in London.

In both locations, gatekeepers contacted during the preliminary fieldwork acted as intermediaries and provided the contact details of the first women to be interviewed. As renowned members of the community, gatekeepers were crucial in negotiating access to participants and gaining their trust. Moreover, they provided an initial guarantee that the research was conducted for a recognized institution, making the process feel both safer and less official for the participants.

Locations in London stretched from Clerkenwell, where the Italian Community Centre is located, to areas as diverse as Croydon and Chelsea. Participants' houses differed in size and style: small terraced houses, flats, and luxurious villas in the outskirts of the city. This is because migrants have moved from Clerkenwell, the traditional settlement area for Italian migrants, to other areas of the city, depending on their economic background. Inside their houses, all had objects that recalled their Italian origins.

Borgo is located in the mountains in the north-central area of Italy. The area of Borgo encompasses the main village, with a population of around 7,000 people, and a cluster of nearby hamlets, with populations that vary from a few hundred to about 2,000 people. About 30% of the population is older than 60 years of age. The decision to include all the villages in the area of Borgo was based on the assumption that place is defined by the meaning that people give to space (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). All inhabitants of the area come under the authority of the same Council and the same schools. Furthermore, the smaller hamlets developed historically around the main village, as the latter was and still is crossed by an important river and had a market, the main church, and, more recently, a train station. Borgo is considered in its entirety as having a geographical and cultural individuality that unites all the villages, insofar

as people who come from the smaller hamlets say that they come from the major village.

Figure 2: Location of Borgo



The two locations provide very different landscapes. Borgo is immersed in a green valley, encircled by mountains. Women who were interviewed in Borgo lived in houses surrounded by nature, with a few situated on the edge of the thick woods. In London, women live in an urban environment, where only some have access to public parks near their home. In Chapter 8, the participants' patterns of physical activity will be analysed, underlining the importance of their surroundings.

In London and in Borgo, participants were more likely to suggest their own houses as their preferred setting for interviews. Indeed, given the sensitive nature of the research topics, most of the data were collected in private spaces, where participants felt that their privacy was guaranteed. Only in a few cases did the women choose to be interviewed in public spaces: in London, these were at the Italian Community Centre

adjacent to the church, and in one case in a café near Piccadilly Circus; in Borgo, at the association for the elderly and in the central café located in the main square of the village. Surprisingly, the location did not predict the quality of the data collected: even those women who decided to meet in public spaces were very open and addressed the same themes as women interviewed in their own homes, including personal topics such as body transformations.

In general, the women perceived the interviews as friendly and relaxed, and often offered the researcher a coffee or a cup of tea. They were also very helpful in explaining the exact location of their houses and giving details on how to reach them. On two occasions, the women were not alone during their interviews: one woman had to care for her severely disabled husband, who could not be left alone; in another case, the interview started in the presence of the participant's father who was almost deaf and seemed to fall asleep after a few minutes. In both cases, the presence of a third person did not seem to affect the willingness of the participants to talk about sensitive topics. Furthermore, none of the women expressed resistance to being recorded. The women did not receive any compensation for their participation in the study.

The target age of participants was modified during the course of the research, as good candidates emerged. The final sample included women between 59 to 74 years of age.

During the preliminary analysis, the women who participated in the research were divided into three groups that emerged from the data⁸:

- RESIDENTS: 19 women who were born in Borgo and had lived all their lives in the village;

⁸ For the details of the groups and members, see Appendix A,B,C.

- MIGRANTS: 9 women who had moved from Borgo to London and are still living in England;
- RETURNED: 5 women who had migrated to London and then moved back to Borgo permanently.

In order to facilitate the reader, all the participants have been given fictional names depending on group membership: the Residents have names beginning with the letter A, the Migrants with the letter B, and the Returned with the letter C.

The third group (named Returned) was not originally planned in the research design but emerged during data collection and contextual analysis (Charmaz, 2000).

Gaining the trust of the women was particularly difficult in both locations. In London, migrants were suspicious as, in the past, their life stories had been published in a book with their full names disclosed. The women appeared to be particularly concerned about their privacy. In Borgo, the close proximity with other villagers and the general fear of gossip played an unfavourable role. For these reasons, in both locations, it was impossible to organize a final focus group, as originally planned.

4.7 Data Analysis

The data collection produced a total of 33 interviews: 19 with the Residents, 9 with the Migrants and 5 with the Returned.

The first two women who were included in the Returned group were originally interviewed as Migrants. In fact, the Returned group was not planned at the beginning of the research but emerged from the initial analysis, as a specific group that was confronted with the unusual situation of living again in their location of origin after having experienced migration.

The number of interviews was defined by data saturation: when new interviews did not bring new meaning, the data collection was considered complete.

Almost all the women interviewed used a mix of Italian language and dialect, with the Migrants including a few English words in their discourse. Only one woman, of the Migrant group, after a short exchange, asked to be interviewed in English, as she felt more confident with the language.

The narratives produced by women were not considered to be factual realities (Silverman, 2013). Instead, a grounded thematic approach was preferred. The analysis started after the first interview and continued until the end of the research to enhance the knowledge about the topic and allow the researcher to explore new aspects emerging from the interviews, augmenting the interview list with new items (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Charmaz, 2000).

The analysis aimed at “bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 207). An inductive approach was adopted, letting themes emerge from women’s accounts in order to acquire the instruments to access how participants interpreted and framed their realities.

The analysis was conducted by coding the data. Coding can be defined as the process of labelling fragments of data in order to concisely describe their meaning (Charmaz,

2006). Following the approach suggested by Charmaz, coding progressed in three stages (Charmaz, 2006):

1. Initial coding: themes that emerged from data and transcripts were divided in quotes to facilitate the recognition and comparison;
2. Focused coding: the research took an analytic direction and initial themes were compared and grouped into codes;
3. Theoretical coding: codes were analysed in their relationships and links to generate a new theory

Initial themes were identified by looking closely at the data for the statements that were repeated frequently or those that were somehow marked with great importance. Furthermore, while the analysis proceeded and came to a close, themes were checked both for internal coherence and cross compared (Silverman, 2013). The entire coding process was completed using QRS Nvivo 9, a computer software programme that supports the organization of data and the selection of themes and concepts.

As is suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), a constant comparative method allows for a more systematic comparison, which also provides the theoretical ground for the emergence of comparison groups. At the beginning of the research only two groups were identified: Residents and Migrants. As the research progressed, the Residents group emerged, while the interviewing process was still underway. At this initial stage, the three groups were constantly compared, in order to inform the sampling, which allowed the identification of interesting subjects as well as the saturation of the data. The three groups were then analysed separately at the Focused stage, for internal coding, and then cross-compared at the same stage.

Writing the thesis can be considered as the final part of analysis. Indeed, writing helped the researcher understand the thinking behind the practical procedures, a process also challenged by the difficulty in finding the language that best described concepts (Pelias, 2013).

4.8 Validity

Validity in qualitative research is a highly debated concept. Several authors have suggested that the use of grounded theory is a guarantee of validity, as the researcher is constantly forced to be self-reflexive and aware of each step of the research (Brinkmann, 2015; Marshall, 2011). Marshall (2011) also suggests that, in order to reach both data saturation and validity, negative instances should be included in the data. In this research, atypical accounts were taken into consideration⁹.

Many concepts of validity are focused on the preliminary stages of the research, especially in the design (Marshall, 2011). In this research, one sign was identified during the data collection: elicitation, understood here as the willingness to talk about the research topic, was high in all participants. This was considered a sign of validation, as the women were obviously interested in the subject and their accounts confirmed that bodily practices occupied an important place in their thinking as well as in their everyday lives.

⁹ See in Chapters 5 and 7 Costanza's accounts on returning to Borgo. She is the only member of the Returned group who prefers Borgo over London.

4.9 Reflexivity

The importance of reflecting on the position of the researcher in the field and, in particular, on the interviewer's personal characteristics that might affect the narrative produced during the interview, lies in the profound awareness of the interactional nature of qualitative methods. Wainwright has suggested that reflexivity management can be considered as an indicator for the validity of research (Wainwright, 1997). In qualitative research, the interviewer is, indeed, the main tool for obtaining data and knowledge (Brinkmann, 2015). Consequently, the data collected must be considered not as the pure expression of the participant's views but as the result of an interaction between interviewee and interviewer (Silverman, 2013). As a facilitator of the interview, the researcher is an outsider and an insider at the same time. Sanchez-Ayala argues that the insider/outsider border can be both beneficial and harmful: if the researcher is seen as an insider, the closeness can produce more revealing interviews but can also be perceived as dangerous; if seen as an outsider, less will be taken for granted but a lack of empathy could be detrimental (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). These aspects were evaluated at all stages of the research.

As an Italian interviewing Italians, the researcher shared the same cultural background with the participants, which was helpful when interviewees reflected upon their views about bodily practices and ageing. Also, the researcher was able to fully understand the three languages used by the women – Italian, English, and the local dialect – as well as their symbolic background. Furthermore, as a migrant having moved from Italy to the United Kingdom, when interviewing the Migrants and the Returned, the researcher was able to grasp the reflections on the differences between daily life in Italy and in England. Belonging to the same cultural area was identified not only as an

advantage, but as a possible risk of words and meanings being taken for granted. The researcher made efforts to defamiliarize the language and unfold conventional and formulaic images used by participants. For instance, the word “acceptance” was one of the most used during the interviews and was immediately identified as a site of multiple complex meanings. For this reason, the researcher asked all those who used the word to define it as clearly as possible.

Like the interviewees, the researcher is a woman. This factor was considered favourable, as participants were not embarrassed when talking about private and personal matters related to their bodies. Although there are arguments both for and against empathy (Brinkmann, 2015), in general, being interviewed by a woman was considered to have a positive impact and resulted in more revealing interviews.

As a person with an evident disability, the researcher was also asked by several participants to disclose the cause of her claudication. This is a common practice in Italy and was not considered intrusive or offensive. Nevertheless, as the conversations progressed, efforts were made in order to avoid the focus remaining on medical aspects of the ageing body.

The researcher is considerably younger than the women who participated in the study. This produced a favourable effect, as the women tended to engage in lengthy explanations of the bodily changes they have perceived with age, and the connected adjustments put into practice in order to project a positive image of themselves.

As mentioned before in this chapter, the women who participated in this study understood the topic of the research and made favourable comments on its usefulness expressing gratitude to the researcher for the chance to participate.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

Before undertaking this study, the researcher undertook two online courses at the University of Oxford about ethical conduct in social research. In addition, ethical codes of conduct of distinguished institutions – the British Sociological Association, the American Sociological Association and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) – were taken into consideration. Ethical issues were questioned during the entire process, from design to interviews to the final write-up (Brinkmann, 2015).

This research, including the information sheet and consent forms used before the data collection, was approved by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) of the University of Oxford in February 2011¹⁰. In particular, a rigorous protocol was followed before the interviews to control that the participant had read and understood the information sheet and the consent form¹¹.

In accordance with the codes of ethical conduct cited above and with the Data Protection Act (1998) legislation in effect in England, as well as the ‘Normative sulla Privacy’ (legge 675/96 art. 12) in effect in Italy, the data were edited in order to ensure the anonymity of all participants. The names of the participants and other sensitive data were removed from the transcripts. Moreover, the name of the village of origin was changed and pseudonyms were used in the final thesis (Boulton, 2009).

Finally, in this thesis, as often as possible, participant views were reported with direct quotations from the translations of the interviews, in order to ensure that the women’s voices were accurately represented (Brinkmann, 2015).

¹⁰ See Appendix F

¹¹ See Appendices B and C

4.11 Limitations of the Research

One limitation of this research is the restricted sample that has been used. Indeed, this study is focused on women that were born in a very specific area of Italy, which does not represent the varied regional characteristics of the whole of the country. Moreover, migrants interviewed for this research had settled in London, which is not representative of the entire United Kingdom. The study was also influenced by the enormous difference between Borgo, a small village in a rural part of Italy, and the city of London, in perpetual expansion and known for its extremely diverse urban context. This study has only focused on the self-reported health of the participants. Objective reports, such as medical records or validated clinical measures, were not examined. The bodily practices that were addressed in this research emerged from the interviews; therefore, certain aspects, sexuality for example, were not discussed.

The selection of participants also posed a few limitations, especially in London. Indeed, it was only possible to reach those migrants who were somehow still engaged, even marginally, with the Italian Community Centre or who had known someone who was a member. Although every effort was made to ensure the variability of the sample, the community of migrants coming from Borgo who lived in London is large, therefore it is probably more varied than it was possible to represent in this research. In particular, non-successful migrants, or those who struggled economically, tend to live isolated from the rest of their compatriots, and it is possible that their accounts could have added more nuances to this research. Unfortunately, it was only possible to recruit a few of these migrants, as a barrier in recruiting these subjects was posed by their lack of involvement in the community. As explained in Chapter 3, the specific group of migrants who moved from Borgo to London in the 1970s has been contacted and

interviewed for several studies over the years. Furthermore, a few migrants have expressed concern over the anonymization of the data, as in the past researchers have published books and articles including the full names of the participants. These problems with previous studies probably prevented some migrants, especially those who do not consider themselves successful, from participating in this research. A few of these limitations could be overcome with further research, something that will be suggested in the next section.

4.12 Conclusions

In this chapter, the methodological approach and the methods of data collection have been discussed, focusing on the motivations that have underpinned the procedures adopted in this research.

The main research question was stated: how does ageing affect bodily practices in later life and how does migration affect this dynamic? The research question was then detailed into sub-topics, such as agency, adjustments, transnational practices, and return migration, to name a few. The selection of a qualitative approach was then explained and justified by the lack of previous theory and the necessity for this research to pay a particular attention to the social and cultural context that surrounds the body.

The methodological approach adopted was then explained. The bond between social constructivism, phenomenology, and embodiment is at the core of this research and has guided the formulation of a heuristic configuration for the observation and

examination of the subject of this study. In addition, a grounded theory approach was applied to all the stages of the research, from sampling to data collection and analysis.

The sampling strategy, guided by theory, was then presented. Participants were selected from among women aged between 60 to 70, as they were believed to have already experienced the menopause but were also probably not yet affected by age-related illnesses and frailty. Moreover, the sample was designed in order to address questions about migration, including women who were born in a small Italian village and had lived all their lives there and women who were born and raised in the same village but had subsequently moved to London. Being born in the same village was considered necessary in order to control for differences in the early socialization of the women. As the sample was left open until the point of data saturation, a third group of women (Returned) was included during the research, as it emerged from the data collection.

The method of data collection was then discussed. . Before the data collection, a preliminary focus group was carried out with four women of the same age as the main sample and living in an Italian village with similar characteristics to the one that served as a base for this research. The aim of the focus group was to refine the list of themes and topics to be discussed with the participants in the actual study, which was based only on previous literature about the body in society. To test the interview topic guide, two preliminary interviews were also carried out with two women from the Migrants group. In-depth interviews were considered the best method of data collection as a source of deeply contextualized data, able to produce rich narrations.

Different stages of the research were then presented. First, the preliminary work carried out both in London and in the Italian area of Borgo was presented, with specifics about first contacts with gatekeepers. The locations of the fieldwork were also described: Borgo, in the northern part of Italy, a village with a small population, surrounded by mountains and woods; and London, the metropolis where some of the women had migrated to and lived scattered across different boroughs. The methods of recruitment, based mostly on snowball sampling, were then described, along with the characteristics of the final sample. The process of analysis of the data collected was carried out throughout the entire process of research, starting with the collection of preliminary data and the first interview. A constant comparative method was applied, where data were compared at different levels in order to expand the knowledge about the topic studied and enrich the interview list. This also allowed the identification of the best subjects to be interviewed (including returned migrants) and the achievement of data saturation. Aspects accounting for the validity of this research have been sought in the rigorous application of grounded theory, the presence of negative and atypical accounts in the data, and the willingness of women to take part in the research. Another aspect considered was reflexivity, understood as the positioning of the researcher as an element contributing to the production of data. Characteristics of the interviewer that influenced the research process were identified in her cultural background, gender, age, and disability. Finally, there was confirmation that the researcher has carried out ethical procedures to protect the anonymity of the participants, to ensure that they have been well informed about the study including their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Chapter 5: Assimilation

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, when individuals come into contact with the world outside their birthplace, they experience a change that can set them apart from the members of their same cohort that are left behind in the country of origin (Ryder, 1965). For this reason, the first dynamic involved in the interaction between bodily changes and migration is Assimilation, defined as the process of migrants coming to contact and gradually living within the community of settlement, rather than living in marginalized communities. Various stages are involved in the process of Assimilation, which takes place during a long period of time and involves more than one generation.

At the beginning of this chapter, questions of belonging will be investigated through the concept of transnationalism. In particular, we will refer to migrant gatherings of compatriots and their experiences of moving back to Borgo, either permanently or for limited periods of time.

Subsequently, we will examine women's thoughts upon their arrival in London. The impact of encountering a new, different society will be described, paying particular

attention to those aspects that shed light on different gender norms and bodily experiences such as clothing and, more in general, presentation of the self.

Accounts of migration will then be analysed as life course transitions, reporting the importance of factors such as education, schooling paths, age at migration, second language proficiency, and their impacts on the life cycles of women, in particular on their search for work and their experiences of pregnancy.

Following the descriptions of their lives in London during the first few years after arrival, we will compare migrants' portrayals of the different lifestyles in London and in Borgo today. Where the small village is characterised by a close network of social relations that favour gossip and mutual surveillance, the big city is considered the land of self-determination, especially regarding personal representation. In addition, in offering a multitude of social events, London seems to provide more occasion for widening and reinforcing personal relations.

5.2 Transnational Bodies

Migration can be described as the movement of bodies through borders. In this sense, just as there are official laws and institutions regulating persons as legal bodies, there are areas of personal expression that are regulated by socially constructed norms. As social spaces are not discrete, when a person moves to a different location two sets of social norms meet - those imported as personal heritage from the place of origin and new norms and habits observed by contact with a new social environment - and initiate

a complex interplay. With regard to bodily practices, distance from the family of origin and the community of the village makes bodily behaviours learnt since childhood weaker and less meaningful for migrants. At the same time, when settling in the place of migration, new practices are generated in migrants by everyday contact with people of other cultural backgrounds who enact different habits.

It is important to keep in mind that, as anticipated in Chapter 3, London and Borgo provide two very different contexts, hence two different life experiences for migrants. It is also crucial to remember that, as Elias (1978) has showed, the way individuals practise their bodies is a response to the social and cultural needs of their environment¹. The village offers a quiet environment that has hardly changed since the time respondents first moved to London; social events are rare or non-existent and close friendships have deteriorated. On the other hand, London provides a plethora of social occasions and cultural events that help the women feel linked to a wider community, although close relations are rare.

Upon arriving to London, the contact with a new community and the consequent exposure to new social norms and habits produced a change in the women's own sense of identity, especially in relation to bodily practices. In this sense, during the interviews, migrants expressed a composite sense of belonging or non-belonging; a complex mix of the memory of the past in Borgo and the actuality they embodied every day in London. Mannheim (1936) has argued that experiences are not simply accumulated throughout and individual's life but are rather articulated in a dialectical dynamic. Indeed, when questioned as to feeling either more Italian or more British,

¹ See Chapter 2.

most women could not give a definitive answer. Although they could obviously talk about the differences of the two contexts, they could not associate themselves fully with either one of the countries.

Barbara: When I go to Italy I feel Italian, because I am closely linked.... I was very attached.... (...) However, I feel 100% Italian. But when I am in Italy I feel more like the Italians.

Although Barbara stated that she felt completely Italian, she also contradicted herself when she said that she felt more Italian when she went back to Borgo. This means that, while living in London, she feels like she has lost some of her ‘Italianness’. Reflecting on this, she is able to express a key concept:

Barbara: If I feel different when I get there? Maybe. How can I say? I have assimilated something over the years that I have been here [in London].

As we will argue in the following section, upon their arrival in London, the women sensed a difference between them and English women. This difference generated a break with old habits, which left room for observing – or, as Barbara puts it, assimilating – new practices.

Glick, Schiller and Fouron (1999) define transnational migration as “a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders, settle, and establish relations in a new state, maintain ongoing social connections with the polity from which they originated” (p. 344). In this study, we argue that the concept of transnationalism can also be applied to the social normativity that regulates behaviours and practices regarding the body. This is particularly evident when we analyse the

importance of migrants gathering in London, and the accounts of Italians moving back to their place of origin.

Although, it can be argued, Italy and England are not geographically distant, we have to keep in mind that migrants in the 1960s did not have the technology to maintain a constant connection with their community in Italy and they were also unable to travel frequently, due to the high costs of transportation and the limitations of their migrant status, as already discussed in Chapter 3. Reading accounts from the previous generation of Italian women who migrated to London, it is clear that they felt marginalized, not only from their native social circle but also from the new community in England. The women who took part in this research were subjected to the same conditions during the first years of their stay in England but were subsequently able to develop a more continuous relationship with other Italians both in London and in Italy.

In Chapter 3 the several transnational gatherings - the Italian churches in London, the Italian Community Centre and the smaller local clubs, the restaurants and cafés - have been discussed. The club of migrants from Borgo was a drive of change when it was founded in 1975 and it became, in the years that followed, one of the most prosperous migrant community associations. Migrants from all parts of Italy already met every Sunday at the two Italian churches in London but the new association and its activities, being more focused on the Italian locality of its members, allowed migrants to regain part of their identity. The importance of the club of migrants from Borgo is recognized at the Italian Community Centre. As one of the members puts it:

Everyone here is from Borgo! (Fieldwork note)

Sunday meetings at the church and other gatherings still take place today and allow women coming from Italy to recreate practices of presentation of the self². The co-presence of other Italians originally from the same village offered women the opportunity to experience and re-enact a part of their identity. The location of the body or, more precisely, the proximity to bodies that are considered similar, proved to be an important factor in the construction of personal appearance.

In this study, fieldwork was carried out by an Italian researcher who commented during the first visit at the Italian community in London:

I was unsure whether the one I had in front of me was the Italian Church of St. Peter. The street was empty and there was no one to ask. After a minute, the doors of the church opened and a multitude of people came out. Then I knew I was in the right place. They looked undeniably familiar to me. Not only their body types – most of them were shorter and larger than the average English – but the way they were dressed: women sporting their best classic coats, heels, dyed hair with permanent waves, and men in suits, tidy but old. Even children looked Italian, although they must probably be third generation, if not fourth. [Fieldwork notes]

In these settings, it was evident that women carefully crafted their personal appearances, demonstrating a certain level of self-consciousness that they tended to refer to as their Italian origins. In other words, when Italian women met, they showed that they still knew how to act according to some of the social norms they shared with their compatriots, demonstrating those norms have not been forgotten. Moreover, this behaviour indicates that the Italian migrants consider desirable, if not crucial, for their

² See Chapter 9

social life to be able to communicate and share their original social norms with their compatriots.

Associations grouping migrants from the same village function as social spaces where “Italianness” is momentarily reproduced, out of place and time. This manner of being and looking Italian is, in fact, mitigated by something different, that has been assimilated in England or that has been acquired during the very process of migrating:

Women show off their best clothes and jewellery when they go to the Italian club in Clerkenwell. I have realised it today when I saw Bruna at her job: she looked like a completely different person. No make-up, no jewellery, no heels. What strikes me then is that this showcase for their wealth is often coupled with discourses about saving money. Once, a woman at the Italian club told me “Even the Ambassador’s wife shops at Primark! I saw her! Why shouldn’t I?”. I wonder if this is a characteristic of migrants, who had to pay attention to their economy during their first years here. [Fieldwork note]

It will be argued in Chapters 7 and 8 that women who had lived all their lives in Borgo tended to show off their wealth with clothing, while in England women migrants adapted this practice and only activate it when in presence of other Italians, either in London or in Borgo, although, as in the example above, with other migrants they are able to deactivate it. This could be the effect of behaviours learnt from migrants who moved to England before them and who have been subjected to severe economic restriction in the years following the Second World War:

Barbara: Migrants of the older generation are distrustful. For example, they used to say that one shouldn’t keep too much money in the bank, as to avoid showing if one is rich.

It must also be underlined that not all migrants were attracted by the occasion of gathering with others from the same village. Some women disengaged, sooner or later

after their arrival in London, from the Italian community altogether, although their sense of being Italian did not disappear completely:

Researcher: Do you still feel Italian?

Brigida: Occasionally

Researcher: English?

Brigida: Not particularly, but I get on better with English people than I do with Italians. I have never gone to clubs, you know, the Italians, just to be with them: it never appealed to me. I am more cosmopolitan, I like to be friends with everyone.

Levitt (2003) argued that, in order to understand transnationalism, it is crucial to remember that migrants are often able to maintain ties with their families and community of origin during the entire process of Assimilation. In their first years in London, migrants were only able to re-enact their Italianness during meetings with other expats but after a few years they were also able to travel back to Borgo for limited periods of time, especially during the summer, or were visited by their relatives for holidays. It is also estimated that, during the 1960s and 1970s, 20% of Italian migrants moved back to Italy permanently³.

The geography of Borgo was reshaped to accommodate the migrants coming back. There is an area of the village where houses belong only to migrants who return from the UK, either permanently or for holidays. It is a long road, clinging on to a small hill. The Mayor and Council of Borgo have reserved this area especially for migrants and have officially named it 'Via Londra' (London Road). Similarly, there are two roads nearby named 'New York Road' and 'San Paolo Road', for other migrants coming back from the United States of America and from Brazil, which are popular

³ See Chapter 3

destinations for those looking for work abroad. Via Londra in Borgo features a number of luxury villas, some of them with swimming pools. The area is particularly valued by villagers for its location, with spectacular views of the valley.

Because migrants are granted such privileges from local institutions and since many of them have acquired, and can display, a certain wealth, it is not surprising that returning migrants have had a difficult time resettling:

Beatrice: The first few times we went back to Borgo from London people in the village didn't have a good opinion of us.

Chiara: First of all, because I was coming from abroad, everyone gossiped, wondering if I was hired through a regular competitive exam. I heard all sort of awful things told around about myself, I felt so so bad. [...] Wherever I went, there was someone who was envious. I walked on the street and they made comments! They did!

Moving set migrants aside from villagers, as if the process was irreversible. Deciding to leave Borgo changed the women's status: they became "le inglesi" (the English), as they were called by villagers, even if they stayed in London only for a few years. This is not only evident in villagers' words, but can also be found in the migrants' narratives. Chiara is one of the migrants who had to move back to Italy, at the age of 27, due to family issues. She repeated often that she regretted moving back to Italy and could not stop the tears when talking about her life in London when she was a young adult:

Chiara: I like to live among people. When I walked down Regent Street or Oxford Street I looked at the shops here and there and I felt relaxed. Maybe I was young too, so to speak. Here I really like when I go to [the main city of the province], which is a drop in the ocean, but there is a little bit of movement. It lifts me up more.

More than 34 years after moving back to Italy, Chiara tried to recreate the feeling of freedom she sensed in London by walking in the streets of the nearby city.

The word ‘unforgettable’ was used by one woman to describe London. However, the women’s discourses show that what cannot be forgotten is the different lifestyle provided by the city, and the different self-perception linked to that. Nevertheless, it is also true that, as we have argued above, migrants did not forget certain bodily practices connected to their Italian identity, showing that their early socialization had left a permanent sign (Ryder, 1965).

Celeste: I used to come to Italy and buy everything. I always shopped in Italy. I have always been very Italian in this, I always wanted to buy in Italy for me and for my children. [...] I used to stay four or five weeks in London and then one or two in Italy (...), and before going back to London I used to buy everything for my children, for winter or for spring, always like this. And the same for me: shoes, bags, dress, coat, everything. I used to care a lot about this.

The women’s discourse shows a complex sense of belonging. It has to be noted that often the women recounted their first years in London using words such as ‘hard’ or ‘horrible’ but these feelings left soon after the migrants settled into the new country and were replaced by a strong sense of independence and self-determination. Also, the reduced feeling of otherness can be evaluated under the light of the process of acculturation, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. As a consequence, it seems that the women no longer identify with their original nationality but have specific traits characteristic of migrants⁴. In order to better explore this matter, the next section will focus on the differences between Borgo and London as experienced by the women at

⁴ See Chapter 9

the time of migration, trying to reconstruct the gap that weakened the women's sense of belonging in Borgo and leaving space for new habits.

5.3 Stories of Migration

Although most of the interviewees moved to London well into adulthood – after completing their education in Italy – some were brought to London during adolescence by their parents, hence their schooling was interrupted and they had to continue in different institutions and in a different language.

Upon their arrival in London, the girls were registered to attend the school run by St. Peter's Church in Clerkenwell, the district of London traditionally inhabited by Italians. The institution was attended by Italian and Irish children. Subjects were taught in English but the school also provided language courses for children of migrants.

Bice arrived in London in 1961 at the age of ten, with her parents and her younger brother. She vividly remembers her first day at the Clerkenwell School:

Bice: Ah, I remember the first time I was brought to the Italian school in London! I didn't want to go back but... You get there and you have always been in a village, you have never seen anything. I remember when my mom took me there, crying because she was leaving me. There was a nun with a hat, Sister Agnes, and then I remember that I was crying more than my little brother so he tried to find a handkerchief. I had none to wipe the tears of my brother, so he took the hem of my skirt and wiped his tears with it.

On the other hand, some girls attended English schools in order to ensure a better inclusion in their new country of residence. Paradoxically, they experienced more difficulties, resulting in wider disruption in their education.

Chiara moved to England with her parents in 1961, at the age of 11.

Chiara: I found myself in London, obviously in an English school, for girls, only girls, and there were 300 of us. I was the only Italian, without knowing a word of English. So can you imagine how it was for me? I came home crying more than once because I didn't want to go anymore. I wanted to go back to Italy (...) Once a week my school sent me to do an English course, me and other girls, Greeks, Indians, other foreign girls like me. We all went to take a course in English, in addition to what we were taught at school. [...] I couldn't even communicate. I didn't speak English and I couldn't communicate. In class I was in the last row up there, in a corner. I was left there until I learned English, really. It was not nice. As I said, I used to go home crying, saying that I didn't want to stay there because I couldn't communicate with other girls. They spoke to me but I didn't understand; they tried to get me to play with them but I was there and I didn't understand.

In order to integrate into a new society and become a part of it, the women had to learn a new language on arrival. Failing to do so created a number of issues and had effects on different aspects of the women's lives. In particular, it is essential to note that every respondent had to learn English at different stages of their lives. Interestingly, the lack of language proficiency at specific ages created different effects, even when the variation was as little as a couple of years. This is coherent with what Thomas and Znaniecky (1927) discovered in their study about the Polish peasants in America: personal evolution plays a crucial role in how the events connected with migration impact on an individual's life⁵.

⁵ See Chapter 2.

Costanza moved to London at 12 and felt that not knowing the language had a big impact on her future:

Costanza: I went to school for a year, but that did not... it made me very sad I have to say. Not completing school neither here nor there I felt very handicapped, in the sense that I couldn't speak Italian or English well.

Caterina arrived in London at 15 after completing all her education in Italy. Unable to go to school or work, she was only in contact with other migrants from her region, who only spoke in dialect:

Caterina: Well I went to London when I was 15 and then I was too old to go to school and too young to start working officially. (...) The first three years were atrocious, in the true sense of the word. I was struggling to learn English because obviously we were in an Italian environment. Then we only spoke our dialect!

Surprisingly, Chiara had the same difficulties, although she arrived at 11, but attending an English school made a real difference as she was able to practise the language outside the home.

Chiara: At first you could see that I had difficulties because we only spoke dialect at home. In London, outside, we spoke English.

Caterina goes further and explains how a small difference in the age of migration of only a few years could change one's entire life-course:

Caterina: Yes, those who were successful came here at an age when they went to school, you know? You see? They went to school, they learned. Because I understand English very well, I have no problems, but I can hardly write. [...] Also, I have my sister. She was 9 years old when we arrived. She went to

school and learned a lot, very quickly, and she was only 9. Eventually she became a secretary but I've always worked, as the British say, as a "non-skilled worker", mostly in restaurants.

Being able to complete her education in England, Caterina's sister was able to fully understand English, hence she was able to find better jobs.

On the other hand, girls of all ages coming from deprived families had more difficulties in learning English as they could not attend school:

Bruna: I started working very young because first, I had no chances with my low intelligence [she laughs] because of failures at school. And when I was learning a second language, I already knew a little, then they drag you, and no one helps so things did not go so well. Then, to go to high school, to be able to attend there it would have cost a lot of money. As only one of my parents was working, they could not help us to go to school, so you had to work.

In some of these cases, young women chose to quit school in order to earn their own income and be more independent financially. Looking back, Costanza regrets this choice:

Costanza: But then, you know, when you're so poor that you want to work to earn money to buy that pair of shoes... You don't think, unfortunately, that in life it is better if you study.

As stated before, not speaking English created different issues at different ages.

Benvenuta became pregnant as soon as she arrived in London with her husband at the age of 22. She could not communicate with the hospital staff but she was able to rely on her brother, who was in England before her and could speak good English, for

translation. This proved to be a successful strategy, and Benvenuta remembers the experience of delivering her child with joy, even if she did not forget the problems too:

Benvenuta: I soon found myself pregnant. So then when I went to the hospital, I didn't understand anything: a disaster! I kept thinking of my mom! [Laughing][...] It was my brother, the one who was here before me for a while. He explained when I didn't understand. Yes, it was very difficult. It was hard from the beginning, it was very hard.

Bianca's story was more problematic. With only her husband in London with her, she could not rely on a network of relatives. Taking care of her first child became unbearable and the child's health was put at risk as Bianca did not understand the doctor's prescription. As a consequence, Bianca's daughter was taken back to Italy by her grandparents, who raised her themselves for a few years.

Bianca: And then it was hard to come to this land as I did not speak English. I had the baby soon after arriving, my little one. I used to write everything on my hand when I took her to the doctor. Then my mom was still young, she saw the situation and that I couldn't speak English; all these problems with this child, to raise her, so she brought her to Italy, raised her for 4-5 years. This was a tragedy. There, I told you, those first few years were the worst of my life. For me it was very hard. When I tell this story now it seems impossible that all of this happened.

Many interviewees recalled their first years in London as being very hard. If learning a new language was clearly a struggle, other aspects were recounted as horrific. Once again, it is worth mentioning that these women came from a small Italian village in the mountains and had never seen a big metropolis. By contrast, London in the 1950s and 1960s was an expanding industrial centre.

When Bruna arrived in England, she had the support of relatives who had migrated before her. Nevertheless, she was not prepared for her new life:

Bruna: London was bad before, it was nasty, dirty. When I came here I went to Brixton... (She laughs). All black, the smoke of the train, you know, buildings were black, dirty. I had relatives here living in a council flat down there. Mamma mia! So bad, so bad. I was always crying, because you know I was only 20. I thought "Mamma mia, how am I going to get used to this?"

If the surroundings were not appealing, neither was the lifestyle. Migrants had to work hard in order to gain enough to live and to abide by the laws regulating immigration which were quite strict at the time. Many interviewees were employed in the catering industry, often by migrants who had previously come from the same valleys and migrated to the UK between the two wars.

Barbara: Italian women have worked very hard here [in the UK]. You shouldn't look at them as they are now. Emigration is high from our valley, and they didn't come for adventure, they came because they needed jobs and there was nothing there. So they associated themselves with the Italians who were already here and they have engaged in catering.

Barbara was one of the so-called "successful migrants": those who were able to disengage from their first employers and acquire a certain wealth running their own businesses. Still, she recalls the sense of uncertainty and danger that was passed on by older migrants:

Barbara: In the older generation there was a little mistrust. For example, they used to tell new migrants not to put too much money in the bank so as not to show how rich they were.

Bice was not as successful and worked all her life for an employer. As with many others in her situation, she felt that wealth created a division within the Italian community:

Bice: But once the migrants were showing off their wealth, those with restaurants showed their beautiful cars. It was a pageant at the Italian Church.

It was a migrant thing: the better your car or your clothes, the more people said "They have money". They used to be poor people, they wanted everyone to know that they went away to make money.

Moving to London proved to be a difficult life choice for all the women interviewed: a new language, a new environment, solitude, and hard work. Nevertheless, all the women who moved to London were absolutely positive about their experiences as a whole.

The word most used to describe life in London was "freedom". All the women who migrated to England highlighted the feeling of independence and disengagement they experienced in London:

Betta: But from the point of view of independence, freedom: that was heaven. You could do what you wanted, you dressed however you wanted to. If you wanted you could put a feather in your hair in the morning and walk around with... Ladies went out with rollers in their hair: you could do it.

At the same time, this freedom did not make them feel disconnected. Instead, the women always felt part of a wider community, made up not only of Italian migrants:

Celeste: Yes, I have been in London for almost 41 years. (...) It's an unforgettable city, one can never remove from one's life because it has given us so much. London is a city that for us Italians... England has given a lot to us. It gave us freedom of choice, freedom to live, freedom to communicate, to do

everything that you wanted. If you wanted you could earn money, or if you couldn't earn money you were helped, you were supported. The bureaucratic system is enviable and so good. I've never had any problems. One wouldn't believe the people I hung out with! And I had a great time. I never felt a stranger in their midst. Not me. They never threw it back at me.

Migrants felt at home in London, to the point that, after spending many years in England, moving back to Italy would feel like migrating again:

Bice: I couldn't see myself going back. Migration is only done once. They have been good. The British have been the most welcoming Country for migrants. Just with the heart.

Some of the women interviewed for this research did have to move back to Borgo, and none of them did so of their own volition. Most of these women still cry when remembering their lives in London. Living in a small village is, for them, too difficult now, as they feel not only limited in their opportunities for socialising but also feel under the constant scrutiny of other inhabitants of the village. Furthermore, some women move back regularly during the summer or winter, and stay in Borgo for a limited period. Most of them miss the freedom of the city and look forward to returning to England. These aspects will be analysed in the following section.

5.4 Life in Borgo

Borgo is a small village or, more accurately, a set of small villages, located in the Apennine Mountains at the intersection of the Emilia, Liguria and Tuscany regions. Life mainly revolves around the many cafés on the high street. There is a community

centre where older people meet to chat or play cards, which is run by a charity association that organizes activities and events such as day trips to nearby tourist locations. The village is home to a small but well-known hospital, considered excellent. For those elderly who are not able to live an independent life, the City Council, in collaboration with the national health agency, offers a nursing home, which is considered one of the best in Italy for its beautiful location and the excellent quality of life provided to patients.

Although Borgo may look like an ideal place for older people, a place where retirement and old age are well taken care of, most migrants who regularly go back from London do not seem to appreciate life in the village.

Barbara: Borgo I think is a bit limited, I find it limited. I still have friends that I studied with. I feel like them, yes... It seems to me though that their whole lives are about gossip. Then again, it has to be said that if you live in Borgo and want to see an exhibition you have to go to the nearest city. In London, I make a phone call and within half an hour I am in the city centre. On Saturday morning if there's an exhibition I'm there. Women there (in Borgo) are still bound to doing their embroidery, a decorated dish, the recipe they have cooked.

Returning migrants reported that Borgo did not offer opportunities to engage in cultural life. In fact, although Borgo is well connected to nearby cities by train and a motorway, they are still more than an hour away. This restricted environment limits the women of the village who are, in the views of returning migrants, still tied to traditional activities. Furthermore, the small community seems to engage in a particularly lively activity of gossip.

Benedetta: In fact I'm going back to Borgo, I like going back, I talk, I want to talk about everything; with men or women, I do not care. But it bothers me because the gossip is something different, it is like a sword that cuts into the brain because you... you have to understand that none of us is perfect, and that each one of us is unique. [...] This I realized ties women down because we are talking about women, but in men it is the same: they are more gossipy than women. But since the woman is more complicated, it's more... because they lack inputs. Elderly people have to look out for inputs.

The chatter in the village particularly bothered those who have moved back from London permanently, as they have had to deal with practices that they do not find as important anymore. Caterina recounts how, upon her arrival, she was surprised by the lack of confidentiality shown by the locals.

Caterina: Instead, the problem of the small village... I was so naive when I got back really... disarming, because I couldn't understand what someone else could do, so ... Maybe you say, you open up to a person but this person doesn't keep it to themselves, and it is never retold in the right context. I see that they [the women of the village] are ruining their lives for nothing.

The difference between Borgo and London is striking. In a big city, social networks are wider and more various. In contrast, in a small village, social connections are closer and, consequently, more rigid. Undesired labels are easier to acquire and harder to forget. As discussed in Chapter 2, this form of social surveillance creates what Foucault (1977; 1979) called “disciplinary power”, a form of micro-control perpetrated by the members of the community on their fellow citizens that has a powerful influence on how individuals live their life in society.

The social pressure of the village was stressful for the women who moved back, as they had to learn new norms of trust and how to present and position themselves in a context which pays particular attention to the personal aspects of women's lives.

Chiara: Here (in Borgo) you will find people are more envious, always in a warning mood. There (in London) it was like a big family. (...) In England I never met envious people, but ... We used to give birthday gifts to each other, we exchanged Christmas gifts. I had a great time. British girls have left me with a beautiful memory. And boys too... Here there is too much envy. I find that envy especially in small villages. But generally, not just at work. At first I didn't understand what it meant here, because I never experienced it.

Costanza, who returned to Italy after retirement, describes Borgo as an "evil" community, where it is almost impossible to live. She also recognizes that this way of life is unique to Italians:

Costanza: In my opinion there is evil, because people can't live well like this. Italians live well because they are all like that, but if a foreigner came to live here they would see the difference. Because even in a small village you see the difference.

Chiara also talked about the "gaze", the consciousness of being watched and judged by other members of the village. Clothing was again picked up on as a means of surveillance, where a woman is examined and judged on the basis of what she wears:

Chiara: But here, especially in such a small village, you should always dress in a certain way. If you don't, immediately someone will say "Look at the clothes she is wearing!". In London, that doesn't happen. You wear anything, no one looks at you, no one says anything.

Of particular interest was the conversation with Bice. As she was in Borgo for the summer, the interview was carried out at her childhood residence, a rural farmhouse in a very isolated area. There are no other houses in sight, only fields and the woods, and no one else was inside the house. Nevertheless, Bice could not help but whisper when she was talking about the people of the village. Even in an isolated place, she felt eyes on her and in danger of causing gossip. In this extract, she describes the different feelings she gets in Borgo and London:

Bice: [She whispers] There is no freedom. In all these villages here people stick their noses into your business. Long live freedom! Money can't buy it! For a woman, a woman! I see that my mom lived here but couldn't do anything. She had to hide under the table. That generation there ... I also had to, when I was here ... [Starts to speak louder] You must have freedom! [She whispers] But also here in the villages they look at each other. But why? But why? You see... Instead, there [in London] I had the freedom, with my children, my husband, so I did what I wanted.

Another point she highlighted was the ambivalent role of the family of origin: while it was useful to rely on relatives, they could also limit freedom and continue the habits of the village even when living in London:

Bice: It is one thing to say you miss your family, but that family keeps you tied; you must do what they say. When I had my mom in London, I always had to do such and such. However, when she retired and moved back to Borgo I found freedom and I have never lost it since then!

The close connections of people in the village create gossip. Returning migrants felt the pressure of an overpowering social surveillance and the loss of a certain level of their autonomy. At the same time, this environment did not provide the traditional benefits expected by the community. Indeed, interviewees felt that the only thing that

had changed in Borgo was the quality of friendship, and not for the better. Instead, they said, maintaining good social relations was now as difficult as it was in London:

Costanza: Considering all the years I lived in London, I knew my neighbours but I never had a conversation with them. Very difficult. Yes, you say "good morning", "good evening", "how are you?", but you don't make friends. But it has also changed over the years here in Borgo I have to say. It's changed here too. Everyone is ... If you go to someone's house now, you only go because you're invited. Once, you would knock at the door and the door was always open: that much has changed. But that's it. Now it's like that everywhere, isn't it? Because people work a lot. They have to. Once women were more at home; even in villages the doors were always open. I mean, there was always a little old lady.

These circumstances seemed to affect more women than men, but it has to be said that only women were interviewed:

Bice: Then life in the countryside should be free but it is not, it is not. Freedom is ... freedom. And they (the other migrants) all say this! This is the reason why wives don't want to come back. Only husbands; husbands say they would...

5.5 London Today

In migrants' accounts, London represented the land of freedom, especially with regard to personal expression. This condition was enhanced by the multitude of opportunities to engage in an intense cultural life offered by the city:

Bice: In London there is always something to see. You go to the city centre and there is one thing or the other... They say "If you're bored of London, you're bored of life". It's true. Even my kids say it. The theatre or the cinema. It's like my dad says, when Prince William got married, it is not so much for the Royal Family but you don't pay anything to go there and stand

to see it. My dad says "In London you can always have a good time."

Bianca compared the variety of opportunities she found in England to life in Borgo. Close social relations in Italy were juxtaposed with the variety of social occasions offered by London. The latter is preferred, even missed, evoking once again the freedom so frequently mentioned by migrants when talking about London:

Bianca: I feel freer. In Italy they are perhaps closer to their friends, but there are other things I miss. Like when I go out in the car, I go to the supermarket, the city centre, warehouses, that maybe if I'm in Borgo, I don't go to the city every day. It is not every day that I go to the city but here we'll go to a shopping centre and we stay out all day, having fun, looking at the shops, having a coffee.

Bruna clearly explained the importance of living in a place that offers a variety of events and cultural institutions. Indeed, these opportunities facilitated social interactions with friends and relatives, helping older women to connect with the social fabric of the city:

Bruna: Then even with my little grandson sometimes we go, we go to the galleries, you know, the Tate Gallery, the New Tate Gallery, then there's also those others in Trafalgar Square, the National Gallery; there is always something even for the children and then they take you... make tours, they explain, it is interesting. And then there are all the museums in South Kensington. We are always there, at the Science Museum, which is also interesting. You go because you have to take the grandson, but often we go to the opera with my friend, to the Royal Festival Hall. There are events and I say "Let's go!"

As demonstrated in several accounts, most interviewees preferred a more culturally-active life in London to a quiet, withdrawn one in Borgo:

Bice: I think that in London there is enormous freedom. There is a huge amount of freedom: you feel free, do what you like, no one criticizes you, nobody... and it's a freedom that... I don't know, perhaps in the countryside... perhaps in the countryside it's another life. It's great, however, maybe because you're in a city. I don't know. I have been very happy in London; I feel part of London. [...] Freedom is the most beautiful thing that England has given us. [...] Freedom is one thing, freedom is something that is precious. My life is so beautiful. I've had it so good. I would not change it for anything.

Only one of the women preferred her life in Borgo. Costanza moved to London at age 12 with her parents who worked as non-skilled workers all their lives. Throughout this period, the family fostered a dream of going back to what they considered “home”:

Costanza: I feel more at home [in Italy]. Although I have lived there (in London) for more than 50 years. [...] I spent my childhood always thinking that I had to go back to Italy because that was my home. A strange thing; I don't know how to explain it.

On the other hand, there seems to be more than nostalgia in Costanza's discourse. As previously reported, she described the community of Borgo as “evil” but, at the same time, found it easier to connect with the inhabitants of the village. Costanza seemed to enjoy life in Borgo for the same reasons that other women did not: its peaceful environment and tighter social connections.

Costanza: I prefer living in Borgo because I have a life that is more... I think it's a bit kinder to the elderly. [...] I feel that I age faster when I am in the UK.

Nevertheless, what is important to note here is that the pleasure of living in Borgo is linked by Costanza to clothing normativity and social surveillance, those same aspects that the Migrants do not like. In fact, it will be argued in Chapter 8, practices of

appearance management are seen by women of the village as an effective way to avoid or delay the label “old”, both at a subjective and intersubjective level.

Costanza: Maybe this is the reason why I feel better here (in Borgo): having more occasions here, I change my clothes more often. In fact, I don't even bring some of my best clothes when I go to London, because I know I wouldn't wear them there.

Actually, Costanza goes further, explaining that:

Costanza: Maybe this is not good, because not everyone can live well here. Only Italians can live well here, but if some foreigners came to live here, they would definitely notice the difference.

5.6 Conclusions

Social scientists have argued that migration, as an embodied experience, causes a body to be displaced and then emplaced in two different social locations. In this process, norms and values acquired from the community of origin entangle with new habits and are simultaneously both weakened by the distance from similar bodies and remembered by the proximity to compatriots. In addition to this, the place where bodies are located seems to have a significance for how this mixed normativity is actually carried out. In fact, migrants are able to employ different practices in different locations or social occasions. In this sense, transnationalism is not only a personal experience of having two or more cultural backgrounds but is a social perspective, made possible by various forms of connections with the place of origin and the integration into the place of destination. This aspect will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

In the women's narratives of migrating from Borgo to London, migration was recounted as a positive life transition. From the collected data, factors such as educational paths and second language proficiency seem to have played important roles in women's life trajectories though moments of hardness were reported, especially in recalling the first years of settling in London. Nevertheless, at the time when the interviews were carried out, women expressed satisfaction with their lives in England.

In particular, we have learnt that, after migrating from Borgo to London, women who took part in this study changed conceptions and norms regarding their bodies. We have argued that this transformation was produced by three factors:

- the **difference** between Borgo and London as social contexts and, consequently, between Italian and English women's behaviours;
- the **distance** from the place of origin;
- the **proximity** to compatriots and the ability to maintain a connection with the community in Borgo.

In the women's accounts, London is mostly defined by the word "freedom", inflected in different meanings, from spatial mobility to more fluid social connections. This liberty was also reflected in the different habits of English women. However, the word "freedom" seems to mostly signify lack of social surveillance. Indeed, the Italian women underlined the difference between London and Borgo especially in terms of gaze: Borgo is described as a restricted community, characterized by a network of inhabitants who observe, talk about, and evaluate women based on their clothing

habits. In contrast, the women soon noted that London inhabitants had different approaches to bodily practices, which they interpreted as a lack of normativity.

Equally, a certain level of disconnection from the family of origin was reported as having an empowering effect: the story of Benvenuta, who kept thinking about her mother in Italy while delivering her first baby in a foreign country without speaking the language, clearly exemplifies the efforts and resources these women had to employ in order to overcome difficulties.

At the same time, the women were not completely disconnected from their community of origin, as they were able to engage in activities and meetings with other people from Borgo and the nearby valleys. This shows the women's need to maintain contact with their place of origin and their desire to re-enact bodily behaviours that are linked to their Italian background.

Examining the narrations of the women who moved back from London to Borgo, either permanently or for limited periods of time, it is clear that the act of migration has somehow set them outside the community. This is true also for those women who only spent a few years in England. Indeed, upon their return, they found it difficult to integrate into a community where other inhabitants did not seem trustworthy in terms of confidentiality and where non-written rules of mutual scrutiny were remarkably strong.

In other words, London, as a metropolis, is defined by social relations that are less close and are experienced as less restrictive. Moreover, London is a multicultural centre, where Italian women came into contact with migrants from all over the world, experiencing intercultural relations and observing a diversity of models of femininity.

Indeed, this kind of context seems to favour the exposure to social norms that are less defined and more various. In this sense, a multicultural, urban setting enhances the sense of individual autonomy, as women are able to observe new ways of managing their bodies, a process that has a transformative effect on their bodily practices.

Chapter 6: Acculturation

6.1 Introduction

The process of Assimilation, as explored in Chapter 5, allowed the women who moved to the UK to come into contact with the culture of settlement in London, although the Migrants who have participated to this research underwent only an initial and mild form of Assimilation. Indeed, it has to be noted that Assimilation is a long process, which can involve different generations. Participants in this research were all first generation migrants and were subjected to an intense impact when they started experiencing and living in a different social context. These circumstances make the management of the body more problematic, since the cultural normativity acquired from the place of origin does not apply in the society of settlement, hence women are compelled to observe and learn new habits and norms. These changes on how the body is practised in society are particularly important, as the body carries the first signs of social interaction. Indeed, in contemporary Western societies, the body is not natural, it is a “civilized body” (Shilling, 2012), both controlled and invested of social meanings that are deeply entangled with an individual’s cultural and geographical location¹.

¹ See Chapter 2.

As is to be expected, the highest degree of difficulty in managing their bodies for migrants is reached at entry to and during the early stages of settlement in the new community. During this period, migrants challenge their normative set, and start a process of negotiation between their culture of origin and the culture of settlement. Furthermore, this process needs perpetual renegotiation, as social norms are different in different stages of the life course. For these reasons, it is argued that the Migrant women who participated in this research did not acquire the bodily practices that they observed in London but were rather inclined to interpret it as a lack of normativity. In this chapter, the second dynamic that is typical of migrants will be explored: Acculturation. This dynamic was firstly theorized by Thomas and Znaniecky (1927) in their pivotal study about Polish peasants in America. They argued that new attitudes emerge when individuals come to contact with the world outside their community of origin. Indeed, when settling into a new community, migrants witness new bodily practices. Acculturation is the process of negotiating between new and old practices in order to maintain a correct social performance. Acculturation has an adjustive outcome that is never conclusive.

6.2 Acculturation: Definition and Use

Migrants who took part in this research have described their lives as “‘extraordinary’”. In this sense they have stressed particularly the freedom they have experienced in London and the possibility to observe and interact with people from different countries.

Benedetta: I don't have any regrets. I have had an incredible life.

The impact of a different social and cultural environment and its population was particularly difficult for many of them. Migrants describe the horror of observing new people and new places:

Celeste: When I arrived in England I didn't want to stay. Everyone looked ugly! I thought "Ugly country, ugly people". But they are generally ugly, aren't they? At first glance they all look bad. Then of course it depends on the area you are in. If you go to a slum people are sloppy, poor, they look ugly.

As described in Chapter 5, at first, most of the migrants were forced to live in deprived areas of London. They left Borgo in poverty and did not have the economic resources necessary to live in good areas. After settlement, when they were confused by the contact with a new culture and experienced difficulty in managing their bodily practices, something started changing and the gaze on English women was transformed:

Celeste: I think English women have changed over time, they are more careful with their style. It used to be terrible.... Watching women was an abomination. I am not talking about upper class, I am thinking middle class women. They were.... You could spot one English woman among thousands. But they are still very English, they want to keep their trademark. Anyway, I think they have improved.

In the previous quote, Celeste infers that English women have changed but she also recognizes that they still look different from Italian women. This "Englishness", although still a sign of otherness, seems to be more welcomed than before. In other words, the way English women manage their bodies is still identified by migrants but it has become part of the ordinary.

Acculturation happens when a subject, being exposed to a different culture, negotiates between values and behaviours learnt in the country of origin and those observed in the country of settlement. When migrants live within the social context of settlement, rather than being segregated or marginalised in communities inhabited only by other compatriots, they experience different bodily practices. In other words, as the process of Assimilation progresses, it initiates the process of Acculturation. Gradually, as migrants perceive new norms, cultural boundaries fade away, although they never disappear. This process triggers a transformation in social practices, which is undertaken in order to maintain a positive social status.

Betta: When I was in London, if there was something I didn't like I could always say "I know another way to do this, as we did in Italy". But the same happened when I was in Borgo, because I could say "This is the way this thing is done, or said, this is the way I should behave, but I know a different way, I learnt in England". I could choose the most logical way of doing things.

As discussed in Chapter 5, migrants are not completely isolated from their culture of origin, as they maintain relationships with their compatriots in London and have holidays in their village of origin in Italy. Levitt (2003) has argued that this kind of situation can be described as transnational: migrants are situated on both sides of the social boundary. In some cases, this process can be very transformative, insomuch as migrants prefer contact with people of other cultures than with compatriots.

Benedetta: And women here.... Now I am friends with women here who are English, Filipino, African,... They are from everywhere in the world and they have the same problem as me. [...] This is what I mean when I say "socializing".

Acculturation is a permanent process. Migration triggers a conscious change in women:

Bice: Once you are a migrant, than you will always be a migrant.

The migrants who moved back to Italy after a period in London still showed signs of Acculturation, and they tended to maintain contact with women of other cultures, even after returning to Italy.

Chiara: I used to have many friends in London. I am still in touch with some of them, after 33 or 34 years. I have a friend from Australia. She lives in Australia now but we met when we both lived in London. We used to work together. We never lost contact. She came to Italy a few times. She was travelling Europe and she came to Borgo just to visit me.

Even several years after migration and, in some cases, after the re-settlement into the community of origin, Acculturation proves to have an effect on the way women conceptualize and practise their bodies.

Benedetta: Now that I hang out with these women here, who are English, Filipinos, who are... from everywhere, black, African... Now I see they all have the same problems we have.

All these aspects will be explored in detail in the next sections.

6.3 “La Differenza”

When talking about their first months in England, migrants expressed how they immediately saw and felt the difference between them and the women – English or of other nationalities – who lived in London.

Bianca arrived in London in 1962 at the age of 19. She talked clearly about what many of the interviewees have called “la differenza”, the difference they described between them and women in London:

Bianca: The impact... English women, you know at the time they were more open... I don't know how to describe it. There was a difference. We were more, especially at that time, you know, 'family and home', and we never left the house, only the husband worked.

Most of the women moved to London during the 1960s and 1970s, when life in a small Italian village was very limited and was very different to what they found in London. Only one, Benedetta, arrived in England in 1987, at the age of 40. Although at the time women in Italy had achieved a higher degree of independence and freedom compared to those who migrated in the 1950s, Benedetta recalls being shocked at some of the habits that were so common among English women:

Benedetta: Women here are something else. I have been quite shocked by women. Now Italy has become a bit like this too, but 23-24 years ago when I came here, seeing drunken women, women... coming home... Here they all do the same, they come home, take off their shoes, throw them there, walk barefoot in the house... This sloppiness... This is not for us, there is no such thing in Italy as a woman walking barefoot in the house. It doesn't happen because it's unhygienic, and for so many other reasons. There's no way you'd sit at the table without shoes on, and underneath you are... This doesn't exist for us, but here it does.

English women's practices looked so different as to prompt Benedetta to think that English women were “something else”. Habits that in Italy simply “don't exist” seemed so natural in London. The simple act of walking barefoot inside one's house

was “shocking”, as it broke all the rules that had been imposed on generations of women in Italy.

This is even clearer when the migrants described life in Borgo as it was when they left, or their impressions when they first went back to Borgo after years in England:

Betta: Now this happens less often, but I used to notice for example that [in Italy] when you went on the bus everyone turned and looked at you, and they were all dressed the same way. For years, in the 1970s and in the 1980s. You arrived and there was only one colour, the same length of clothes, the same garment, better if branded. But when we went back from London, my children used to wear short trousers on Easter, my children could play with the water in the park, and other children looked like grandpas compared to mine, all dirty, and they looked so envious. There was and still there is a tendency in Italy to conform, to follow this one thing.

Clearly, it has to be taken into account that these women moved to London from a small village, located in a deprived, rural, mountainous area. Those who migrated during the 1960s and 1970s, in particular, discovered in London a new world they had never seen before:

Claudia: Keep in mind that you come from the mountains and you get in a metropolis.[...]So of course I didn't come from Milan or Parma, I came from here [a small village], so I found more than what we had: supermarkets, we had none, street markets, we had none. [...] Yes, it was more modern.

The word “emancipated” was used to describe English women with an unspecified sense of modernity: English women could go out alone, they used disposable tampons, and they did not care too much about their appearance. All these things were unknown to the young Italian women coming from a rural area.

In particular, the Italian women appreciated the freedom of fashion or, in their eyes, the complete absence of rules regarding clothing:

Barbara: I try not to get out looking like a mess but there are many people here [in London]. No one judges you for what you wear. It's a very good thing.[...]In Italy you're more influenced, but it's not like that here [In Italy]. You would never ever go out wearing slippers but here [In London] you might very well go to the supermarket in slippers and no one looks, no one turns around. And this makes me feel good.[...]I don't know, it is a problem we don't have here [in London]. I arrived there [in Milan] and my sister said 'That colour is so last year'.

Lack of rules meant independence, freedom, but mostly lack of surveillance. As will be revealed in details in the next chapters, clothing had an important role in defining women's identity in Italy, where the discourse on fashion was constantly linked to complex questions of status and morality, among others. In this sense, women living in a small Italian village were subjected to a rigid social surveillance which was absent in the experience of the migrants:

Chiara: Also because you can go around dressed as you want, and no one is watching you.

Under these circumstances, the Italian women who had moved to London felt able to choose how to present themselves. In fact, some still paid attention to aspects of their appearance, such as their hairstyle, but they were aware of their choice and equally conscious of their freedom:

Costanza: I must say that I'll put in curlers [in the morning if I know that] I will go out, but you can go as you like in London; nobody looks at you because you don't have [a good hairstyle]... London is not like that, in the city centre or the suburbs. But here [in Borgo] it is, a lot.

Furthermore, these lack of restrictions were experienced as a general sentiment of English society towards people of every kind, something that went beyond gender:

Betta: I've felt this difference in freedom but not just for women. A personal freedom, respect for the person. They don't shower you with compliments but you're... Things are changing but you were a person, and as such had rights and responsibilities.

Interestingly, some interviewees mentioned culture as a key factor in the equality they had experienced in England for the first time:

Caterina: Women in England are perhaps more interested in culture and more interested in things; here [in Italy] maybe a little less. I think that in England everyone has a little education, even the person more... They are all somehow well behaved, know how to behave, how to... Ok, now times have changed there too. I'm talking about when we moved. Then even the most humble person had an education. Even those who lived in council housing had an education.

6.4 Transnational Practices of Acculturation: Gatherings, Media, Personal Relationships

Transnationalism, as defined in Chapter 2 and 5, positions the migrants on both sides of the social boundary between life in the small village of Borgo and experiences in the city of London. Some practices of Acculturation bring together the two social and cultural locations, facilitating the comparison between the two and forcing women to consciously evaluate their choices.

As explained earlier, one of the most important transnational practices is represented by gatherings of Italians abroad. During the 1960s and 1970s, the gatherings were very important for migrants, who were still living in partial isolation from the English.

Bice: It used to be a migrant thing: the bigger your car, the better your clothes, people would look at you and say "They have money". And those with big cars would drive to the Italian Church, just to show off.

Migrants who moved back to Italy acknowledged how important meeting their compatriots was in defining their dress choices. Nevertheless, it seems that these gatherings did not only provide a way to maintain normativity imported from the culture of origin; these events went beyond traditions, offering an occasion to show new habits and assess how other migrants from Borgo were able to perform in a different setting. Being with other Italians in Italy does not equate the experience of being with other Italians in London.

Celeste: We used to go to those charity dinners, special galas. Also, we used to go to the theatre and to the movies. We had many occasions to dress nicely. Here in Borgo there is none so I had to reduce my wardrobe.

In London, these gatherings have changed over time. As the migrants moved to different areas of the city, so their need to show their wealth decreased. At the intersection of this dynamic, ageing also plays a role, with the onset of health issues.

Bice: In the past, migrants used to show their wealth, they wanted people to believe they were rich. At least those who had restaurants. It was like a challenge at the Italian church, they were looking at who had the best car.... It was silly. But now... now it's health! Now that most of us have health issues, now they just stay quiet. The hope for health is all we have.

Over the years, the migrants in London were able to watch Italian television. This practice is also transnational, as it links an outlet of Italian culture to the different cultural environment where it is consumed.

As explained in Chapter 3 in relation to the cultural and historical backgrounds of Italy and UK, the discourse on women in Italy is still linked to stereotypes of strict bodily norms and traditional roles, under the influence of cultural heritage. In the past few years, Italian media, and especially television, have been heavily criticised by scholars in gender studies for being the expression of this conservative view on women. The media does not cease to be an agent of socialization during old age and negative stereotypes, Fingerman and Pitzer (2007) have argued, can affect individuals even in later life². It is not surprising then that, when speaking about Italian television, migrants express their discomfort.

Brigida: No, I don't like Italian TV. All those silly women... They look like prostitute, they really... Some of them have awful voices, I can't stand them. I am sorry. Even in Italy, I was there with my grandsons for a week but we never switched the telly on once. I only like to look at the news and the weather forecast. That's it. I used to love the old films, that's it, but this modern women.... And men as well...

Women residents in Borgo do not like the way women are depicted in the Italian media, but they still compare themselves with women on Italian television³. Migrants, on the other hand, are able to distance themselves:

Bianca: I would never compare myself to one of those women on TV. Even if I see them and I think they look good, that's just not me.

In this discourse, a new feature emerges. Acculturation involves both material aspects (e.g. dress choices) but also ideational aspects, related to morals and norms. These two facets are deeply entangled and continuously influence each other.

² See Chapter 2

³ See Chapter 8

In the next passage, it is clear that, for migrants, different clothing choices are underpinned not only by a different sense of style but also by a different contextual framework:

*Benedetta: A great pity, because there are some good women but they ruin themselves I think. There's no shame, so women tend to stumble. You don't see this sort of spectacles in English TV. And in Italian TV they scream, they don't listen to each other, women are terrible. They try to overpower each other, they are arrogant, they show their thighs, they are always strained. It leaves quite an impression on viewers
It is an ugly mirror, because unfortunately TV is the only company for older people.*

It would be natural to think that this rejection of the Italian media is due to the fact that respondents in the Migrant group watched television when they were still in England. Interestingly, this feature is retained by migrants when they moved back to Borgo. In some cases, the repulsion goes so far as to decide to avoid Italian television completely and continue watching English programmes even when in Italy:

Caterina: I am disconnecting from the Italian digital service and putting on a satellite to watch English programmes. Italian TV is horrible, it's something I can't watch. I think they are all brainwashed. All of them: journalists, news readers, hosts. They all had plastic surgery. In London it's not like that. Yes, they choose pretty young women to read the news but they all studied in Oxford or Cambridge. They are actually journalists!

Nevertheless, in some instances migrants who moved back to Borgo cited women on Italian television as a site of comparison for their physical appearance. After migration, media consumption clearly becomes a transnational practice, mediated by Acculturation:

Chiara: I'll tell you this: I would never change myself with one of those women on TV. Yes, they might have ore possibilities than me, but I say to myself: "Yes, she is better than me, but she is better because she spends a lot of money, she has plastic

surgery, she does this and that". She is better than me but only because of this, otherwise she would just be the same as me.

Another transnational practice that allows migrants to maintain connection with their origins is the constant contact with other Italian women. All the women who took part in this research spent a certain amount of time in Borgo every year. Some of them travelled back to Italy only during holidays, some went back more regularly, but all of them have had the chance to meet with the women who live in Borgo and are familiar with members of the Residents group. When Migrants are in Borgo, the differences are more evident.

Given the size of the village, it is easy for migrants to focus more on other women's appearance when they are in Borgo.

Caterina: In London there are always many people around, so it is difficult to pay attention. Here in Borgo, when I go out, I meet only a few people, so you can look at them carefully, you can check out their outfit.

Comparisons are varied and involve different bodily practices. Medical aspects are discussed, and it is a commonly-held opinion among the Migrant group that those in the Residents group tended to exaggerate their health issues.

Benedetta: Italian women tend to complain all the time.

Migrants noted that there are differences between English women and Italian women:

Caterina: (If you are Italian) you are born with an instinct. It's something we carry with us, right? I think every Italian woman.... I mean, English women are more into culture and other things, while Italian women are less into those things and more in fashion.

The difference has changed over time. After the Second World War, when most of the migrants moved to London, Borgo was a poor village, disconnected from bigger cities

and mostly rural. Today, Borgo is well connected and the social life is richer. Moreover, new establishments, such as the hospital and a few small industries, have brought job opportunities and wealth.

Bianca: When I first came here in London, in the 1960s, English women were icons of style. But now I think things have changed. I think Italian older women take care of their appearance more now than before.

Mostly, those in the Migrant group stressed the fact that, after the onset of ageing, the women who live in Borgo seem a bit passive and did not actively engage in the life of the community. This form of surrender from a full, active life, is connected to the stigma attached to older people and the sense of shame some women might feel. This also underlines that migrants perceived a sense of agency over their lives that was unknown to those in the Resident group⁴.

Benedetta: I see this in Borgo: many women tend to keep a good appearance but most of them tend to become lazy, they tend to stay behind the scene. Instead, I think women should be ambitious! And also feed their minds!

In this discourse, the Migrant group women showed that they still apply some normativity on older women when in Borgo. Sometimes, stigma was some attached to women who did not care about their appearance:

Celeste: Italian women... Some of them keep well, they take care in their appearance, they take care of every detail, and some of them give up completely. There is a huge gap between these two levels.

Sometimes on women whose effort to look good was judged as exaggerated:

⁴ See Chapter 9

Bianca: I don't go to Borgo just every 4 years, I have always been there, with daughter, three or four times in a year. We have a house on the coast and there I see women my age who keep their appearance well. They are right, but you need a lot of.... I don't know, I think a woman is always beautiful. You can keep a good appearance without being too elegant.

This shows that the application of social normativity can be activated and deactivated in different contexts⁵. In the next section, drivers of Acculturation will be explored.

6.5 Acculturation and Changes in Bodily Practices

Individuals who have experienced the process of Acculturation can rely on a wider and more varied repertoire of bodily practices, as they have observed and sometimes absorbed new social norms. Women migrants are conscious that the cultural normativity is different in London and Borgo. For this reason, they can choose to apply different practices in order to attain a successful social status.

Costanza: When I am in London I dye my hair with products bought at Boots. I would never do that in Borgo! Never! I feel the difference profoundly.

Moreover, they are able to adapt their style to different contexts even within the same cultural environment.

Costanza: In Borgo I always blow dry my hair with rolls. In London, I only make this effort when I have a special occasion. In London you can just go out and look the way you want, in London no one looks at you.

⁵ See Chapter 9

For Acculturation to happen, there are two important factors to be considered:

1. How the individual perceives the new norms

The process starts with an evaluation of the members of the culture of settlement and their social behaviour. Most of the women who took part in this research had a privileged point of view of women in London, as they worked in some of the busy Italian restaurants in the centre of the capital:

Bice: I used to work in a restaurant in the West End. We had costumers from the nearby theatres, from everywhere in the world. It was very interesting.

These women analysed the appearance of English women and related it to the normativity they had acquired from their own culture of origin. Migrants looked at women who represented the Other and evaluated their bodily practices by applying categories learnt in the past, looking at how similar or different they appeared. For example, they recognized that the category “brand” does not seem to be important for English women, while it is for Italians:

Caterina: My colleagues cared about their clothes, but it was not a question of brands. They just wanted to look tidy. In England I have never seen someone wearing clothes with visible brands... no, never.

It is interesting to note that the observation of English women did not stop after the first few years of settlement, but continues today, meaning that bodily practices are still continuously adapted and that the process of Acculturation is still ongoing:

Caterina: It's a moderate sort of fashion. When I go to London, of course it depends on which district, but if I go to Sloane Square or King's Road, then maybe there I find a woman wearing Chanel head to toes, but you have to look out for it. You see an elegant lady and then, if you look carefully, you notice that her shoes have the brand, or maybe her handbag, but it's never showy.

Migrants also evaluated the general attitude of English women in regards to their personal appearance. Often, the different normativity has been considered by the Migrants as a lack of normativity. Indeed, migrants appeared to be unable to identify signs of clothing norms in English women:

Chiara: Women in England are less elegant than us. That's because you can wear whatever you want there. Instead, here, especially in a small village, you have to dress carefully otherwise people will soon say 'Look at her, what she is wearing?' In England no one looks at you, no one says anything.

In other examples, the different normativity is considered as a lack of care:

Caterina: Where I used to work, it was a clothes manufacturing company, which included everything from design to production. Even in this factory, there was no one, and I say no woman, who had the same passion that Italian women have for fashion. For them, it was just a business.

2. How the migrant is perceived by the society of settlement

This second factor is of particular interest because it can make migrants more or less inclined to Acculturation.

At the beginning, some of the migrants did not feel welcome in England:

Claudia: they used to avoid you, because you were a foreigner. There was still some hate because of the Second World War, not all English people had forgotten

As already discussed, the first few years were associated with a sense of repulsion towards British people's appearance. This isolation from the community of settlement was not permanent, though. Slowly, contact with British women has become more personal over the years:

Bianca: To be honest, I have to say I got on very well even with people from here, they are just like us. For me, we get on very well.

However, women have acquired different levels of Assimilation. Although all the women who participated in this research still live integrated but not assimilated into the British community, some of them have developed profound relationships with women of various origins:

Bianca: Italian, English, Jews, Greeks,... I have friends from everywhere.

At the other end of the spectrum, some women still spend time only with their compatriots:

Benvenuta: Yes, I have only Italian friends. Every Wednesday I see them at our club, at the Italian Church in Brixton.

Between these two extremes, there are many different approaches. In general, the majority of the migrants have described their relationships with British women as superficial. This underlines the fact that the cultural boundary has not disappeared:

Costanza: All the years I spent in London, I knew my neighbours but I have never had a conversation with them. Very difficult. Yes, you would say 'Hello' or 'Good evening' or 'How are you?' but it was never a real friendship.

Although personal relationships with English women are generally not close, women are still exposed to the influence of their different normativity. In fact, migrants have had the chance to interact with other women in different settings; the workplace, for example, where women are not only in contact with other Italians, can provide a site of regulated encounters, offering the chance to observe and experience different bodily practices.

Bice: I found there is no discrimination in the workplace. It doesn't matter where you come from, we are all the same. It doesn't matter what your colour is, it doesn't matter... If you find a friend, even at work people help each other, there's no difference, we are all the same. I found no difference, if you find a friend then she is your friend.

As discussed in Chapter 5, all the women who took part in this study agreed that contact with women of different cultural backgrounds had a liberating effect. In other words, the realization that it was possible to live outside the social regulations imposed by the culture of origin is perceived as positive.

Betta: I was lucky because my friends in England were emancipated women.

6.5.1 Sites of Acculturation: Clothing

Dress choices are one of the most discussed sites of Acculturation by the Migrants. This is coherent with the notion that the link between clothing and identity does not become weaker in later life (Twigg, 2009). The acculturating individual develops

personal behaviour changes in a matter of years. The change is conscious, especially in retrospect, when comparing with women who have lived all their lives in Italy.

Betta: I know for sure that if I had stayed all my life in Italy, now I would be like my ex colleagues: they go to the hair stylist every week, they buy new clothes... I used to be a teacher, I had meetings and other formal occasions. I worked with principle for a while. This environment would have led me to buy expensive clothes, not things you can buy at the market. I know I would be more self-conscious now.

Compelled by the necessity of making everyday life easier and accessible to the people of the region of settlement, the women experiment with and find new ways of practising their bodies. This new ability allows them to perform their daily lives more easily.

Bice: No one looks at you there, no one cares at all. There is an Italian shop near where I live and customers walk there wearing only their dressing gown or their pyjama. If you are too strict, if you think that is too much.... Well then this place is not for you. In the end, those customers are not naked, they are wearing something, and that is enough.

Again, this difference is clearer in their discourse when they compare their actual circumstances as migrants to the situations they witnessed in Italy, a difference which is described as too complicated and too difficult to live:

Costanza: The life style we have in Italy is not for everyone. Italians live well here because they are all the same but if a foreigner moved here he or she would see the difference.

At this point, migrants are distant from the women who have lived all their lives in Italy. The change is permanent. Here, they experience what Ryder (1965) has

described as “existential chasm”⁶: a change so powerful as to set the Migrants apart from the Residents.

Benvenuta: I have never bought clothes in Italy. I always buy clothes in England. Even for my daughter's wedding, which took place in Italy, I bought my dress in London. And everyone in Italy asked me why, they told me I should have bought it in Italy, that they have better dresses.

A new normativity of personal presentation can become articulated, as it entails different settings and different audiences. Women are conscious of these features and are able to argue about the correct practices for different contexts:

Costanza: I leave some of my best clothing items in Italy, because I know that I wouldn't have any occasion to wear them in London. When I am in England I mostly stay at home, or sometimes I go to the restaurant, while when I am here I often go to a ballroom.

Signs of Acculturation are clearly detectable when the women migrants talk about shopping. Dress choices start in the shops, where the offer of clothes is restricted within cultural boundaries. At the beginning, women had difficulties in finding what they needed or wanted but, after a while, the choices offered by the shops in London were considered sufficient, or even natural. In other words, shopping became less problematic over time because women became accustomed to a different sense of style:

Bianca: In the past, I noticed a lot of difference, Italy was always ahead in fashion and in everything, even in food. But in the past few years I don't see a big difference. I can buy nice things here. If you are a good buyer you can find here whatever you would find in Italy. And actually, I feel like there is more variety here than in Italy.

⁶ See Chapter 2.

It is interesting to note that some of the women migrants had developed their own rules about clothing and shopping, which shows that they are still transnational:

Betta: I buy shoes in Italy, all my shoes. But I buy clothes in England.

It will be argued in Chapter 7 and 8 that the women who have lived all their lives in Borgo tend to rely on the advice of other people, including shop assistants, to validate their clothing choices and reassure them that their outfits are age-appropriate. Interestingly, migrants report being annoyed by Italian shop assistants, who are described as too intrusive. In fact, they prefer shop attendants in London, because they do not give their opinions on customer choices.

Caterina: There is absolute freedom in England. You enter a shop in London and you are free to look around, try clothes if you want... You don't feel any pressure. And, no one looks at you and tell you that you look well with something when you actually look bad. Sale assistants don't do this because they know that, if you don't like the clothes you buy, you can return them next day.

The sense of agency experienced by the women migrants in their bodily practices will be described in details in Chapter 9.

In general, the attitude of people working in the industry of personal appearance in London is described as less based on social norms (see also previous quote on workers in a clothes manufacturing company). This does not only affect clothing, it also involves other aspects of personal appearance. Where women who live in Italy describe their frustrations in their relationship with the hairstylist (see Chapter 8), women in London have the chance to experience a different approach, which is preferred.

Caterina: In London I used to go to this hairstylist shop that didn't take appointments. There were three or four of these shops in different underground stations. So I would just get out of the tube and go into the shop. There were four or five hairstylists and the maximum waiting time was five minutes. It was very professional. They cut your hair without losing time, they don't answer the phone, they don't talk to other customers. They spend forty minutes to cut your hair and they are fully focused on you. In Italy it's difficult.

6.5.2 Sites of Acculturation: Medical Practices

Chapter 5 reported stories about the difficulties encountered by migrants when they had to face health problems during their first years in England. The women had to give birth to their babies in hospitals where staff could only speak English while the migrants, having just arrived, could barely understand them. Moreover, the women recounted their initial difficulty in navigating the National Health Service.

After spending several years in London, cultural and linguistic barriers faded. Nevertheless, the women migrants tended to make limited use of the medical facilities in the UK⁷. In particular, they tended to avoid the use of medications.

Brigida: I don't ever take tablets, even if I have a headache, I say it will go away. I don't believe in taking medicines, unless it is absolutely necessary.

The Migrants identified two issues with medical practices in London. First, during their initial years in London, women were unable to be visited by doctors as frequently as they were in Borgo, because their status as migrants was not always regular. Second, medical practices are different in UK. In general, doctors do not prescribe as many medicines and specialist visits as in Italy:

⁷ The concept of “medical acculturation” will be discussed in depth in Chapter 9

Bianca: I only go to the doctor here in England, when I need a blood test or something. I don't trust doctors in Italy. Generally, I don't go to the doctor very often. Although I have to say that I have the impression that GPs in Italy are more used to referring their patients to a specialist, more than English GPs.

This different attitude is sometimes welcomed by migrants. Some of them recognize that the doctors in UK do not provide as many medicines or referrals, but apply a different attitude to the care of their patients:

Benedetta: I think councils in Italy should provide gym classes for older people (as in London). Doctors should care for people's health, not only... This is ancient philosophy. In Italy doctors only care about new techniques, new discoveries, which is good but they should also look at the human beings. It is not only about pills!

Nevertheless, migrants' views on medical practices are varied. This fact is not surprising, as a lower level of Acculturation is expected when contact with the culture of origin on a certain aspect – medical care, in this case – is sporadic. Moreover, the migrants had opportunities to access Italian medical care over the years. Some of the older migrants were able to be visited by Italian doctors who worked in London:

Chiara: Even in London I had an Italian GP. Of course, if I needed to go the hospital, we had no choice. But for ordinary visits, my family and I preferred our Italian doctor.

Others preferred to postpone their medical issues until their visits to Italy, back in their villages:

Benedetta: I only see doctors in Italy. It is easier to reach them as they are in a small village.

There are also structural factors to be considered. In matters of health, the migrants seem to prefer the smaller community of the village. In this case, surveillance does not represent a concern and a well-known normativity is welcomed.

Costanza: We have to remember that Borgo is a small village. Maybe even in Italy, in a big city, the situation is the same as in London. But in Borgo, when I go to the local hospital, I know everyone. And maybe, because of this, I had the perception that they pay more attention when I talk. Because they know you.

As previously described, the women who lived in London appreciated the lack of intrusiveness of sales assistants in England. The sense of freedom experienced in English shops became part of their everyday routines and women did not want or feel the need for clerks when they shopped for clothes. This attitude changed completely when they needed to buy medications. In Italian pharmacies, only chemists can work at the counter.

Costanza: Even when you go to the pharmacy, you talk with the chemist, explain your problem, and they will suggest what medications you need. This doesn't happen in London. There, when you go to the chemist you must tell them exactly what you want. This is because in London there are only big chemist shops, all big chains, and sales assistants are only employees. And there are so many people there, that no one pays attention.

In general, Acculturation is more difficult in medical practices. Nevertheless, it will be argued in Chapter 8, the women members of the Migrant group attained a different attitude and a sense of agency over their health.

6.6 Conclusions

In this chapter we have examined the concept of Acculturation as described by the women who migrated from Borgo to London.

Acculturation happens when people who move to a new country negotiate between the social norms imposed since childhood in the culture of origin and the new normativity they witness in the new social and cultural context. As can be expected, women are subjected to a deep impact during the years of arrival and settlement. In these first stages, the need to adjust one's bodily practices arises. When migrants slowly start to assimilate into the new community, cultural boundaries gradually fade and habits are transformed.

The impressions after the first contact with the new culture in England were described by the women using the word "la differenza", which indicates the difference they instinctively felt when they encountered English women. The migrants identified several effects, the most important being a sense of freedom caused by what they had interpreted as a lack of normativity.

Bodily practices are continuously adapted by migrants as they are in a transnational situation. This means that their normativity lies on both sides of the social boundary. Different situations allowed the migrants in this study to carry out a constant comparison between themselves, English women, and Italian women: gatherings with other compatriots, fruition of Italian media (in particular television) while in London, and visits to Italy.

Signs of Acculturation were particularly evident in the discourse of women about two areas of bodily practices: clothing and medical habits. Dress choices are the first sign of encounter with a new culture and the women were able to observe and sometimes

absorb the new norms easily. Migrants were more resistant in acculturating on medical habits, as they only had sporadic contact with English doctors.

Chapter 7: Acceptance

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, the concept of transnationalism was examined, investigating the circumstances of migrants' bodies, displaced during migration and now emplaced in two different social and cultural contexts. In addition, we analysed the differences between Borgo and London as narrated by immigrant women, with a specific focus on migration as a life-course transition.

In this chapter, Acceptance will be analysed as the dynamic that describes the complex interplay of body and self in old age. As "acceptance" and related words were often used by respondents, beginning by surveying the definitions and use of the term as found in the interviews. Then, conceptions of self-acceptance will be examined, by describing how the women who took part in this study perceived and described bodily changes related to age. Subsequently social acceptance will be the focus, considering factors such as community of residence, media, and family relationships. To conclude, the interaction between self-acceptance and social acceptance will be taken into consideration.

7.2 Acceptance: Definition and Use

The word “acceptance” was often used by respondents to describe a way of addressing changes connected to ageing. As discussed in Chapter 2, ageing represents a fracture in women’s life, as women are faced with the challenge of reconciling with the bodily changes and the shift in social identity, in a context where old age is constantly pervaded by a sense of Otherness. Acceptance is described as a movement between body and identity aimed at repairing such fracture.

Residents tended to more often use the impersonal form “accettare” (“to accept”), which was often coupled with words such as ‘need’ or ‘must’, representing imperative, a duty. This sense of obligation is not present in the Migrant and Returned groups. In fact, in their accounts, the word mostly used was “accetto” (“I accept”), which expresses both a feeling of agency and a sense of completeness of the action. It has also to be noted that the word was mostly used by those in the Resident and Returned groups, with only a few examples from the Migrant group.

Each member of the Residents group used the word “acceptance” or one of its derivatives at least once in their narration. Although the word was so frequently used, respondents were not able to produce a clear definition. Instead, they linked it to a multitude of concepts and practices.

First of all, respondents suggested that acceptance originates from the consciousness that the body is modified by the passing of time and the realization that these changes are both undesirable and unavoidable:

*Amanda: You find yourself with a totally different body. [...]
Accepting means having still a bit of self-esteem.*

Hurd (1999) described a circular process in which women, by refusing the label “old”, reinforced the negative stereotypes that are socially attributed to later life. In accordance with this findings, retaining a positive attitude towards oneself during later life did not seem a spontaneous attitude for the women who participated in this study. In fact, it required a series of changes, both internal and external. On a personal level, the women highlighted that their perspective on what was important in life had to change. At this level, accepting acquires a sort of passive meaning, as if the women, attaining now a new social status of being elderly, felt they had to let go of the part of their identity they had linked to their personal appearance and instead replace it with features that were socially regarded as more valuable:

Antonella: In relation to the body, I feel that I shouldn't ask too much. I think at my age it is not really worth digging yourself to understand why you are this way or the other way.

Alessandra: I think health is more important than physical appearance.

The same attitude is also used when the practice of emphasizing positive physical attributes loses its effectiveness:

Anita: You go to the hairstylist once more, you go to the beautician once more but then sometimes you don't care and think “I had all the best from life, this is enough”.

Indeed, acceptance also means passive surrender to what the women felt they could not change, coherently with the studies on adaptation by Liechty and Yarnal (2010), in which participants, approaching later life, adopted a more achievable ideal of body.

A similar form of acceptance was seen as the only conceivable alternative when all practical possibilities of controlling the body had failed, even if brought to the extreme:

Amelia: Gaining weight was the thing that affected me the most. Because or you simply stop eating... But I want an active life and I see that if I don't eat enough I can't live my life... otherwise you have to accept yourself the way you are, there is no other option. [...] So let's keep our wrinkles, our flab, let's keep this decaying skin, because it is evident that this is part of ageing, and let's try to be dignified and emphasize whatever is positive of our age.

Paradoxically, together with this perspective, women of the Resident and Returned groups described a high interest in their appearance and a remarkable number of activities which they carried out daily, in order to limit the effects of ageing on their bodies. One example was dieting:

Costanza: Unfortunately the body changes. Once I used to have a waist line, I used to wear trousers with a belt. But at 70 I don't have a waistline anymore and this really annoys me. And I keep dieting... but why? The waist line will never come back. It won't come back! But still I try. And that is because I don't accept it.

Hence, acceptance was seen as a relationship, an interaction between the body and the self, aimed at reconnecting the two with the adjustment of social practices. As argued in Chapter 2, negative stereotypes connected to later life form a “plastic cage” (Brown, 1995) that makes the transition into old age difficult for women. Acceptance is the necessary instrument that allows women to negotiate such difficulty. As several studies suggest (Hurd 1999; Paoletti 1998), women tend to avoid being labelled “old”, a resistance that is mitigated by Acceptance. In the case of the women who had lived all their lives in Italy, the process seemed to be led by bodily changes; only afterwards had their identities acquired this new feature of being “old”. On a social level, the

negative meanings ascribed to older bodies worked as a stimulus to find ways to dissimulate signs of ageing:

Angela: I look at myself in the mirror and think “I have to go to the hairstylist, I have to retouch the hair colour”.

In section 7.5 it will be argued that the women of the village often underlined the importance of controlling their personal appearance. This matter will also be discussed in depth in Chapter 8, which describes all the arrangements that women put in place in order to adapt their changing bodies and identities in old age, according to their cultural background.

Twigg (2009) has argued that the link between appearance and identity remains strong during the entire life-course. Consistently, for members of the Resident group, personal appearance remained in later life one of the most important instrument of impression management. The women were conscious of the stigma ascribed to older people, mostly because they felt pressured to dissimulate signs in their bodies linked to ageing. Sometimes, respondents described a general sense of social approval when they changed their personal appearance according to social norms:

Agnese: when you leave the hairdresser you also see the difference in the eyes of others, I mean you feel better and you also have the approval of others, because maybe you meet someone who tells you that you're looking fine, you're looking younger.

But there were also examples of social pressure coming from specific agents, such as close members of the family:

Allegra: Sometimes I don't accept myself and this is when my daughters tell me “Go to the hairstylist”. They are right, because you look better at my age when your hair looks good.

[...] You try not to think about your problems because otherwise you make other people's lives a nightmare, so you try to think as little as possible.

Instruments of appearance management, such as going to the hairstylist and wearing makeup, are not only used in order to obtain social approval and avoid stigma but, on a personal level, they are also described as a way to contain the sense of becoming older. This shows that social expectations had penetrated women's sense of identity:

Anna: I feel good. I mean apart from the early morning, when I wake up, and I look really worn out. I should get some tan! But usually I wear some foundation as soon as I wake up, and this is how I accept myself well.

These examples clearly illustrate the deep level of entanglement between personal acceptance and social acceptance. Moreover, it is interesting to note that, even at a subjective level, compensatory practices aimed at hiding bodily changes retained their efficacy:

Alba: If I look at myself in the mirror wearing only my underwear I think "I got so fat! Look at my belly!". But then when I put some clothes on I convince myself that I am still ok. I try to load up some self-esteem.

So far, we have only taken into consideration accounts from members of the Resident group, who had lived all their lives in Borgo and had never experienced migration. We will now examine how members of the Migrant group talked about ageing in terms of acceptance.

As argued before, those in the Resident group described ageing as a process that started in their bodies. In descriptions from the Migrant group, ageing has more to do with

what they called their “personality” or “mind”¹. It appears that the passing of time was felt as affecting more the self than the body. Nevertheless, bodily changes were still mentioned as an important part of the change, but always in conjunction with the self. Benedetta expresses well this sense of body and identity not working well together but still feeling like a unity. Indeed, the changes in how she perceived herself led to changes in how she practised her body:

Benedetta: When you turn 60 it is an accomplishment and you do not feel like it and it is a bit bad because even if you don't want to..., even if you try to have an open mind... Instead no, there are limits. You feel it, you feel it because your mind is unable to run hand in hand with your body. (...) You gain a new calmness so you can better evaluate everything. So, for example, you pay more attention because you know that you can fall.

The conjunction of body and identity was consistent among the Migrant group members in the discourse about ageing, insofar as to make a woman describe wrinkles as part of her personality:

Celeste: For now, I am still proud of the way I look. I am still ok for my age. Yes, of course I have some wrinkles, but they are part of my experience, right? I accept them.

The same can be said for Bianca. When looking at her reflection in the mirror, she did not feel the need to change or do “crazy things” – i.e. employ those instruments of appearance management that those in the Resident group had described – because she felt that age was not only an agent changing her body but also a part of her identity. In her discourse, she identified her personality as the first means of acceptance:

Bianca: This is my personality and I accept it. When I go in front of the mirror, my age is like that, I don't want to do crazy

¹ These words were used by several respondents to identify an internal feature, as opposed to a physical feature

things because no one can buy the way you are. This is my age, I keep it, I have a way of keeping myself, and it's my personality.

In light of the differences in the discourse about the body of the Resident group and the Migrant group, it is interesting to analyse the representation of acceptance made by those women who moved back to Borgo after living in London.

Costanza is a member of the Returned group. In her discourse, she showed a remarkable level of consciousness of the social importance of personal appearance. She explained how bodily decay caused by ageing could be compensated, by using tools such as clothing, in order to avoid negative social impressions. Moreover, Costanza also underlined the importance of using such tools at a personal level as deterrents to the loss of self-esteem. Nevertheless, Costanza retained the sense of cohesion between body and self:

Costanza: I think ageing changes are very bad but you have to accept them. I don't accept living with my body because from 65 to 70 it has changed for the worse. Changes are not wrong, it's the personality that is wrong.[...] I see myself as young, and don't see myself as old. No, I don't see it... It would be very bad if I saw myself as old. I look in the mirror, obviously not every day, but I think I look nice and I don't look old. But I don't see myself as old because I don't act old. I don't dress old. It's everything together. If you start wearing an apron, or flat shoes, and go out with pins on your hair, or you cut your hair short and get a perm, you look at yourself in the mirror and think "Oh my God, what have I become?". No, you know why I don't do it? Because I don't want to become old.

From Costanza's account, it is clear that Acceptance has a complex relationship with the tools of appearance management, such as clothing and makeup: using these can help come to terms with bodily changes but, at the same time, hiding those changes

can mean that age has not been fully included in one's identity and that the individual believes that ageing is socially linked to shame.

In the next sections, a further analysis of this topic will be carried out, starting from self-acceptance, then investigating social acceptance, and concluding with an examination of the relationship between the two.

7.3 Physical Changes and Self-Acceptance

Cultural categorizations, based on bodily features such as appearance and performance, define a person's place within a social order depending on their body. The reception and absorption of such categorizations occur simply by living and sharing them with a community and can influence the system of thoughts and feelings that one uses to refer to oneself. In this sense, the way women take on the bodily changes caused by the passing of time is profoundly influenced by their social context².

In this section, we will analyse bodily changes connected to ageing as they were described by respondents. We will also look at how women's social and cultural backgrounds have framed their response to such changes. Adjustments that were put in place by women in order to adjust to these changes will be discussed in Chapter 8.

² See Chapter 2

7.3.1 Nature of Physical Changes Related to Age

The women mainly described two types of physical changes in relation to age: those related to their appearance and those regarding their health, the latter mainly consisting of the menopause and linked symptoms.

For all respondents, one feature that all these changes have in common is that they were perceived as undesirable. In general, the women felt that their bodies were deteriorating and that this process would worsen with the passing of time.

For members of the Resident group, bodily changes related to age were not only seen as a variation but they represented a deviance, something that set them aside from the norm and could even bring exclusion. In the following example, a woman describes how she decided to stop dyeing her hair and let it grow grey, underlying her difficulties:

Antonia: For example, the matter of grey hair has required a great dose of courage. Not dyeing my hair was a big bodily change for me. (...) I had to be brave, because if I wanted to keep being unnoticed I had to keep colouring my hair. (...) It was a big change. I was blonde and going grey, even now, needs some adjustment. It's been more than a year now and still when I pass in front of a shop window, and casually see my reflection, I still think "Oh my god, it's me".

It was previously noted that, coherently with other studies (Hurd, 1999; Paoletti 1998)³, in general, respondents found it difficult to recognize themselves as "old". If

³ See Chapter 2

the women who had only ever lived in Italy attributed this process mainly to physical changes, those in the Migrant group tended to relate it to their identity:

*Bice: Sometimes I think “Oh my God we are pensioners now”.
We are, you know, old!*

Women of all groups used words that expressed their inability to prevent and control bodily changes. Most of these expressions, such as “luck” and “thank God”, refer to those aspects that they still perceived as positive, as in “I am lucky to have a good health”.

Nevertheless, in the discourse of those in the Migrant group, the sense of negativity attached to the word “old” was mitigated by the fact that they intended ageing primarily as a feature of their identity. Indeed, as Small (2007) argued, negative connotations of later life are more difficult to change when they are related to the body. Their sense of agency is then applied more on features of their social self, such as lifestyle, rather than on aspects regarding the body.

The women who lived in London were aware of this difference between them and the Resident group. In fact, all members of the Migrant group reported spending their holidays in Borgo and had contacts with members of the women who live in the village. Here, Benedetta speaks about her friends in Italy:

Benedetta: I see in Borgo some people care about themselves but most become lazy, they stay behind the scene. But they shouldn't! Women, I think, should have... a mind! They should feed their mind! (...) When a woman says “big suffering” [referring to menopause]... Yes, but it all depends on you, on your background, on what you have built inside.

More on the use of the word “lazy” will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

7.3.2 Personal Appearance

The passing of time was described as having a prominent role in shaping women's bodies.

Members of the Resident group tended to feel that their bodies and identities had been somehow detached by the passing of time:

Amanda: When I look at old photos it's almost like looking at another person.

In some cases, changes were perceived so intensely that looking in the mirror was considered almost useless, as if the reflection could not convey the real image:

Allegra: Sometimes I don't even look at myself in the mirror because of course I have changed.

Or, even, the mirror and, by consequence, one's own image, can become something to be avoided:

Amelia: Last night I was looking at old photos of when I was only 20, or even younger. I looked at myself and I thought "From now, I will run every time I will pass in front of a mirror".

In light of this, the persistent use of the word "acceptance" in the accounts of the members of the Resident group members can be read as the need for self and body to regain unity. Because of the stigma attached to later life, women applied some resistance in fully including the feature "old" into their identity, even though they recognized the signs in their bodies. In this sense, the meaning of "self-acceptance" could acquire the connotation of being a binding agent between body and self.

A strong example of this phenomenon is represented by the following quote. A woman states that she still represents her body in her mind as the one she had years before. For this reason, she is unable to recognize clothes of her size and fit:

Amanda: I don't have the perception of my body until I don't wear something. Until I see something on a hanger I would buy things that seem to me... Probably my head is a bit behind, still at the time when I was a size 6 or 8. So now when I look at clothes on myself, and I see they don't fit me well, then I feel annoyed.

Obviously, this conflict has a negative effect on the women's self-esteem, hence the need to accept, or fully approve and recognize, the changes of ageing at all levels.

In contrast, members of the Migrant and Returned groups showed a unitary sense of body and self. In their discourse, the two components seem to fit well together and form a unit:

Celeste: I think my face is in harmony with myself.

Those in the Migrant group often underlined the continuousness of time. They mentioned the connexion they felt between their bodies in the past and their bodies in the present and, possibly, in the future.

Benedetta: But you are given this body and you have to value and protect it, until slowly, slowly things change; then I think it's normal. Not to look younger, but to feel good about yourself.

Once again, it is interesting to note that the way women in the Migrant group looked at their image is mediated by a perception of their identity. Body and self were described as almost mixed, fully united:

Bice: If I look at myself in the mirror I think “The years... now we are in later life”. You change but that’s when you look in the mirror... it’s your mentality.

7.3.3 Menopause

The menopause was one of the most discussed topics during the interviews. In fact most women of all groups described it as the principle change in becoming older.

Resident group respondents reported a series of symptoms they linked to the menopause: high blood pressure (Antonia); a little insomnia and high cholesterol (Agostina); depressive tendencies and problems of arthritis (Antonella); mood changes (Ambra; Alba); dryness of the skin and increased weight (Amelia). One effect of the menopause was reported by members of all groups: hot flushes.

The great number of symptoms reported indicates a certain discomfort with regard to the menopause expressed by those in the Resident group.

Several studies have reported that preparedness is essential when facing an important bodily change⁴. In fact, background knowledge acquired from the social context before the actual onset of the menopause has a direct effect on how women will actually experience the transition. Moreover, Lock’s (1993) study on how menopause is understood in North America and in Japan has highlighted that representations of symptoms of the menopause are influenced by society.

In women living in the village, traditional accounts create the premise for women to have a negative attitude:

⁴ See Chapter 2

Alba: I have always been very afraid of menopause, in the sense that I always saw menopause as a period of ageing, so when I went through menopause, soon enough, I was 49, so for two and a half years almost three years I have done HRT.

In this example, the use of HRT was initiated by the socially-induced fear of the menopause rather than the subjectively-perceived discomfort.

Indeed, women of the Resident group tended to rely on medical practices in order to control the menopause – this, as well as the medicalization of other bodily changes connected to ageing, will be further discussed in Chapter 8. The next example shows how a woman had decided to use hormone treatment in order to avoid what she thought could be the risk of going through the menopause: an ‘emotional breakdown’. Her fear was so strong as to lead her to extend the treatment longer than advised by her doctor, although she was conscious that this could increase the risk of more serious health problems:

Alessandra: That is, the menopause was once a problem for women, it was a problem. I do not know why everyone had to have a nervous breakdown. Maybe now we have other medications. I used the patch, the patch, and I could only use it for five years, so the doctor told me. I used it for eight years. I knew I shouldn't have taken it for so long, they told me it could give me problems in my breasts. And then I did have problems in my breasts.

From this example, it is clear that the social discourse on menopause acquired by the women who had lived all their lives in Italy has framed their actual response to this life-course transition. It is important to note that, in this case, socially generated experiences that are external to the body are more effective than the actual internal familiarity with the menopause.

In Chapter 2 it was argued that the level of preparation for bodily transition such as menarche (Ruble & Brooks-Gunn, 1982) and menopause can influence the actual experience of it. In light of this, it is interesting to note that the use of the word “acceptance” in the discourse about menopause could also mean that, although the menopause is an expected physical change, it still can cause a fracture in women’s identities. Despite the fact that the age of onset as well as the cause – since some women reach menopause after surgery due to illness – are variable, the menopause is still linked to the feeling of being old.

With regard to members of the Migrant group, we have seen before that they did not report any other symptom of the menopause beside hot flushes. In addition to this, some of them described little or no concern for this transition. Moreover, they talked about the menopause as a transition that did not represent a disruption but a continuity with earlier stages of their lives, as in this example:

Bendetta: Every year passing I felt that something was changing, from my 40s or 50s. Every year I felt something was different but not negative, not in a negative way.

Another consistent factor in the discourse of those in the Migrant group was the expression of shifts in the perception of their identity leading, or being more poignant than, bodily changes. In this case, acceptance was described as a way to deal with the menopause, and its effects were not only limited to the inclusion of a new feature in their identity, but it also affected the actual bodily experience of the menopause. In other words, this is another instance of self-acceptance linking body and self, although it was seen from the opposite perspective:

Chiara: Regarding internal changes, I have accepted menopause very well, consequently I haven't... I had no flushes, no other symptoms linked to menopause.

7.4 Community and Social Acceptance

As seen in the previous section, the antecedents of self-perception are social. This means that the way a woman perceives and thinks about herself is strictly linked to her social background and, as we have discussed in Chapter 5, to the location of her body and to her sense of belonging to a community.

This section will examine in detail how the women described the social acceptance of older women in their community.

First, it is useful to note that the women of all groups reported that they compared their bodies and related practices to those of their peers in order to find differences and similarities to the changes they experienced in their own bodies.

For instance, Alba, surprised by the fact that gaining weight had produced in her body shapes that were different from those which occurred in her youth, noted that the same happened with her peers:

Alba: All my cohort has gained weight but we didn't gain it the same way as when we were young.

The same happened to members of the Migrant group, who compared themselves to other similar bodies, those of the women of Italian community in London:

Benvenuta: When I see some of my friends even at the club [the Italian Community Centre in London], I say: 'That person has

become so old'. Then I look in the mirror and think, 'But I've changed a lot too' [Laughs].

In terms of social acceptance, a subtle ambivalence lies within this process of continual comparison. The community of belonging can serve as a useful instrument of acceptance. Indeed, having the opportunity to confirm that the changes a woman is experiencing in her own body are synchronized to those she can observe in her peers activates a process of identification and, reducing the feeling of isolation, also limits the sense of Otherness that is often linked to ageing. It is not surprising then that the participants reported talking about their own bodily changes with other women and feeling comforted by sharing the same problems.

Agnese: I hear from my colleagues that some of them have problems with their hips, some need an operation, some have problems with their knees, so all in all.... (...) I see that everyone has these problems, I mean if they don't have these problems they have others. So all things considered I accept the problems I have.

Bendetta: The most important thing for the elderly is being social, is seeing... You see that actually everyone has their own problem but this... this makes you feel more inside the society.

Nevertheless, this comparison can assume a negative connotation, when bodily changes related to ageing are considered to be negative and are linked to a sense of decay and deterioration⁵. Therefore, they can initiate fear of the expected future worsening. Because not all bodies are similar, a woman can fear the change she sees in her peers, as in this example:

Ada: Sometimes I think "Look at that person, she is my age... Am I really like that?". Then maybe I ask my daughter: "Do I look like that lady who's my age?".

⁵ See Chapter 2

7.4.1 Hiding the Body

Women looked at each other not only on the basis of bodily changes. What was mainly scrutinized was the way a body is managed, especially in relation to personal appearance.

Respondents from the Resident group described a series of clothing norms related to age. Different reasons were reported to explain why clothing should change with age. A dramatic lifestyle change such as retirement, for example, can trigger a shift in how a woman chooses her clothes:

Antonia: Until you work, wearing nice clothes is almost a necessity, but then when you retire you don't have many occasions to wear nice things.

Nevertheless, the need to hide signs of ageing was reported as the most important element determining clothing norms. Here, Alessandra points out three clothing rules related to points of the body that, she says, show signs of ageing and therefore must be hidden: legs, neck, and arms.

Alessandra: I see some people of a certain age who wear make up but just a little bit, they dress the right way and I see people who dress in a way that is not ... I mean this thing for me is... that's not her age. I don't know, or the skirt is too short or the top is too low-cut, because you can see the wrinkles too ... too ... too ... even the neck. That is age-appropriateness. That is, you can't wear certain things after a certain age. Or, the strap [the vest], sometimes even in the countryside I do it: I wear a vest but then I think: 'No, but look, you can see the arm!' I need a half- sleeve. I mean this [she touches under her arm] (...) If you dress young when the body is no longer young ... you show your flaws instead of trying to cover them up. You show the flaws that over time your body acquires. (...) The body changes so clothing must change too. You cannot wear a vest because your arms are not toned. I mean, you can still do it and not care but ... I don't know.... you highlight the flaws.

The above is only one of many examples where the women explained the need to hide their bodies, or what they called “flaws”. Indeed, the sense of shame and the reluctance to show certain parts of the body were widely shared among the villagers. The women who lived in Borgo felt they needed to maintain a difficult balance: hiding those parts of their bodies that showed signs of ageing and, at the same time, wearing clothes that were not too formal or traditional, as these were characteristics that ascribed to garments for older people.

Alba: I always try to couple the need to disguise my flaws and my taste for clothing. I wear young clothes. I don't like to wear classic clothes, as they make you look even older. So I try to find young clothes that are also good for my body type but it is not easy. It takes a lot of work!

In terms of social acceptance, this great deal of work, aimed at hiding the signs of ageing, shows that the women feared appearing old. In this sense, it is clear that the label “old” was undesirable; it was not considered a positive feature, and was to be avoided for as long as possible. . This confirms Paoletti's (1998) argument that even older people consider the label “old” as negative⁶, therefore showing signs of internalization of the negative stereotypes on later life, which are stronger than the actual lived experience.

The following excerpt illustrates that women who had lived in London and moved back to Borgo either retained or re-learnt the social norms related to age-appropriate clothing:

Costanza: The clothes I choose as young-looking as possible. Once I wore skirts with hems twenty centimetres below my knee

⁶ See Chapter 2.

and now, if I only could... But my knees are not.... So you try to shorten the hems but then you realize and you stay below the knees, but hems are not as long as when you were 50. (...) Because people don't look at your face, they look at the way you manage your body, your life, the way you walk. So you can always give the impression of being younger than you are. I still wear high heels but when I walk I always think: "Walk nicely", especially when I walk down the stairs. Because if I don't walk nicely they will know that I am [old]... Because when you age you don't walk very well with heels. I have to wear heels that are a bit lower now but I know I will have to wear very low heels in ten years.

As we have argued in Chapter 5, Costanza, having experienced what she interpreted as a lack of normativity in London, was even more aware of the importance of clothing rules and their strength as a means of social impression. However, as highlighted in Chapter 5, Costanza did not feel this so much as a burden as much as an opportunity. In fact, this was the main reason why she enjoyed living in Borgo: she felt that by managing her body with social instruments such as clothing, she could avoid or delay the social and personal recognition of being "old".

7.4.2 Visibility in the Village

As described in Chapter 5, the women reported a network of social surveillance in Borgo, focused on issues of visibility. Although data show that this network does not only concern older women and their bodies, these are the matters that will be discussed in this thesis.

Generally, public behaviour is carried out through practices of impression management, controlled and subjected to a complex process of looking at and being looked at by others. In this research, the women who were members of the same

community observed the outcome produced by their peers with their bodily practices and adjusted their behaviour accordingly. This behaviour is an example of the micro-control applied by public surveillance that, according to Foucault (1977; 1979), produces disciplinary power⁷.

The first thing to be noted is that the awareness of being watched and, as many women reported, “judged”, activated fears of exclusion:

Anna: I fear the judgment of my people.[...] I feel very observed.[...]Here one must be very careful. Here people confuse the liveliness of a person, the socialization of a person, with maybe "She is not serious." I am terrified by this thing. I never go out after dinner, if not for that kind of thing here [at the elderly centre]. Because ... It's easy. In the village there is this bad habit and I know it. I'm from here, I know.

It is also true that the same women who feared other's surveillance were also ready to turn their gaze on others:

Anna: I go crazy when I see women who don't take care of their appearance. I get so annoyed. I really care about this matter.

The awareness of being involved in a network and being, at the same time, subjects and objects of observation, commenced a normative-based social comparison among the women. The function of this mutual gaze is multiple. At the level of physical comparison, as we have already discussed, it served as a coordinating instrument which helped the women confront their bodily changes as part of a collective experience. On the different level of appearance management, it fed a process of

⁷ See Chapter 2.

control and regulation that was felt to be too oppressive and augmented the fear of exclusion, in so far as self-presentation became a problematic task on a daily basis.

In the women's discourse about clothing norms, different practices corresponded to different moral characteristics. In other words, not abiding by the rules culturally known and shared among the community did not only pertain to a person's body, but was also a symptom of something deviant in a woman's identity.

Amelia: I see women my age who still go around ... This morning a friend of mine, an acquaintance of mine, one of my classmates who is still a beautiful woman, she has a beautiful body, I saw her on the streets in shorts and you could see the knees. The knees fall at our age, there is nothing to be done. She was pathetic. Instead of shorts she could wear a pair of pants below the knee and she would look good because she still has a beautiful body that I envy, however. She is still a beautiful woman. But I don't understand why she must disfigure herself with things that are beyond her means. There's a minority who are like this, but they are pathetic, I feel sorry for them.

The discourse around clothing choices that deviated from the norm revolved mainly around the word "ridiculous". The word was used by several respondents to describe those older women who showed their bodies more than what was socially acceptable:

Agostina: I think they are ridiculous. Yesterday I saw a woman with an openwork dress. You could see everything! And, c'mon, her body is not that toned anymore!

Amelia: Because a woman my age who wants to be flashy, or as we say locally, one who "throws herself out" is likely to become either pathetic or ridiculous.

Being ridiculous was also associated to other practices of the body, such as fitness:

Anna: I am afraid to be ridiculous, I am afraid that they will say "Look, she goes to the gym." Because I am good in the gym, I'm afraid people will say "Who knows where that lady goes."

It is clear that the word “ridiculous” is connected to the idea that some women are not able to manage their bodies properly. However, this word has plural connotations. It underlines the fact that women who do not abide by the clothing norms shared among their peers are unable to practise something that is obvious, that should be known to them. Moreover, it shows that these women faced the danger of being vulnerable to mockery and, most importantly, social exclusion. In this sense, women reported the fear of being “ridiculous”:

Anna: I try not to be ridiculous. I love the dresses younger women wear now but being ridiculous would be very annoying. I do half and half. I don't dress old or young. And I always ask everyone "Please tell me [if I look ridiculous]".

There is another interesting concept linked to the word “ridiculous”. Those in the Resident group called “ambition” the desire to attract male attention. The concept of “ambition” is clearly linked to clothing choices, but it does not only pertain to old age. It is applied to dress choices in continuity throughout adult life:

Adelaide: I have never been ambitious, so I have never relied much on clothing or appearance.

In the understanding of villagers, showing the body in old age or, better, avoiding to hide certain parts of the body, could be interpreted as an attempt to be “ambitious” – i.e. sexually attractive – which was considered unacceptable for an older person:

Anna: I do not have ambitions, I've never had them. I could barely stand my husband. I've used to sleep alone [her husband is now deceased], I was one of the first who chose separate rooms.

7.4.3 Agents of Control

In the previous section, we analysed visibility as a relational and strategic feature of the women's social lives in Borgo. We argued that a discourse that disciplines the body of older women was applied in the village through a system of mutual surveillance and that this same normativity created and reproduced ideas of deviance by negatively labelling those behaviours that did not conform to the standard.

As we have observed, women put in place a great deal of work in order to choose correct bodily practices, especially related to clothing, as they feared social exclusion. In this sense, we can argue that social acceptance is an important matter for older women.

In addition to their own social skills, respondents reported relying on a network of other agents in order to control their bodily practices and ensure full acceptance in their community. This shows two facts: first, that the women did not fully trust their own judgements, highlighting that, in certain cases, the violation of a norm could happen involuntarily but could still lead to negative social labelling. In fact, in this case, a woman would show her inefficiency in maintaining her social role. Second, the existence of this control network shows that normativity was not only known by older women, but was also shared by other members of the community.

In the interviews, the most quoted agent of control was the family. Other women of the family demonstrated knowing and being able to handle social norms of personal appearance. Sometimes, like in the following cases, older women asked younger family members for their help:

Antonia: Sometimes I tell my friends and my daughters "Please, tell me if I become ridiculous" because it's easy and maybe I don't realize it.

Adriana: Because sometimes you also run the risk of becoming a little ridiculous over age, maybe dressing too juvenile. In fact, I occasionally say to my daughter, "Isa, what if I wore this?" And she says, "Okay". Because sometimes ... you might even verge on the ridiculous in fact.

In other cases, daughters intervened directly and participated in their mothers' choices:

Ambra: My daughters tell me "Wear this! Wear that!"

Agnese: I have been thinking about it [leaving her hair gray] because I have allergy problems but my daughter told me "No mom no, wait a little longer".

Sisters were able to be control keepers too:

Anna: I can stay away from the hairstylist for a month but I think that my sister must go, always.

It is clear then that villagers were interested in older women of their family having a socially acceptable appearance, as the public image of its members reflected upon the family's status. In the following case, it is shown that men did not usually participate actively in this process but they were taken into consideration only as observers:

Anna: Every day of my life I have woken up and, before the family was up, I had already my makeup on. This is an illness. Because I didn't want to disappoint them, I always wanted them to see me beautiful.

In addition to family members, other women of the community could become agents of control too. In the following case, the gatekeeper is a saleswoman. In fact, she personally knew Amelia but she was also considered an insider of fashion and, most of all, she knows the clothing habits of other older women of the village:

Amelia: I always buy my clothes in the same shop. The clerk was a seamstress, and I always tell her: "Please, if I get a bit crazy with age, tell me!"

As discussed in Chapter 2, "preminescence", defined as the process of looking ahead and trying to predict the future (Covan, 2005), is crucial for the construction of older women's identity. Moreover, Hagestad (1986) has highlighted the importance of a certain predictability of the future to achieve a sense of sameness across life. In this sense, the past and, in particular, past models of older women, can be considered agents of social acceptance. Older women of the past were remembered both at subjective and collective levels in similar memories, often as positive examples of all that is socially desirable. Far from being objective evidence, these models were influenced by normativity as much as the present ones. In this sense, the past was a part of the present social reality that transcended the subjectivity and was used by older women as a comparison site with their current situation.

Antonella: I think there is something that helps me in accepting ageing and it's the affection I felt for older people when I was a child. I used to know older people who had grey hair gathered on their head, maybe a handkerchief on their head, and for sure they would not uncover certain parts of their bodies that today women expose. The love I have felt for them, even if they were not my relatives, [...] helps me accept myself even if I look older than I actually am.

Often, memories constituted an ideal model that mainly reinforced the current normativity. In the following example, Anna illustrates why older women should avoid appearing "ambitious" using the traditional example of a good wife:

Anna: Once, when a woman was married, it was over. What also would she want? She didn't have to show off anymore. She was married, enough, she should just look good for her husband.

Nevertheless, models of the past can also function as a representation of how the condition of older women had improved. Compared to the present stereotype, with her dedication for personal appearance and her resistance of ageing, an older woman of the past can appear as an example of sloppiness, underlying her disengagement from society.

Adriana: In the past, sixty-something people obviously... maybe they surrendered to ageing at an early stage? Maybe now we want to extend... not even youth but a pleasant appearance despite ageing.

Several authors (Agamben, 1993; Berger et al., 1973) have underlined the importance, in contemporary society, of the images of women in media, in particular in light of the increasing manipulation of pictures and videos, allowed by newer and advanced technologies⁸. It is not surprising, then, that for the women who participated in this study the media also has a role in social acceptance, especially when older women appear on television. In this case, women can evaluate and discuss the proposed models in order to better understand which practices are available:

Adriana: I feel now there is this anxiety, people don't want to get older. I see it especially on television. (...) I think that today, especially women who work for the TV, have a great help from makeup, it's clear when you see their pictures without makeup. So sometimes I think "They are so lucky".

Members of the Migrant group did not have the same network of surveillance as those in the Resident group, but they reported looking at models of ageing from the past:

⁸ See Chapter 2

Benedetta: When my mother was my age, a woman looked twenty years older. Now there is this thing of keeping a good appearance.

Also, most of the migrants still kept contact with their country of origin by watching Italian television. It is interesting here to note that they did not seem affected by the examples they saw in the Italian media, which could not then be considered in their case to be agents of acceptance:

Bianca: I look at them and I think that women in Italian TV are more into their appearance than English women. (...) but I would never compare myself to them.

The reason could in fact be related to Acculturation, described in Chapter 6. In fact, comparing models of different cultural and social backgrounds could reduce their authority:

Caterina: [in Italy] Even the journalist who reads the news on TV has had some plastic surgery. This is still out of question in London.

7.5 Sense of Agency and the Relationship between Social and Self-Acceptance

In the previous sections, we have analysed social and self-acceptance as separate phenomena. In this section we will investigate the interplay between the two, maintaining the focus on migration and the comparison of the three groups of respondents – Resident, Migrant and Returned.

In our previous analysis on social acceptance, we have explored how women who live in the village have described the consciousness of being both subject and object of observation and the ambivalent outturns produced by it. This network of surveillance created a gaze in which women's bodily practices were regulated by social agents that crossed the boundaries of private and public.

In women living in the village, self-reflection and social observation were profoundly entangled and self-acceptance depended on a complex dialectical relationship between subjective and intersubjective experiences.

It was already observed in this thesis that women used their dress choices to avoid or delay being labelled as "old". Clothing was, indeed, the primary source of impression management and, in the village, the most prominent subject of the discourse on an older woman's appearance. In this study, clothing was also found to be the bodily practice that most revealed the close connection between social and self-acceptance. As described before, women who infringed clothing norms faced the risk of social exclusion, and villagers reported being afraid of losing their social status as valuable and active member of the community. Indeed, women who did not properly manage their personal image were described as "ridiculous". As previously discussed, this word describes the lack of coherence between a woman's personal appearance and her social identity, or her inability to conform to age-ordering norms, and is connected to the notion of "ambition" – the desire to be sexually attractive – a socially unacceptable feature for older women.

Angela: Some women look ridiculous, in the sense that they still want to look young.

When interrogated about the possible reasons that could bring a woman to infringe clothing norms, respondents selected personal matters that had to do not only with their relational domain, but also with their self-identity:

Amelia: I think it's fear of getting old, lack of self-confidence, and lack of affection.

Some directly quoted acceptance as the main cause:

Agostina: These are people who don't want to accept old age

Ambra: I think these women don't accept old age, they don't accept it.

In this sense, the discourse on dress choices reveals the mutual influence and reciprocal dependence of social and self-acceptance. The women noticed that when the self and the body are not synchronized – i.e. when the body is ageing but the feature of “oldness” has not been fully included by a woman in her identity – bodily practices cannot be managed correctly, hence social acceptance is less likely.

The stigma attached to those who fail in practising their bodies, coupled with the assumption that reasons to do so are to be sought in imbalances in personal identity, enhanced in the Resident group the need for agency in their appearance:

Anna: You should see me in the morning, when I wake up. But I don't give myself the time... I immediately put some makeup on my eyes, even when I am home alone, doing house works.

This same sense of agency was then also applied to aspects such as health. Although, as we have seen, women often referred to “luck” or “God” as the source of their wellness, good health still symbolized success in managing the body and in controlling individual behaviours. Those who were healthy often attributed positive meaning to

their own habits, inferring a sense of responsibility that can lead to stigma towards those who fall ill.

First, it is interesting to note that members of the Resident group considered ageing to be responsible for many health issues, although they seemed to be there for a long time, as in this example:

Alessandra: I have gastritis, some gastritis. I have a hiatus hernia. I think this is something that comes with age. But I always had gastritis.

The sense of agency then leads to an increased use of medical practices. Residents used a remarkable number of medical terms to describe their health, especially in relation to medications and their use:

Alice: The only drugs I took were calcitriol with vitamin D for bones, now I take a supplement because even at the last check they told me that the vertebrae have little cartilage, then instead of that one I take a supplement of cartilage.

Moreover, the use of this striking specialized lexicon was coupled with an apparent competency in making inferences about the causes of their problems:

Adelaide: Some problems with my teeth, more holes. Probably calcium is leaving me.

Alessandra: Obviously, I took hormones so my DXA is perfect.⁹

Although it was not possible to verify the source of women's medical information, it is important to note that none of the respondents was a health professional, and that

⁹ DXA (Dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry) is a medical test measuring the bone mineral density.

sometimes the information they provided was proved to have no actual medical basis.¹⁰

We are then inclined to believe that there is a normative structure supporting this display of competence over medical issues. In other words, the habit of showing agency on personal health was the effect of the social pressure to be successful. The use of medications and other adjustments will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

In regards to transnationalism, it is interesting to note how members of the Returned and Migrant groups expressed a sense of agency on their bodies.

Women who had lived in London and moved back to Borgo tended to recognize the same sense of agency over their bodies. Indeed, they identified practices and actions they could put in place in order to work upon their bodily changes, as in this example:

Chiara: The flab! A little extra flab! I do not like it but it is there and if I was a bit better at making diets or have a massage... Yes, massages! I could remove a bit.

Migrants who continued to live in London showed that they also applied a certain level of supervision over their bodily changes. Nevertheless, in their discourse there is a shift in temporality. Instead of looking at bodily changes as a sudden and unexpected occurrence, they constantly referred to the evolution of their bodies as a continuity in time:

Benedetta: But you are given this body and you have to value and protect it, until slowly, slowly, things change; then I think it's normal. Not to look younger, but to feel good about yourself.

¹⁰ In the passage from Alice's interview, quoted above, we have been able to verify that 'supplement of cartilage' does not exist, and that 'Cardiven' is actually a medication used for regulating blood circulation.

In the narrative of members of the Migrant group, the same sense of continuousness was adopted to analyse the practice of the care of their bodies:

Caterina: If you look at you diet, your life-style, I think 30% of your health is controlled by you. Maybe even more! (...) I am glad I took care of myself well in time.

As previously discussed, this sense of continuity of time was the source of their sense of synchronicity between body and identity, and their different use and understanding of the word acceptance. It is interesting to note here that, in the discourse of Migrant group respondents, the stigma was attached to lifestyle choices rather than appearance. As women who lived in the village used the word “ridiculous” to describe those women who did not conform to clothing norms, women who lived in London applied a normative structure to lifestyle choices and used the word “lazy” to label those who did not behave according to their age:

Bendetta: Because one of the fundamental things in ageing is laziness. When you say “No, no, no, I don’t feel like doing something” but then when you do it you feel good. This has to be overcome. (...) I don’t think later life is bad. If you commit yourself... You have to be active, not lazy, you have to be generous with yourself.

As much as women of the Resident group did not always feel confident about their bodily practices, and feared being labelled “ridiculous”, Migrant group respondents were able to refer the word “lazy” to themselves, although they did not put in place the same network of control described by women living in Borgo:

Bruna: You know... Exercise. Ok, you can do physical exercise, they say aqua gym is good. But actually now I am a bit too lazy to do those sort of things.

Plastic surgery was another instrument which the women discussed using in order to control their image in the public sphere. What is interesting in this discourse is the different approaches and different motivations reported for being in favour or against the use of surgery to alter a woman's appearance. Some of the respondents were in favour, in as much as they showed having previously thought about the kind of alteration they would seek:

Anna: Oh yes I would, I would do everything! First of all my lips, the lines around my lips. These wrinkles near my eyes are not annoying, I don't have any on my forehead. And I would want to lift my eyebrows, like that! Yes, I would do it to like myself. I must like myself.

Financial issues and fear of undergoing operations were cited by women as reasons for not choosing plastic surgery. What is interesting here is that they applied the same normative structure as clothing. In fact, if certain procedures like facelifts were considered appropriate for older women, others fell into the category of "ambition". In other words, cancelling out signs of ageing would be considered acceptable, but trying to show sexual attractiveness would not:

Alba: Yes, absolutely. Because it's too expensive but the first thing would be a nice face lift. Not my lips, because I think women who have lips augmentation at my age are obscene.

More on plastic surgery and its use will be discussed in Chapter 8.

7.6 Conclusions

In this chapter we have analysed acceptance as a dynamic synchronization between body and self.

The word “acceptance” was used in different variations in respondents’ accounts. “Accettare” (“to accept”), the grammatical form mostly used by members of the Resident group, shows a sense of obligation, as if acceptance were a duty to be fulfilled. In contrast, “io accetto” (I accept) was the form mostly used by members of the Migrant and Returned groups, expressing a sense of agency.

Acceptance was described by respondents as originating from the recognition of the signs of ageing. As a way of reacting to physical changes, acceptance can signify passive surrender, when all means of control of the body have lost their effectiveness, but it can also be considered in its active meaning, when it triggers practices of adjustment and functions as an instrument of synchronization between body and self.

Indeed, the women referred to situations when the appearance of their bodies and their self-identities showed substantial incompatibilities. On the one hand, for Resident group respondents, the process of accepting ageing was described as starting from the body and its changes, which initiated a process of transition in their selves. On the other hand, Migrant group respondents described ageing as a feature of their identities rather than their bodies.

The way bodily changes were described by respondents revealed critical aspects of self-acceptance. The Residents and the Migrants described different changes in their personal appearance and the main transition they had to face, that of the menopause. In particular, Resident group members described changes as sudden and almost

unexpected, while those in the Migrant group showed a sense of continuity with regard to the transformations of their bodies. In this sense, self-acceptance functioned as a binding agent for self and body, when the two feel disentangled.

Since acceptance appears to be socially mediated, respondents described how social acceptance was accorded in their own community. Members of the three groups reported comparing their body to those of their peers in order to recognize signs of ageing. This process of comparison can be both positive, as it helps reduce the sense of otherness often linked to ageing, and negative, as it can initiate fear of exclusion. In fact, the women also observed and compared social practices of appearance in order to achieve better outcomes. Residents described social norms regarding dress choices in old age and the negative labels imposed on those who contravened the norms. Female members of the village formed a network of mutual surveillance, which women feared but, at the same time, supported with their own actions. Nevertheless, other women could also be positive agents of control on the women's bodily practices.

In conclusion, in the process of ageing, the relationship between self-acceptance and social acceptance produced in women a sense of agency over their own bodies, in which the validity of personal actions was supported by a culturally-mediated normative structure.

Chapter 8: Adjustment

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 7 the notion of Acceptance was examined as used by participants. Focusing on concepts of self-acceptance and social-acceptance, differences have emerged among the three groups of women who took part in this research – Resident, Migrant, and Returned. Acceptance was described as a movement between the changing body and the social identity of the women interviewed, a dynamic necessary to deal with the fracture represented by the onset of ageing. Most importantly, social factors were identified by residents as key to achieve acceptance, while migrants mostly referred to features of their identity being the force supporting the same dynamic.

This chapter will discuss another dynamic related by participants to bodily practices in ageing: Adjustment. After evaluating factors such as their working status, the relationship with their peers, and the transformations of their own bodies, the women perceived that their social status had changed. This change brought them to assess their bodily practices, to transform and adapt them to both their changing bodies and to social expectations.

Changes in bodily practices will be described in this section, with a particular focus on how women described the reasons underpinning their choices. It will be argued that,

where the Residents tended to refer to external factors to justify their preferences, the Migrants tended to identify internal agency as the main trigger for their decisions.

8.2 Adjustment: Definition and Use

In Chapter 2, two concepts of Adjustment were discussed, both focused on the changes of the self that individuals make in order to accommodate or prepare for changes in their bodies, such as disability (Charmaz, 1995; Ruble and Brooks-Gunn, 2016). In this study, Adjustment is conceptualized as a movement in the opposite direction. Indeed, Adjustment was defined from the participants' accounts as the set of strategies women put in place to adapt their bodily practices when they feel that their social status is changing. Adjustment starts as an adaptive reaction to the realization of transformations both in the body and in social identity, a defining moment in the lives of the women who participated in this study.

This concept takes into account long term, or possibly permanent, changes in the personal behaviour as well as short term variations that occur during the transition. It also includes those changes that are evaluated by women as a possible coping strategy but are then discarded as not effective.

Some adjustments are common in all groups: Hormone Replacement Treatment (HRT) after menopause, for example, was used by members of all groups with no significant difference in terms of percentages. Nevertheless, in this as in other choices, what varies significantly between the groups are the reasons given to adopt one behaviour over

another. Indeed, women who had lived all their lives in Borgo tended to indicate elements of their social environment as their main motivations to change or maintain their habits, while the women who had moved to London were more likely to describe adjustment as an inner-driven dynamic.

The reader might remember that, when speaking about Acceptance¹, participants described it as a movement between body and identity, which was described as starting from the body by residents and as starting from identity by migrants. In other words, those in the Resident group were more likely to pick up physical changes as the reason for recognizing that they were becoming “old”, while those in the Migrant group were more inclined to see it as a feature of their changing self. Migrants also showed a sense of continuity with previous stages of their lives, while residents felt that the beginning of later life represented a fracture.

In the next sections we will analyse how these dynamics also affect adjustment, and how they affect the way the women perceived and lived their bodies.

8.3 Internal and External Drivers of Adjustment

Every day the body is lived and practised. Women apply a constant evaluation both of their experience of the body and the signals that they send with bodily practices. Changes in bodily practices can be triggered by different reasons, or drivers, described

¹ See Chapter 7

by the women who took part in this study. In this section, it will be interesting to note the differences between the three groups – Resident, Migrant, and Returned.

As argued in Chapter 7, the migrants highlighted internal factors when they described acceptance. The same happened when they spoke about adjustments to the way they practised their bodies:

*Bendetta: When you become older a new placidity appears.
You have a new authority, which gives you a better perspective.
Therefore, you pay more attention, because you know you can
fall. There are uncertainties, right?*

Bendetta described a new awareness, which brought the cognition that an older body can be more fragile, in accordance with the social narrative about older people. The consequence is a more alert evaluation of movements and of the risks implied. Nevertheless, insecurity does not come first; the first hint comes from the recognition that time is passing. It is also important to note that this change is described with strong, positive words, such as “authority”. This indicates that the focus is not on the decay of the body but on the augmented consciousness.

A new cognition of the self is not the only driver indicated as the beginning of the change. To succeed in maintaining acceptable bodily practices, Bendetta indicated that personal commitment is key:

*Bendetta: Women shouldn't say "I don't care about myself
because I am becoming older".. No, we should care!
Of course you can say "I don't like being old" but I don't think
being old is negative. If you make an effort, if you are not
lazy,... You have to be generous with yourself, have a good
relationship with yourself, have self-esteem.*

As emerged when describing Acceptance, the word “lazy” is used to indicate that the power to overcome unwanted transformations brought about by ageing can be

overcome. The Migrants experienced a major life transition when they moved to a different country, and felt that they had been successful despite being disconnected both from their culture of origin and the culture of settlement. Through this process, migrants gained the sense that the capacity to cope and be successful were to be sought in personal abilities, rather than in external resources².

When women in the Resident group reflected on ageing and the changes it brought, they tended to focus on external elements:

Antonia: These changes... I still wonder if changes are due to modifications in my life style, like my work status - because when you retire everything changes -, or because age itself led me to this... I don't know if my life would still be the same if I still had my job.

Residents did not only focus on structural aspects but indicated others, especially other females, as drivers of change.

Allegra: Sometimes I don't accept myself, when my daughters tell me "Go to the hairstylist!". They are right, because at my age you look better when you hair is tidy.

On the one hand, residents felt that the change was directed by agents that they were unable to control. On the other hand, migrants described their ability to regulate adjustment and make choices in bodily practices. This sense of agency is deeply entrenched in members of the Migrant group, insofar as even health choices regarding medications and diagnosis were described by migrants as self-directed.

Chapter 5 described how, after their arrival in London, the women were disconnected from the medical system for reasons such as their inability to speak English and their

² More on this will be discussed in Chapter 9

lack of knowledge of the rules and regulations of the NHS at the time. In the early years of settlement, migrants were forced to give birth or take care of their children without the constant supervision of a doctor. Today, faced by the medical challenges of ageing, they focused on their ability to act independently:

Bendetta: And now, even when I am in Italy, I go to the doctor and I am the one making the diagnosis. I tell him what I have. I say "I have this problem and I think this is the reason".

The decision to manage health independently was conscious³. In fact, when members of the Migrant group were in contact with their peers in Italy, they were able to highlight their different approaches:

Bendetta: I don't take medications. But when I go to Italy, women tell me "Take this! Take that! Why don't you take a few drops of this?". Here in England doctors don't prescribe medications, so after a while you start wondering "Why should I take medications?".

Most migrants reported not taking medications, even when prescribed by doctors – English or Italian. By contrast, all the women who spent their entire lives in Borgo described a detailed medications regimen.

Alida: I take many medications. [She takes from her purse a small pill box, divided in three sections, and opens it]. This is Cardiven, for my scars, this is a protection, this is for cholesterol, and this is Cardicor for the heart.

Residents often seemed stressed about the quantity of medications they were taking, which was described as imposed by and unavoidably connected to ageing.

Alida: these bones are growing and they hurt the joints in my fingers. It is very painful. It is all due to menopause, I am taking so many medications for this menopause, this osteoporosis.

³ This will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 9, when the concept of "medial acculturation" will be introduced.

As anticipated in the previous chapter, although members of the Resident group seemed particularly knowledgeable about medications and their use, when their knowledge is tested faults show.

HRT is a treatment used to alleviate the symptoms of menopause and related long term risks, such as osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease and stroke. HRT consists of medications containing female hormones – oestrogen and progesterone – that lower when women approach menopause and can be administered in different forms: tablets, patches, and pellets implanted under the skin. As argued in Chapter 2, the experience of menopause is strongly linked to the cultural background and is becoming increasingly medical in Western societies (Lock, 1993). Hence, it is not surprising that the women who participated in this study had different approaches of adjustment to such a pivotal change in their bodies.

Several participants in this research, members of the three groups, reported using HRT or choosing not to. Surprisingly, some Resident women used HRT without knowing it:

Angela: No, I haven't done anything for menopause, no hormones, nothing. Just a patch.

Several members of the Resident group reported using “only a patch” that was prescribed by their doctors, without understanding that it was HRT, or being informed about its actual content or potential risks. However, other Residents have expressed a better understanding of HRT.

HRT was the only instance where Resident-group members showed a sense of agency, an independent choice, often made to delay the visible effects of ageing. Indeed, many reported “smoothness of the skin” as one of the best effects of HRT. For this reason, some women decided to use HRT longer than prescribed, although conscious of the possible risks.

Alessandra: I used the patch... I was supposed to keep it for 5 years but I kept it for 8. I knew it was dangerous, the doctor told me it could led to breast cancer. And then I actually had breast cancer.

Others, showing the same sense of agency, decided not to use it, but in accordance with their doctor:

Amanda: I haven't used HRT. My gynaecologist asked me if I wanted it but he didn't support it I didn't want it because I was feeling well.

Women who had not used HRT expressed doubts about their decision. It seems that, for them, if a treatment is available it should always be used when possible.

Adriana: I didn't take HRT, maybe I have been irresponsible.

The quote above is from a woman whose sister had breast cancer after using HRT for longer than prescribed. Because the risk of developing breast cancer is believed to be genetic, her sister's illness was the main reason why her doctor decided to not prescribe HRT. Despite this clear indication, the impossibility to use a medication was received with uncertainty.

The same doubts appeared when the choice of not using HRT was imposed by other health issues, investigated by doctors:

Agnese: I started HRT but then, after a check, they found calcifications in my breast. I underwent surgery to remove them, it was nothing too dangerous, but still.... The doctor said I had to suspend HRT, and even my husband suggested I quit. I feel that now I have become a bit idiotic. Maybe I would be more lucid, had I continued taking HRT. I don't know, but I couldn't face a bigger risk.

The choice to avoid the use of HRT was explained by migrants using different reasons. Many of them reported being 'too busy' to realize that they were approaching menopause or even that their menstrual cycle had stopped. The same attitude was maintained by members of the Returned group:

Chiara: I didn't have hot flush, I didn't have the usual symptoms of menopause. Maybe that's because I was too busy caring for my mother, who had Alzheimer's disease. Maybe.... Or maybe it's because I have accepted it, because I had already accepted every stage of my life.

In this quote, once again, the word "acceptance" is used to signify a sense of unity between the self and the body. Migrants seemed to believe that this internal agency could have a tangible effect on their body, or on the way they perceived it.

Residents seemed to pay particular attention to their diet, which had undergone significant changes over the years and especially when later life approached. None of the members of the group of migrants reported changes in their dieting habits, while all Resident-group members spoke about adjustments in their food consumption. Diets are often aimed at lowering calorie intake, sometimes even fasting. Abstaining from food was common in the village, although women reported difficulties in following this social prescription:

Anna: I don't follow a diet but I care about my food intake. Last night I went to bed early so I could skip dinner.

Adjustments to food consumption were heavily influenced by several external factors. Residents reported peer pressure, media, and doctors as sources of information and advice for their diet.

In addition to losing or maintaining weight, changes in the diet included integration with natural supplies, which were also affected by a common discourse. Rather than medical advice, a general 'they say' frames choices and decisions, and can justify exceptions:

Agostina: Well sometimes I indulge in a small sin: dark chocolate. But that's because they say dark chocolate is good for your health. Also, I take supplements, like blueberries to strengthen the veins and the eyes, because they say it is good for your eyes, I take millet for my hair and I eat yoghurt for calcium.

External drivers of adjustment can be ambiguous and led different women to opposite conclusions. For instance, the will to reach the desired physical appearance supported both the decision to undergo or not undergo a diet.

Alba: At this stage of my life, dieting is difficult. Not because of the diet but because you know you will lose weight on your belly but you also lose skin elasticity. My skin would fall, my wrinkles will become more evident, and my face will deteriorate. So I would like my face to stay the same, because it looks better with a bit of lift, but I would like to lose some belly. But you have to put together the two things and settle for that.

8.4 External Drivers of Adjustment

Ageing represents, in women's life-course, a source of discontinuity. In Western societies, the discourse on ageing is largely focused on cultural norms that can be confusing, if not conflicting, and are based on both positive and negative meanings of the word "old" (Ussher, 2006; Small, 2007).⁴ This discourse permeates media, medical accounts, as well as everyday discourse on ageing, to the point where women can feel that their personal experience of ageing has been shaped mostly by external factors.

External drivers of adjustment are the reasons advanced by Resident group members to justify their choices of adjustment. The certainty that external factors oriented the ability to undertake adjustments led residents to highlight them even when they were speaking about other people's choices. Amanda lives in Borgo and has a sister who moved to London. Here, she reflects on their different lifestyles, and the reasons that underpin this difference.

Amanda: I think life in England is completely different. Especially because this is a village where we all know each other. I think living in a village is different than living in a city. First of all, we all know each other in the village, it is quiet and calm. The city is confusing, it's hectic, and there is movement. Going to London is quite something. And their habits are so different!

The first external agent she identifies is the structure of their environment. London and Borgo provide different opportunities of adjustment and, at the beginning, it seems that the metropolis can offer more than the small village. However, when Amanda goes further detailing her analysis, she seems to have a different perspective:

⁴ See also Chapter 2.

Amanda: My sister's life is very different from mine. I was always able to work, go to the gym, and play volleyball. She couldn't do these things when she was young but she can do them now. That is because I married my husband when I was very young and my mother was able to help me, because I was still going to school when I got married. And then my mother kept helping me even when I started working.

As in this example, residents quoted domestic arrangements as one external factor that might orient adjustment.

Plastic surgery was discussed during the majority of the interviews as one possible strategy for adjustment. As we have discussed before, personal presentation was more important for the women who were part of the Resident group, while Migrant group women tended to concentrate on issues regarding their lifestyles. Therefore, it is not surprising that the migrants were not interested in speaking about plastic surgery, and generally quickly discarded the topic.

Celeste: I don't feel I need to.

The Residents were keener to speak about plastic surgery. In their discourse, the possibility of looking younger was the only acceptable reason to undergo an operation. Other beauty factors, such as achieving a more sensual look, were deemed to be “obscene”, morally questionable and not appropriate for an older woman.

Alba: I would never do a lip augmentation, I would never do that. I think women my age who have a lips job are obscene.

Social normativity is therefore another driver of adjustment, although it is not recognized as external. This is coherent with Rexbye & Povlsen's (2007) work, which

argued that, after years of social conditioning, women internalize the specific concept of beauty that is predominant in their cultural environment.

The eyes of the others are always present in the Residents' decisions. Indeed social surveillance has a disciplinary power on women (Foucault, 1977, 1979). The social surveillance described in Chapter 7 is a powerful drive of adjustment, although it can be ambiguous. On the one hand, the idea of hiding the body to conceal signs of ageing can bring to the conclusion that plastic surgery would be a positive strategy of adjustment:

Alba: I would retouch my face because that's the thing you can't hide. You can mask everything else with the right dress, or a pair of trousers, or heels, but not your face. If you have wrinkles, you show them.

On the other hand, the exact same normativity can lead to the opposite outcome:

Amelia: Looking like a porcelain with plastic surgery is useless. There are things that you can't hide and that reveal your age: arms, knees, and hands. You can have a face like a doll but then when you show your hands... There's the rub!

Social surveillance was perceived as authoritative, insomuch as contravening the supposed social expectation can become an excruciating problem. Women knew that all their choices of adjustment would not pass unnoticed, but would be scrutinized and evaluated by the community.

Antonia: Going grey has requested a good dose of braveness. Not dyeing my hair was a huge physical change. Yes, I was brave. As soon as my hair went grey people who know me, my daughter's friends, or even my own friends, started commenting. 'You look good!' or 'I can't look at you so old'".

An independent choice sometimes seemed too difficult. Women perceived that they had to maintain certain habits and repeat them against what they perceived as their free will.

Adriana: I go to the hairstylist very often as ageing is particularly evident on my hair. I mean... My hair is grey. I started dyeing my hair at thirty, and now it feels like I am a slave.

Economic factors were also quoted as key components of the process of decision making.

Alba: It would be really too expensive, this is why I don't do undergo plastic surgery. The first thing would be a lifting, to conceal some of these horrible wrinkles on my face. I have always declared it with pride, I have no problem with plastic surgery.

8.5 Internal and Mixed Drivers: Physical Activity

In this research, it was often stressed that Borgo and London are different environments and that they create different opportunities for women to practise their bodies.

The geography of Borgo and its surroundings is, in the words of the residents, the main reason why they were able to avoid the gym and other indoor physical activities, and preferred to take advantage of the woods on the mountains close to the village to take long walks.

Amelia: I take a long walk every day, at least one hour and half. I walk on the streets around my house but I keep away from traffic. Of course this is possible only because Borgo is a privileged area in this sense.

In Borgo, walking and hiking are very common, and almost all the women belonging to the Resident group reported walking as their main physical activity. Walking seems to be the easiest choice, where more structured activities fail to provide the same flexibility:

Alessandra: I used to go to the gym. I tried for a year but it was too stressing. I had to close my shop for the lunch break, run there, and come back right after. I quit and now, whenever I can, I go for a walk.

The practice of walking can take many forms. The length can vary, as well as the frequency. At a first glance, it looks like it was self-imposed by women as part of their adjustment to later life:

Anna: I haven't been at the gym lately but I walk a lot. Maybe not a long walk, but wherever I go I leave the car a bit far and walk. It is just another way to avoid becoming lazy.

Amanda: I like walking. Last summer I went every day, a long walk, more than one hour long, always with a friend. I feel good when I walk, I haven't lost weight, but it made me feel good.

Working all day long at my desk, in front of my computer, at the end of day I feel pain.

When analysing the reasons that brought women to begin walking as a more or less regular physical activity, it appears that, in addition to the geographical structure of the village, doctors played an important role in this decision.

As is evident from the interviews, walking was prescribed by doctors as if it were medication. Women actually considered it a treatment and relied on its efficacy for the

cure of various medical issues. For example, walking was considered a cure for high cholesterol:

Antonia: I went today to the pharmacy to check the levels of my cholesterol. It is a bit high. I will go to the doctor and see what I have to do. I walk every day but clearly this is not enough. Maybe it is produced by what I eat.

Walking was also believed to be a treatment for osteoporosis and, more generally, a way to improve the state of bones. Again, doctors' advice seemed to be the source of this certainty.

Alida: I walk because it makes my bones work better. My doctor says I should walk at least half an hour every day.

In a rare example, the Resident group identified one internal factor as a key element for the success of walking as medical therapy: self-discipline was seen as the fundamental impulse. Ultimately, the decision to take a walk was taken independently by the women.

Alice: When I got into menopause my doctor said that I couldn't take hormonal replacements. She said that, instead, I needed to walk regularly, so I tried to do it every day. It was not the kind of walking I like, it was a sort of obligation. Yes, I did it, and yes, I was satisfied with myself, but it was just a short walk in the neighbourhood. But I have to say that it was also rewarding in terms of health, or at least that's what I was told, because I don't have osteoporosis.

What is interesting to note in the discourse of the Resident group about physical activity and, more in general, about their bodies, is the language. The body is described as a group of features (blood, bones, and internal organs) that are properly identified

and named. However, the residents did not refer to their own bodies as an organism, as a unity.

We will now analyse in detail an example of how adjustment in the migrants is not only driven by a sense of internal agency, but also by the idea that the body forms a unity, and that it is seen as an integrated part of the person.

In this extract, Benedetta describes her choices regarding physical activity and how it has changed since she felt she was becoming older. At first, she quotes external factors that allowed her choice:

Benedetta: There are places here in London offering free classes of aerobics for people in their fifties or older. I go every Tuesday and Wednesday. So of course the movements are fit for older people. The teacher leads you to perform movements that are good for your joints.

The discourse then quickly changes and focuses on the internal benefits of physical activities:

Benedetta: It is also something psychological, which helps you maintain your mind busy for that hour. You stop thinking about your problems.

After evaluating separately structural and internal aspects that led to her choice of beginning a regular physical activity, Benedetta refers to how movement allows her to realign body and mind, which are described as a unity that has been altered by the passing of time. Movement allows the realization of changes but it also brings the possibility for adjustment.

Benedetta: But mostly, it is difficult to... to.... move following the sound of music and think at the same time. Ageing lets you do everything you would regularly do but you are unable to involve the mind in those actions because it becomes too demanding. Those courses resynchronize... Do you understand synchronizing? When they tell you '1,2,3,4', and you do the movements, and try your best to be precise. I realized that the movement of your body is a movement with your mind.

Other migrants identified physical activity as a successful adjustment, underlying its efficacy in achieving the unity of body and self:

Bianca: Moving is difficult. Every time, before leaving home, I am not very keen on going to the dance class, but then, when I come back home afterwards, I am happy that I went and I feel more like myself.... But a bit different.

Caterina: Mentally more than physically. Because exercising is as good for your body as it is for your mind. Because it is like... a unity. When you exercise you feel good both mentally and physically, but mostly mentally.

Benedetta considers a factor as internal as thinking to have a direct impact on the body.

The body, she explains, can be educated:

Benedetta: This has happened to me, I am not very old, but I am stiff in regards to my body, because of my mind. And my body is stiff because I don't challenge it! When you walk or do exercises and you are not used to it, you are just dragging your feet. When I go to the gym and they ask me to do some movements, then I realise that a step is a movement from the hip to the ankle, or backwards. And this is a sort of education, made with the sound of music.

The use of the word “education” implies that the unity between body and self cannot be attained by self-discipline but needs the involvement of external factors. This is

why, attending classes, rather than practicing sports alone, is so important for Benedetta:

Benedetta: And it is the same when I go to dance classes. When you dance you engage with your mind. When you dance on your own you just mix some steps, but there are very precise steps that you have to follow in class, and you have to count them, and when you make a mistake you think “My body is not following... Or, better, my mind is not following”. This is the problem! No one tells you what is perfection, you can just do what you feel you can do. And slowly you get better at it, and it all starts from your mind.

Being in a class with other women of the same age also provides the chance to compare the transforming physical abilities. The ageing body, then, is not perceived as ‘other’.

Benedetta: Socialising (in gym classes) means that you are not alone anymore. It is the most important things for older people. Socialising means that you are not alone anymore. You go there and you receive something, not that you are asking but still you receive something. You go there and see others, and you see that they all have their own problems and this makes you feel included, inside the society.

Nevertheless, migrants, just as with members of the Resident group, practised walking as a form of physical activity with the aim of maintaining their bodies fit. This tradition, which in Borgo is facilitated by the quietness of woods and empty lanes, was retained in the busy streets of London.

Brigida: I walk when I go to the supermarket. When I don't have to carry a heavy weight, even if the bus is coming I'd rather walk home.

Members of the Returned group showed the ability to highlight mixed mechanisms underpinning their choices pertaining to physical activities. On the one hand, they were

visited by the same doctors as the residents, and therefore they received the same advice regarding the efficacy of walking. This proves to be a powerful external motivation for adjustment:

Chiara: I don't practice any sport, I go for a walk when I can. Doctors told me I need to walk, as a therapy, as a cure for diabetes.

On the other hand, the Returned group respondents seemed to maintain the sense of unity that allowed them to describe their body more like a lived experience than an external object composed of different parts:

Chiara: I listen to the music and let my partner lead. I listen to the music, I let my head sing, I sing along with the band, and move. It is heavy physically but it makes my mind feel light. It is beautiful.

Although physical activity was felt by members of the three groups as an important and potentially positive strategy of adjustment, increasing tiredness in ageing was quoted as an obstacle.

Chiara: The most important change for me is the lack of enthusiasm. I was more enthusiastic when I was 30, I wanted to do things, see things. Now I lack strength, maybe physical strength. Now doing anything takes me longer.

In the matter of tiredness, once again the migrants were more likely to refer to external factors only and specifically when they talked about their years of settlement in London:

Bice: I was more tired when I was younger. I had two children and I used to bring them to and back from school, to the swimming pool, bring them... Back then I knew what it means to be tired.

8.6 Clothing and the Body as an External Drive

As previously discussed, the women migrants described the body as an integrated part of their identity, and expressed a sense of unity of body and self. By contrast, members of the Resident group talked about the body as an external feature, an object that could be managed and even modified.

As an external object, the body itself was sometimes described as an agent that could lead to modifications in women's habits:

Alba: I think my biggest problem is my sexual life. I have never been very active sexually, I was always quiet and my husband is very respectful so I was always the one who had to initiate.... But now, with my body changing, I don't feel confident anymore. If I have to take off my clothes in front of my husband, I turn off the light.

McLuhan (1968) has described clothing as a powerful tool that creates a perceptual and symbolic environment⁵. Coherently, the body was used by participants as a textual instrument to communicate with others. Residents felt the need to achieve a complex balance between not looking old and showing moral consciousness:

Alba: I always try to match my style with the desire to hide my body with young-looking clothes. I don't want to wear classic dresses, because they make you look even older, so I always look for something with a younger style that can fit my body. It is difficult, difficult, because it takes a lot to find the right shape of dress.

Features of clothes that were taken into consideration when adjusting to old age were various, and included shape, length, colour, and tightness.

⁵ See Chapter 2.

Alba: I don't want to show fat rolls so I tend to wear large clothes. Sometimes too large, so people tell me 'You look bigger than you actually are!'

Amelia: I try to dress appropriately, not clothes for an old woman but appropriate, but not clothes or dresses or outfits for an old woman. Something appropriate for my age. For example, I love colours. Of course I also wear black or grey, but I try to make my outfits soft. I love red and I wear it often but if I wear a red top then I'll pair it with black or blue trousers. I take a lot of care, and I always look for others' advices because I don't want to be flashy.

This message was not only aimed at adults in the community. Children were believed to understand the same code:

Antonella: I think that, even though my pupils don't talk with me about how I dress, but I see that they look at me and they feel that they can rely on me more than they would with someone who is dressed like them.

This clothing language was profoundly modified by another change that comes with age: retirement. Women adjusted their clothing styles to their new position in society. In this case, the new role of pensioner seems to have brought a more relaxed attitude.

Anita: Now that I don't work anymore, I need less clothes. I mean that I don't need to wear something different every single day.

Nevertheless, this change is not always welcome. Sometimes women would like to keep shopping as they did before but felt obliged to limit this activity:

Antonia: I am a shopaholic. I am trying to control this, I have definitely reduced my shopping after retiring. When you have a job, you have to go to work every day... Well it is not necessary but you feel like you have to often wear new outfits.

The movement between body changes and clothing adjustment was described by the residents as circular. Physical transformations led to change in dress choices but clothes could also modify the personal perception of the body:

Amanda: Of course, there are clothes that I like but then when I wear them.... I think I don't have an exact perception of my body until I wear clothes. I would buy things that are not... Probably I am still a bit behind with my head, at the time when I was smaller. Then, when I see myself in the mirror with clothes, I get really upset.

Therefore, clothes were both site and driver of adjustment. As drivers, clothes could be ambivalent. The quote above shows that wearing clothes that are considered too juvenile can alter the perception of the body and make it look older. The following quote shows that the same practice can have the opposite effect and maintain a sense of youthfulness:

Ambra: I think I never feel old because I am always wearing jeans, trousers, and shirts.

Those in the Returned group showed the same attitude. The ability to master bodily practices enhanced a woman's sense of agency on ageing itself.

Costanza: I don't see myself old because I don't ACT old. If you wear a smock, flat shoes, you tie your hair or cut it very short, you get a perm, then you look at yourself and think: 'What have I become?'

In women who have moved back from London, the need to adjust clothing to age was also present:

Chiara: You have to adapt your style at every age, every age needs a bit of adjustments

Members of the Returned group used both external and internal drivers to explain their clothing choices:

Celeste: I haven't changed inside, I still care about what I wear. My life style though has changed because I live in a small village and I have fewer occasions to dress up and go out. When I was in London I used to go to the movies, to theatres, to parties and dinners. We used to go everywhere, now here we had to reduce. When you go to the village, you can't wear an evening dress. But I still like wearing nice clothes. It is something inside you. Clothes don't make who you are but they are still a part of you. I still have this pride, the desire to present myself nicely.

Adjustments in clothing were recognizable in migrants too, although the language was slightly different. The accent seems to be not on the unfitness of the body but on the wrong shape of the dress:

Bruna: I see clothes that your daughter would wear, you try them on and think "Oh my God, they are horrible!". You always try to look at yourself as when you were 20 years old, you don't search clothes for now but then when you wear those dresses, things that I didn't even wear when I was 20, you realize it doesn't look good.

Nevertheless, the women in the Migrant group seemed to have a more varied attitude. Some of them had not adjusted their style:

Brigida: I am afraid I am not interested much. My sister is. I have always been plain and I carry on being plain.

Some adjusted to a different style, but identified a continuity with the past and, as in previous examples, external drivers such as economic factors and family status were used to establish a connection with their early years in London:

Benvenuta: I see I am different from before. I used to like dressing up but now I am quieter about it. I used to like dressing up but I couldn't afford it even then, I never had the

money, never. I can't complain, I never had any debt, I could always cover for our basic needs.

Caterina: I dress younger now than when I was 25. I had two young children back then, I had no time for clothes.

8.7 Conclusions

In this chapter we have explored the concept of adjustment as defined by the women who took part in this research.

Adjustment consists of the set of changes that women apply to their bodily practices in order to adapt to the cognition of being 'old'. This cognition can arise both from transformations in the body or from the evaluation of social aspects, such as retirement. Adjustment also includes those changes that have been evaluated by women as a possible coping strategy but that have been discarded for different reasons.

Adjustment can have different drivers – i.e. different forces can propel the change – that have been divided into internal and external.

In general, members of the Migrant group justified their choices of adjustment mainly using internal drivers, which included features of the self, such as authority or personal commitment. In this sense, the migrants showed a sense of agency in accordance with their view of body and self as a unity, which emerged in their discourse about acceptance. Nevertheless, when the Migrants talk about their early years in London, they tend to focus on external drivers.

By contrast, members of the Resident group mainly focused on external drivers of adjustments, such as other members of the family or the community, economic factors, environmental factors, and medical practitioners. These forces were described as

strong enough to suppress personal will. Sometimes, the residents described their own body as an external driver of adjustment, showing that they tended to perceive it as an object that could be used to communicate their status to other members of the community. On the other hand, the Migrants and those in the Returned group described their bodies as a lived experience.

Chapter 9: Conceptual Outcomes

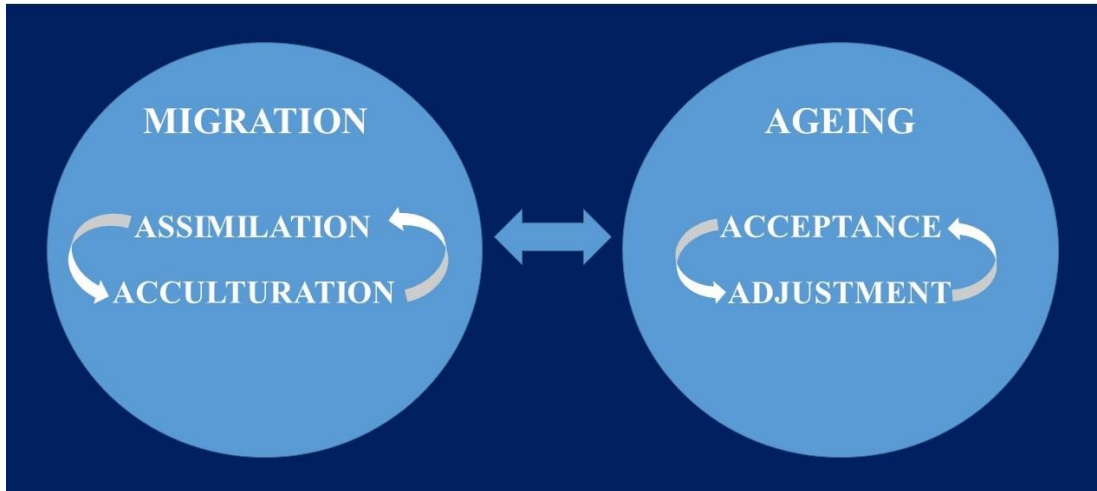
9.1 Introduction

In this thesis, four dynamics have been identified to be at the core of the intersection between migration, ageing, and the body: Assimilation, Acculturation, Acceptance, and Adjustment. Having examined these dynamics individually, in this chapter the relationship between them will be described.

First, a conceptual model of transnationalism in relation to ageing and the body will be presented. Drawing from Aristotle's concept of potentiality and its use in the work of Agamben (1993) it will be argued that migrants' transnational cultural framework does not only encompass the location of origin and the one of destination but it also entails a deep understanding – instinctual more than conceptual in nature – of the contextual essence of social norms.

Finally, the relationship between the two dynamics related to ageing – Acceptance and Adjustment – will be examined, with reference to the effects produced by migration on it. Then, the interplay of the two dynamics related to migration – Assimilation and Acculturation – will be described, focusing on how ageing affects it.

Figure 3: Interplay of the Four Dynamics



9.2 The Body and Transnationalism

Studies on transnationalism have mostly focused on the double cultural context of migrants (Fortier, 1999, 2000, 2006; Levitt, 2001; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Zontini, 2015). Zontini (2015) has described the habitus of migrants as “bifocal” (p. 328): their system of reference encompasses both the culture of origin and the culture of destination. For this reason, it is argued, migrants’ cultural background is shaped by the intricate relationship between traditions and new norms. Building from the empirical findings of this research, in this section a new dimension of transnationalism will be presented.

As previously discussed¹, the advent of postmodernity has produced social identities that are more fluid. Nevertheless, strong social norms that regulate the body seem to still be extremely relevant in defining older women. In particular, a certain view of

¹ See Chapter 1 and Chapter 2

older people as less valuable members of the community generates in older women the fear of being excluded.

In this study, the fragmentation of social values that originates when a migrant becomes accustomed to social norms seems to bring a new and more individualistic perception of the social identity in women. Unsurprisingly, their social identity seems to be more centred on the self rather than on the social environment, since they do not completely feel like they belong to one. This becomes evident when the women follow some rules in the presence of other Italians, but then feel free to contravene the same rules when they are in a different environment. The most interesting fact is that both the women in the Migrants group and those in the Returned group seem extremely aware of this dual standard and this is what makes them feel “free”. In particular, when migrant women are in the company of non-Italians, they interpret the context as non-normative, and this perception allows them to choose behaviours from a larger selection. In the first year of migration, the women could not use their cultural background as a resource to interpret everyday life and act accordingly, as they were in a different social context. In response, they developed a new transnational cultural frame that is not connected to their culture of origin nor to the culture of settlement and is, therefore, above locality. This transnational cultural construct is an addition to the two sets of norms and values. It is important to note that this frame has been built by migrants over many years, possibly decades, of transnationalism, during which they have been able to activate and deactivate social norms learnt from their culture of origin numerous times. For this reason, ageing as a migrant is different from migrating as an older person.

In this context, Aristotle's concept of potentiality can be particularly useful to study the way migration interacts with bodily practices. Potentiality can be described as "the possible but unrealized state of a thing" (Bunnin, 2004 p. 542). This "thing" can then be realized in multiple ways, which are called "actuality". In particular, the way Agamben (1993) draws upon the difference between potentiality and actuality can shed light on how migrants engage with their social context and why this process entails more than two separate sets of social norms regarding bodily practices. Agamben goes further into the Aristotelian analogy and argues that there are several actualities inside the same potentiality. The potentiality in itself is different from each singular actuality, although potentiality includes all actualities. When an individual acts, it means at least that the individual can realize that specific actuality: one in the unlimited possibilities of potentiality. This also means that the individual possesses that actuality in potentiality. Agamben argues that "the passage from potentiality to act, from language to the word, from the common to the proper, comes about every time as a shuttling in both directions along a line of sparkling alternation on which common nature and singularity, potentiality and act change roles and interpenetrate" (Agamben 1993 p. 20). He also indicates that the way in which potentiality becomes act is called "usage" (ibid.). It is often impossible for an individual to understand potentiality in its entirety, so potentiality is often known only through its expression in different actualities. Agamben argues that the only way for an individual to understand the limitless potentiality is knowing "impotentiality" or, even better, the potentiality of not acting. Only this impotentiality can bring the awareness of the difference between potentiality and the infinite ways of expressing it in acts. Indeed, when only potentiality is known, it can easily be confused with one of its expressions in acts. This

happens because impotentiality does not deny only one act of expression, but potentiality itself. It can be argued that impotentiality is necessary in order to understand the difference between potentiality and act, because impotentiality asserts the very existence of potentiality (ibid.). The same discourse can be applied to different ways of understanding and using the body. If one and only one form of practising the body (an actuality) were to be automatically identified with the natural body itself (the potentiality), individuals would not be able to understand that the body can be used, experienced, and presented in many forms and that the nature of the body is larger and more complex than one of its forms. Only when individuals are confronted with a third element, something that can work as a site of transition, other ways of practising the body can be taken into consideration. When this happens, social norms and behaviours are challenged.

Migrants have a glimpse at impotentiality – or at least at a part of it – in the social space that is neither the location of origin nor the location of destination. It is a space where they can simultaneously apply different actualities: the norms acquired with socialization, the new norms that are witnessed in their country of settlement, or none of them at all. This is the social space that we have described as transnational.

By acknowledging the double nature of their social identity, migrants seem to go beyond a fundamental question: should an individual live and act for the self or for the collective culture? In fact, the lack of norms also means, for the Migrant group, the suspension of all forms of social scrutiny and surveillance. In this sense, the concept of agency becomes more prominent in their lives. Berger and Luckmann (1966) have underlined in their work that the relationship between the individual and society is dialectical: society influences the individual who, in turn, participates in the

construction of society. Because of this, agency also depends on the social conditions of the individual. The women who are members of the Migrant group perceive their own agency as a product of their own will. Their singularity and their individuality have been enhanced by the process of migration, in which their socially constructed understanding of the body, among other things, has been antagonized by a plurality of ways of practising the body and, subsequently, a suspension of any form of norms. This particular social space is what the Migrant group calls “freedom”. Indeed, what they mean by “freedom” is not the possibility of acting as an Italian or acting as an English person, and not even acting as a migrant; what they mean is the possibility of not acting inside a realm of norms.

This conceptual framework is particularly interesting when applied to Italian migrants. While studying Italian women migrants living in Chicago, Nardini (1999) identified the concept of “la bella figura”, a fundamental imperative of Italian culture that refers to “face, looking good, putting on the dog, style, appearance, flare, showing off, ornamentation, etiquette, keeping up with the Joneses, image, illusion, esteem, social status, reputation – in short, self-presentation and identity, performance and display” (p. 7). Although there is no Italian literature on “la bella figura”, this concept is so deeply embedded in Italian culture that Italians are often unaware of its power. La bella figura is entangled with two important factors: gender and age. It is different for men and women, as for women it is more complicated and includes a wider realm of practices. In agreement with Fortier, Nardini sees the Club as a performative place, where la bella figura matters above anything else. The meetings of the members of the Club are described as “culturally constructed plays” (p. 77) where actors interpret their role with la bella figura both as setting and primary outcome. The migrants who took

part in this research have the occasion to practise *la bella figura* not only when among Italians in London, but also when they spend time in Italy. Indeed, during their summer holidays in Borgo, the Migrant group women show off their wealth and passively engage with the network of gossip of the village but they never fully reintegrate with the community. These multiple intersections shape the Migrant group women's social positions. They experience themselves in different contexts and expand their perception of agency. Because of their complex sense of belonging they benefit from more flexibility in their creation of meanings and in the presentation of their identities. Even in Borgo it is taken for granted that migrants are not Italian anymore and that they are not British, they are something else.

It is important to remember that neither assimilation nor integration exclude transnationalism (Levitt, 2001). Transnational individuals may at times develop conflicting identities but they are able to manage them (*ibid.*). Consistent with Levitt's findings about social capital (*ibid.*), the migrants interviewed for this thesis are able to activate and deactivate their "Italianness" and are able to do so at their convenience. In this thesis, the findings suggest that this happens when migrants initiate a communication with their compatriots, both in Italy and in London. Nevertheless, the same does not happen when they are in contact with the social community in London. The women in the Migrant group seem very active in London: they go to the theatre and visit museums but they do not feel the pressure of acting according to a certain set of norms. Actually, migrants are not able to identify signs of clothing norms in English women. This happens because this particular group of migrants has not assimilated into the society of the country of destination. Instead of being assimilated, they are integrated, which means that they are able to act and move in structures and institutions

of British society without adopting its cultural norms. Assimilation into this group has been lowered both by the changes of the demographic of migrants, who are now professionals and students and do not socialize with the Italians who are already in London, and by the fact that migrants were not working with English people; they mostly worked in Italian businesses with other Italians, therefore they were not professionally in contact with English people. Moreover, they all married Italians. It was difficult, if not impossible, to break the invisible barrier that divided migrants from the British society, and they maybe did not even want it. They discovered that it was possible to live in England without completely assimilating and being absorbed by another country. London gave them the opportunity of great liberty and uniqueness; in a large city shaped by migration, assimilation was not a necessity and they retained the freedom rather than fitting into another community. This is also why they tend to live a flexible life, rather than feeling the need to only be part of the Italian community.

9.3 Ageing: Acceptance and Adjustment

Although the two dynamics of Acceptance and Adjustment are conceptually distinct, they are deeply entangled. In fact, Acceptance and Adjustment influence each other in a continual process, in a progression that forces a perpetual assessment. Indeed, bodily changes in ageing happen over the span of decades, a long development that requires a continual reconfiguration of how a woman sees her body and how she wants to present it in her public sphere.

As seen in Chapter 7, Acceptance can be described as the process of reconnecting the body, altered by ageing, with the self. But the fact that body and self need to be reconnected means that they were previously disconnected. This phenomenon has been described in situations of illness and disability (Charmaz, 1995), when a sudden change in the body forces the reconsideration of everyday life habits as well as long-term life goals and ambitions. Charmaz (ibid.) has called the process of altering one's life to accommodate the new body "Adaptation", a process that, she argues, entails the acknowledgement of bodily changes. The alterations are assessed to be both personally and socially acceptable. There is one fundamental difference between the changes imposed by Adaptation and those included in the concept of Adjustment: the changes that are connected with the former are usually permanent, while adjustments are a series of smaller changes that add up over the years and rarely result in a permanent adaptation, at least not until the final stages of ageing when illness, frailty, and disability take over. Consistently, in this thesis, only Ave, the oldest person in the sample, used the word "adapting" to describe the set of changes she puts in place to accommodate ageing. Being the oldest, she has probably undergone years of adjustments, until the effects of ageing had become permanent.

Acceptance might appear to be a private process, a sort of internal dialogue, while Adjustment seems to be more connected to the outside, the public presentation of the body. Nevertheless, the process of Acceptance is more complicated than this. First, it has to be noted that the power of the social gaze goes beyond the public space and enters into the private life of women. Members of the Residents group reported being unable to look at their naked body, to the point where one of them only takes off her clothes when the lights are out and she can barely see herself. The self and the social

are also connected when women look at their peers to compare their bodies and understand what is accepted and what remains beyond the norms. This results in a different path of Adjustment, and is also one of the reasons why practices like clothing are semantically weak, as highlighted by Twigg (2013). Indeed, because of this, analysing the way women attribute meanings to their and others' clothing choices allows to extrapolate the sort of pattern of values they attribute to their ideal older woman. In the interviews, there were certain norms shared by all Residents but they could be linked to different motivations too. For example, when the participants asserted that an older woman should not wear a short skirt, the reason could be moral, when they perceived that an older woman should not be sexually attractive, or visual, when they thought that an older woman should cover their knees when they are not as toned as when they were younger, and any other sign of ageing. Another example can be found in the use of plastic surgery. Many women interviewed regarded this practice as "not natural", although they did not seem to attach the same meaning to practices such as hair dyeing. Plastic surgery was seen as a sort of barrier that makes the body artificial and it represents a limit beyond which adjustment is not possible or desirable. At this limit, Residents think that Acceptance should occur and help the woman incorporate into her identity the inevitable loss of beauty. Furthermore, Adjustment does not only have an effect on the way women are perceived by others, but it also has to do with how the women perceive themselves. In fact, when a woman is able to project a public image that she perceives as positive, she is also more willing to accept bodily changes because she perceives herself as less old.²

² See Section 7.2

The relationship between Acceptance and Adjustment is modified by migration. As seen in Chapter 7, migration has brought a sense of unity to women in terms of self and body, triggered by their augmented sense of agency. In this sense, where the Residents group perceived that both Acceptance and Adjustment were more linked to external factors, such as the relationship with others, those in the Migrant group categorized them both as connected to their self.³ In the migrants, this could also be a consequence of the lack of a univocal basis of comparison, such as other women migrants from previous generations. Indeed, the Migrant group women do not compare themselves to others, be it other Italians, English women, other women migrants in London, or women in the media. It has to be noted that, for a long time, women in the Migrant group have consciously been “the other”, not assimilated into the community in London and not members of their community of origin in Borgo. The women who lived all their lives in Italy have never consciously been the Other. It can be argued that women have always been considered the Other, when compared to men. Nevertheless, women are socialized to be women and, to a certain extent, they are also socialized to be old. The Migrant group women, however, do not have any model or go through any socialization process to be an older woman in a different country and therefore do not have any resources to help them adjust to their new status. Indeed the Migrants can be considered as examples of outsiders in society, given that their status is far from being dominant and privileged. This means that the Otherness of oldness is not alienating for the Migrants group; it only represents another stage in life that they can handle with more freedom than those in the Residents group.

³ See Chapter 7

This phenomenon is so powerful that sometimes the Migrant group women have enough flexibility to enter the menopause without even noticing.⁴ It is interesting to note that members of the Returned group reported that they did not perceive any symptoms of the menopause, just like those of the Migrant group. Medical Acculturation, or the adoption of health-related norms typical of the country of origin, has been known to have a negative effect on the health of migrants (Biddle, Kennedy, & McDonald, 2007). Furthermore, several researchers have found that migrants' health is generally poorer than natives' health and that being female is a risk factor (Lanari & Bussini, 2012). Nevertheless, while there is some literature that underlines the economic and health inequalities suffered by older migrants, other researchers have moved away from the structural focus and have underlined the need to concentrate on the personal experiences (Zontini, 2015). In this thesis, it was often underlined that, being forced to use the medical facilities they could access in London – a difficult situation because of both the difference of the language and the medical practices – women in the Migrant group are less likely to take medicines or complain about their medical status. In this sense, their need for adjustment to medical practices is obviously lower, to the point that the Migrant group women believe that those in the Residents group exaggerate their health issues and are mocked for taking too many medications. This, as well as the lack of symptoms in menopause, could also be a consequence of the “healthy immigrant effect” (Kennedy, McDonald, Biddle, & others, 2006); in other words, the idea that only healthy individuals will migrate to a different country. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that migrants interviewed for this thesis were mostly women who followed their partners or parents in their quest for a job. It is also

⁴ See Chapter 7

true that due to the lack of anticipatory socialization and the fact that the migrants who participated in this study are not assimilated, members of the Migrant group tend to pay more visits to their Italian doctor now that they are older.

For members of the Resident group, the economic remittances, such as help for the community in Borgo with social services, the hospital, and the reconstruction of part of the historic centre, are the only accepted contact with the transnational world. For instance, different clothing practices might be visible in the village when the Migrants visit, especially over the summer, but they are not adopted by members of the Residents group, mainly because of the Otherness that surrounds these migrant women. This is evident from the isolation that has been experienced by the women in the Returned group, who have been avoided by villagers upon their return.⁵ It all stems from the supposed privileged economic status of the Returned women, who are believed to be rich, and their preferential relationship with the institutions, such as the City Council, which is due to the economic support granted by migrants to the village. It seems that if men tend to connect with successful migrants and take advantage of their professional achievements, women are only guided by their desire to observe, monitor, and judge, in a quest for likeness and homogeneity. When a woman exceeds the limits imposed by the norms of the community, she risks negative classifications: she could be deemed too seductive or too sloppy. There seems to be a golden point of balance that the Resident group women desperately seek, although it is never clearly stated and shared in public with other women who are outside the family. The only point they share is fear, when they tell each other: “Please, warn me if I fail”.

⁵ See Chapter 5

When they moved back to Borgo, the women in the Returned group re-adopted the clothing practices of the village. It is not clear whether these women retained or relearned the social norms related to age ordering in clothing. This is because Acculturation has not affected their idea of ageing, again because of the absence of a model of the “older woman migrant” that could serve as a basis for comparison and assessment of their self-presentation in society. Nevertheless, those in the Returned group find adjustment more difficult because for them these acts are not spontaneous; they got used to their freedom and they feel that abiding by the rules is not as natural anymore. They are also more afraid of failing as they faced a backlash when they moved back from London so they know how harshly villagers can treat those who do not belong and they do not want to be rejected by the community. They still fear the gossip, the scrutiny, and the isolation. Therefore, the women in the Returned group adjust with a different consciousness, as they know that abiding to social norms is not an obligation but is only functional in being a member of the community.

A final reflection on this topic must be made on the importance of the media. Although television seems to be a major site of comparison for those in the Residents group, television does not affect the Migrant group, who watch Italian shows on a daily basis when they are in London. The main reason seems to be that the Migrant women do not share this practice with other Italians: they do not talk about it, they do not make comments, and it is clearly not one of their main interests, while resident women share their views and talk about it, gathering other women’s opinions. Therefore, the media participates in the Residents group’s cultural construction of what an older woman or a woman in general should be.

9.4 Migration: Assimilation and Acculturation

Assimilation and Acculturation have a circular relationship: Acculturation happens when migrants apply the social norms observed and learnt in the country of destination, abandoning the habits that they had acquired through socialization. In order for this to happen, migrants need to be able to live with the natives and share their everyday lives with them, in other words, they need to assimilate into the community of settlement. At the same time, being accepted by the natives implies a certain similarity that is only acquired through Acculturation. At the group level, this process involves changes in social structures and institutions; at the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behavioural repertoire. In other words, while Acculturation reduces the sense of Otherness and facilitates Assimilation, Assimilation puts migrants closer to the culture of settlement and helps Acculturation.

Chapter 5 describes how women members of the Migrant group expressed a mixed sense of belonging. They do not feel Italian or English. Furthermore, they feel that once an individual has undergone the process of migration, the status of migrant will prevail upon any other form of belonging, a change that can never be undone. In this thesis, Acculturation and Assimilation are complex processes, and denote the changes that take place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their members. In fact, women who moved to London were not only confronted with English norms, but they were in touch with other migrants of different origins, in an extremely diverse environment that was intensely in contrast with their small village of origin in Italy. In addition, it should not be forgotten that these changes can take years, if not generations, to be achieved. Moreover, although these aspects have only been touched on briefly in this thesis, Acculturation and Assimilation do not only force

changes in migrants, they also leave signs on the community of destination, in urban structures, restaurants, cafés, churches, eating habits, and social networks.

As stated before,⁶ the group of migrants that took part into this research has not assimilated into the host community. Because assimilation takes several generations, the first generation is between two cultures. It is not engaged with its original culture but it is also different from the culture of destination. The first period in England was a break, the women were scared, and everything looked ugly because it was different and they did not understand it. Their social world, in their neighbourhood and in their workplace, was almost entirely Italian. Nevertheless, as migrants moved out of Clerkenwell, the original “Little Italy” of London, to different parts of the city, two things decreased: their contact with other Italians and their need to show their wealth to their compatriots. Moreover, working mostly in Italian businesses, contact with natives or migrants of other nationalities were minimal. As a consequence, the women in the Migrant group who participated in this study are perpetually situated in limbo, one that is deeply transnational. At the beginning, the proximity to other Italians in their neighbourhood mitigated the effects of Acculturation. Once a certain economic success had been attained, migrant women and their families moved to other neighbourhoods but they did not blend in. It has been previously mention in this thesis that the Migrant group women often used the word “freedom” to describe life in London.⁷ This freedom is, indeed, the disengagement from any sort of obligation to fit in and conform to social rules.

⁶ See Chapter 3

⁷ See Chapter 5

This situation is even more crucial in the process of ageing. Indeed, the Migrant group women at least underwent a primary form of Acculturation, having learnt that there are other norms and other forms of bodily practices that are different from the ones they absorbed in their country of origin. Using the same process, they also learnt how to assess their bodily practices, particularly, in light of this thesis, their public image compared to others. Indeed, Acculturation can be described as a set of adjustments triggered by migration. In this sense, migrants do not perceive Adjustment as linked only to ageing. Throughout their lives, they have been changing their practices to accommodate to a new life. This is one of the reason why they do not perceive ageing as a sudden disruption of their lives but they feel that ageing happens as a continuation from the past. Moreover, being able to pick from a wider range of habits and being detached from the social gaze and the familial pressure reduced the need for Adjustment. Furthermore, ageing is interpreted as starting from the self, not from society. The Migrant group women are able to build multiple social identities, according to their context, in a complex way that seems unattainable for women of the Residents group, who have only been influenced by their culture of origin.

Nevertheless, meetings with the Italian community and rituals at the Italian church have not lost their power over the Migrant group women. Although these gatherings were more frequent for the migrants who moved to London before the Second World War, they are still important today. Drawing from the works of Goffman and Butler, Fortier (1999; 2006) has explored in her studies the Italian spaces in London as transnational sites where women perform their being Italian. These spaces are used to experience collective belonging as they are spaces that belong to Italians and to which Italians belong. Fortier argues that the identity of Italian migrants is not only reflected

in these spaces but is also an effect of encounters with their compatriots, where being Italian is not only an idea but also an embodiment. Fortier (2000) has also described how social gatherings of Italians in London build symbolic environments where migrants are able to recreate their cultural backgrounds and show off their wealth and success. Nevertheless, the tension between comparison and assessment – the scrutiny that is so powerful in Borgo – is mitigated by the fact that these gatherings are limited in time, and that women feel less oppressed by rules as they are able to withdraw from the situation. Organizations such as the Italian Community Centre and the association of migrants from Borgo are transnational also in the sense that they have activities in both countries: they fundraise, donate, and have relationships with local politicians both in Borgo and in London.

One important aspect to be considered is the difference between the changes in appearance practices and medical practices. Indeed, the Migrant group women seem to be able to abandon norms related to clothing and other practices related to their look relatively quickly, while they still retain a few norms related to medical habits. In the previous section, it was described how the Migrant group women tend to think less about their health, as they have been forced to use English medical facilities and have disengaged from their habits. Nevertheless, with the onset of ageing they seem to be more preoccupied with their health, although still not as much as their counterparts in the Residents group. This is particularly evident when they talk about shops; in fact, when they talk about assistants in Italian clothing shops. Migrants describe them as too intrusive and persistent, but in their discourse about pharmacies, they often mention that shop assistants in big chains in London such as Boots are not sufficiently helpful and are too dismissive. In general, it seems that, with age, the ability to

maintain self-ownership in matters of self appearance is more welcomed than having autonomy in choices related to their health.

One interesting finding of this research is that the Migrant group women were not keen to return to Borgo permanently. This is consistent with previous research (Zontini, 2015) that has also found that women are less likely to be willing to return than men. Indeed, as described before, women do not want to abandon their freedom and reconstruct a new life in their place of origin, because it would entail returning to living standards that they do not want anymore. This is strongly connected not only with the extensive norms that regulate bodily practices, as discussed in this thesis, but with the private norms and obligations towards their kinship connections that have regulated the position of women in Italian families for centuries (Coleman, 1997). Women also do not want to abandon the relationships that they have built in their country of settlement. This shows that successful ageing for them also means having contacts and bonds (Levitt, 2001).

The Returned group women, as well as those who engage in circular migration (Palmer, 1977), spending six months in England and six months in Italy, are often associated with this sort of kinship obligation. Sometimes it is to care for the elderly in Italy and sometimes it is to follow their husband. In a couple of instances, this was also due to the fact that the second generation, the daughter of one of the migrants, decided to move to Italy after spending all her summers there as a child and teenager. She married a man from Borgo and they live in the village where they also have children. In this case, the woman who participated in this thesis research decided to spend lengthy periods of time in Italy to help her daughter, although she described this situation as only temporary and referred to her life as being located in the UK.

The main difference between the Migrant group women who engage in circular migration and the Returned group women who have left England for good, is not the amount of time they spend in the village but their engagement with the local community. Indeed, although the migrants return to Borgo frequently and have relationships with family and friendships with the locals, they use the village only to display their wealth and success. As previously discussed, this is consistent with their use of the ritual gathering at the Italian church. Borgo has become for them a performative site. In contrast, Returned group women have regained and want to maintain the status of being members of the local community, as they want and need to mingle with the locals.

9.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, the main conceptual outcomes of this thesis have been presented. First, it was argued that transnationalism entails more than being able to recognize and apply two different sets of social norms, the one learnt in the country of origin and the other acquired in the country of destination. Drawing on the concept of “impotentiality” that was developed by Agamben from Aristotle’s theory of “potentiality”, transnationalism was described as a conscious disengagement from any form of regulation of the body imposed by culture. It is important to underline that this state was achieved by the Migrant group women after several years of activation and deactivation of the set of norms that they had acquired through socialization. This sense of disengagement from external factors has amplified in migrants the perception of agency. This aspect of

transnationalism is particularly relevant for Italian migrants because, as argued in Chapter 3, their original culture is particularly concerned with “la bella figura”, understood as the perfect facade that has to be shown in society. Another important aspect to be considered is that, although the Migrant group women seem to be involved in various social and cultural activities in London, they do not seem to be able to recognize the local social normativity regarding the body.

The two dynamics that have been identified as regulators of ageing – Acceptance and Adjustment – are in a close mutual relationship. Acceptance acts as a binding agent between the body and self when women recognize signs of ageing. Adjustment is the set of changes in bodily practices that women put into action in order to conform to their socially constructed ideal of an ageing woman. On the one hand, Acceptance of the feature “old” is needed in order to activate Adjustment. On the other hand, Adjustment may facilitate Acceptance when women perceive changes as positive. Adjustment in ageing becomes Adaptation only later in life, when bodily changes are more or less stable. Migration has an effect on the way women experience Acceptance and Adjustment, as the migrants perceive an augmented sense of agency.

Assimilation and Acculturation, the dynamics that regulate migration, act in a complex interplay. Acculturation is the process of learning and employing the social norms acquired in the country of settlement, while Assimilation happens when migrants become members of the new community. By reducing the sense of Otherness that separates the Migrants from the natives, acculturation facilitates Assimilation. At the same time, Assimilation facilitates Acculturation, because living in contact with the natives increases the possibility of observing and learning their habits. Ageing had an effect on these dynamics in the group of migrants that was the object of this study.

These migrants did not assimilate into the British Community in London, therefore, after many years' negotiation between different social norms, older migrants – who have aged within a transnational framework – were able to disengage from social normativities.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

The research presented in this thesis stands at the intersection of three fields of study: the body, transnational migration, and ageing. It aimed at gaining a better understanding of the relationship between ageing and bodily practices as cultural processes. In particular, the research sought to explore if and how migration, understood both as a geographical movement and a cultural circumstance, affected the dynamics of ageing. This puzzle brought to light a series of elements that needed clarification. Regarding the nature of the relationship of bodily practices and ageing, the purpose of this study was to identify how women experienced their changing bodies and their realities as ageing women. On the subject of migration, this research aimed at recognizing the impact that the encounter with a different culture could have on the conceptualization of the body, and how living as a migrant in a country other than the one of origin could affect the process of ageing.

In order to give answers to these questions, a heuristic approach informed by grounded theory was adopted. Particular attention was paid to the choice of the sample, which was guided by the existing literature. The ages of 60 to 70 were chosen for different

reasons. First, 60 was the age of retirement for women in Italy at the time of fieldwork. Second, women older than 60 years of age had likely already experienced the menopause and could talk about it. Finally, the limit of 70 years was selected in order to avoid a focus inclined only towards medical practices, as women younger than this age were less likely to be affected by illness and frailty. During the process of data collection, the age limits were changed slightly, and the final sample included women between the ages of 59 and 74.

The project involved the comparison of a group of older women migrants with a group of older women who had always lived in their place of origin. The purpose of the comparison was to highlight differences and similarities between those who migrated and those who stayed behind, in order to highlight the specific effects of migration. For this purpose, Life-Course Theory provided the background for the selection of the sample, and in particular the concept of socialization, understood as the process through which individuals learn those values and behaviours that are accepted in their social and cultural environment. Socialization is cohort-specific, meaning that it is defined by the individual's age and historical and geographical circumstances, i.e. the time and the place. To reflect these requirements, the sample needed to have three specific characteristics:

- All subjects had to be in the same age range;
- All subjects had to come from the same place of origin;
- One group had to have lived all their lives in the same place; the other was to have moved to a different country.

First, a group of women migrants from a small village in Italy (fictionally named Borgo) was identified in London (the Migrants). Then, contacts were made in Borgo to ensure the possibility to meet and interview women of the same age group (the Residents). A third group, called the Returned, was identified during the data collection, as it was reported during the interviews that there were several migrants who had moved back to Borgo and were living in the village (the Returned). The final sample was composed of three groups:

- Residents: women who were born and lived in Borgo;
- Migrants: women who were born in Borgo and moved to London after childhood;
- Returned: women who were born in Borgo, moved to London and then moved back to Borgo permanently.

Italy proved to be a particularly interesting case on the topic of bodily practices. A large body of literature illustrates the peculiarities of the attitudes of Italian culture towards women's bodies. In particular, there is a wide consensus in the field that the Fascist Regime regulated women's lives from a very young age with its focus on bodily practices and that the effects of the Fascist Regime's attitudes are still evident in contemporary Italy. In particular, the deep normativization of women's bodies and related practices has flourished and is still applied today, as evident, for example, in the application of specific medical practices for pregnancy. In contrast with the rest of Europe, there was never a strong national feminist movement in Italy. Instead, small pockets of feminism were active in bigger urban centres, especially in the north. In Italy, women's lives have been tied to traditional familial roles until very recently and only in the 1990s did universities establish courses on Women's Studies.

During the interviews, the subjects were asked to describe their relationship with their bodies, focusing specifically on the changes that they related to ageing. Differences among the three groups arose from a very early stage of the data collection and analysis. Indeed, the process of migration emerged prominently from the first few interviews as a crucial factor in the life of the members of the Migrant and Returned groups, as they referred to migration to explain both past choices and factors of their current life.

The data analysis identified four dynamics that regulate the relationship between migration and ageing in later life, in regards to bodily practices. Two dynamics – Assimilation and Acculturation – define the encounter with a new society and new cultural norms in migrants. The other two – Acceptance and Adjustment – are connected to ageing, in all three groups that, nevertheless, presented substantial differences. Moreover, a new dimension of transnationalism was identified as a feature of the Migrants, who were able to live and act above localities.

10.2 The Four Dynamics: Assimilation, Acculturation, Acceptance, and Adjustment

Four dynamics have been recognized to regulate the interplay between ageing and migration. The first two, Assimilation and Acculturation, are the dynamics that define migration and have been identified in this thesis as regulating bodily practices in older women migrants.

ASSIMILATION is the process of migrants gradually coming into contact and living within the community of settlement, rather than in marginalised communities with other migrants. The stories of migration that emerged from the interviews were different, but had some characteristics in common. The first few years in London had been difficult for all the women, regardless of their age. In particular, regarding bodily practices, those in the Migrants group described their negative perception towards the appearance of women in London – both natives and migrants of other nationalities – as well as having difficulties in accessing and making use of the medical facilities in the city. They called this first period of their stay in London “la differenza” (the difference), a term that illustrates the sense of distance from the reality they were experiencing and the difficulty they had in processing and making sense of the context in which they were now living. After feeling this perception of displacement, women disengaged from their community of origin in Borgo and did not engage with the British community in London. They remained in a limbo of “freedom”, a word that has been often used by the Migrants to describe their lives in London. The understanding of this “freedom” was not conceptually explained by the Migrants and the Returned. Instead, they described an instinctual perception of a reality that was super-normative, or, in other words, above culturally imposed behaviours. In fact, “freedom” for them meant the liberty to act without referring to social norms, although they were able to activate behaviours linked to their Italian origins when they were with their compatriots. Members of the Returned group reported difficulties they had in re-integrating into the community of Borgo when they moved back to the village, a sign that migration had a lasting effect on the way they were perceived by the inhabitants of Borgo as well as on their own perception of the village. Indeed, the

Migrants and the Residents rarely came into contact with one another, even though many Migrants had relatives in the village and often returned for holidays, especially during summer. The club that groups in London all the migrants from Borgo often makes large donations to the village. In the last few years, they were able to offer economic support for the restoration of part of the old church and the construction of a new ward in the local hospital. Moreover, there is one road along which most of the migrants have their summer houses, mostly luxury villas overlooking the valley. This financial inflow represents the only visible presence of the migrants in the village. Even when in Borgo, members of the Migrants group prefer to keep contact with Residents to a minimum, in order to avoid gossip and social scrutiny. For this reason, Borgo has become for the Migrants a performative site, where they recreate their “Italianness” and apply the social norms of their culture of origin. Borgo can be seen, for the Migrants, as one of the social gatherings of Italians in London: a place to act as an Italian, with total disengagement from the consequences of not acting according to social norms. In fact, the main difference between the migrants who spend at least part of their time in Borgo and the Returned group is that the first do not engage with the village community, while the latter feel the need to engage with the villagers, although they still consider themselves outsiders.

ACCULTURATION happens when migrants, coming into contact with a new culture and its norms and values, negotiate between the behaviours learnt through socialization in the place of origin and the behaviours that they observe in the country of settlement. The daily and prolonged contact with a different culture has a profound impact in how women practise their bodies, an impact that can last an entire lifetime. The women

who were interviewed for this thesis have undergone a primary form of Acculturation. Being first generation, they have not fully adopted the behaviours of their country of destination and they are also unable to detect them. Indeed, women of different cultures are perceived by the members of the Migrant group as “non-normative”. In other words, the Migrants are unable to detect the norms and manners of the women in London who are not Italian. This inability was still present at the time of the interviews, even after decades of life in England.

Although Assimilation and Acculturation are conceptually separate, they happen at the same time and influence each other. Indeed, the more a migrant assimilates, living and working with natives, the more they acculturate, adopting behaviours that are similar to those of the natives of the country of settlement. The opposite is also true: when migrants acculturate and behave like the natives, they are more likely to assimilate into the society of settlement.

The second pair of dynamics, Acceptance and Adjustment, are those regulating the relationship between bodily practices and ageing.

ACCEPTANCE originates in individuals with the realization that they are entering into a new stage of their lives, namely old age. Acceptance is described as a movement of unification and synchronization between the changing body and the self. Women in the Residents group felt that the need for Acceptance originated with bodily changes that sparked a transition in their own selves. Women in the Migrants group described ageing as a feature of their identities which helped them accept the transformation of their bodies. Furthermore, while the Residents group women perceived ageing as a

fracture in their life course, the Migrants group women described it as a gradual transition in continuity with the past. For the Residents group women, engaged in a complicated activity of mutual social surveillance in the community of Borgo, Acceptance was deeply rooted in their social context. In fact, the Residents assessed their status according to a complicated scale made up of comments, gossip, and other women's behaviours. The Residents group women feared the social exclusion that might stem from showing that they were not able to conform to the social rules. A network of women, including relatives and friends, acted as their informal advisors, especially when it came to appearance, and made sure that they did not fail to conform to accepted social norms. Moreover, other older women in the village as well as in the media served as sites of comparison. The Migrants group women were completely disengaged from the activity of social surveillance but they understood it and they were able to activate it when they were in the presence of other Italians, both in Borgo and in London, as previously described in this section.

ADJUSTMENT encompasses all the changes in bodily practices that women put in place when they feel that they are becoming older. These changes reflect the need to conform to culturally specific norms regulating the behaviours of women who are considered older. Women in the Residents group also described Adjustment as an attempt to mask signs of ageing in their bodies, such as untuned knees and upper arms. Adjustment also includes those changes that have been evaluated and then discarded by women. Adjustments become permanent adaptations in situations of illness and disability but not in ageing, or at least not at the early stage that was examined in this

research. This means that Adjustment is the result of a continuous process of assessment.

Women in the Residents group mostly agree on what the accepted behaviours of an older woman are but it is interesting to note that the values underpinning such behaviours can diverge in different subjects. For example, most Residents agree that an older woman should not wear a short skirt and should, therefore, adjust to wearing longer garments. Different women have given different reasons for this adjustment: some think that showing untanned knees would reveal frailty, some say that an older woman should not try to look attractive.

It is interesting to note that the women in the Migrants group felt the need to adjust. Ageing is a bodily change and it is not only connected to cultural norms. A series of self-reported symptoms – such as the diminished ability to move – compelled women of all groups to change their behaviours. Nevertheless, behaviours are not norms per se. And, consistently with their disengagement from social norms, women of the Migrant group adjusted but described the changes in their behaviours as driven by internal forces, such as personal will, rather than external forces. In contrast, when reflecting on the motivations underpinning adjustment, the Residents group women were more likely to focus on external factors, such as the fear of being judged by the community or the intervention of an expert - e.g. a medical doctor. In this sense, the Migrants group showed an increased sense of agency compared to the Residents group. Migrants also showed a sense of continuity in time, as Adjustment was not a new practice for them. Indeed, Migrants adjusted to a different social situation when they moved to London, therefore this is not a new practice for them. In contrast, Adjustment came as a new need for the members of the Residents group, who felt ageing to be a

drastic change and disruption to the past. It is interesting to note that the Migrants were more likely to abandon the norms related to beauty and clothing for good but, at the onset of ageing, they were keen to approach Italian doctors and adopt at least some of the medical habits that they had abandoned before. In this, the Returned group had an interesting position. While the Returned felt the necessity to adjust their behaviours according to the social norms of the village, for them this practice was not perceived as a natural need, as it was for the Residents, but a conscious effort, more similar to the description provided by the members of the Migrant group.

Acceptance and Adjustment are deeply entangled. Adjustment takes place only when women accept ageing - i.e. when they begin to incorporate the label “old” into their identity. In turn, Adjustment affects Acceptance. In fact, when women were able to practise their bodies according to socially accepted norms, they felt like they still belonged to their community even if they were becoming older.

10.3 A New Dimension of Transnationalism

The way migrants experience ageing in regards to bodily practices is affected by their transnational circumstances. The women in the Migrants group spent decades moving in and out of their Italian backgrounds. Transnational practices in London, such as gatherings with other Italians, allowed them to remember and exercise bodily practices that they had learnt in their culture of origin. Furthermore, after the first few years, they were able to visit Borgo quite often when they had the opportunity to use their cultural background, especially those norms related to the concept of “la bella figura”,

by showing off their wealth. Nevertheless, the migrant women also had a different social space. In this space, where they observed and interacted with women who were British or of other nationalities, the Migrants group did not feel any pressure to act according to social norms. Rather, when they interacted with women in London, they seemed to be unable to detect cultural norms regulating bodily practices.

Women who had lived all their lives in Borgo participated in a tight network of social surveillance. They observed each other and were aware of being observed. They evaluated each other's bodily practices and feared the consequences of failing. Showing signs of ageing, wearing clothes that were considered inappropriate for their age, or being unable to manage their health could lead to negative consequences, namely being considered a less valuable member of society and, ultimately, social exclusion. For this reason, the Residents group painstakingly evaluated every bodily practice they adopted and experienced their choices as driven by external forces, such as the authority of medical practitioners or of shop assistants, and the social gaze itself. It also has to be noted that women members of the Residents group perceived their behaviour as "natural". They did not experience any other form of bodily practices besides those that were learnt and shared in the village. In contrast, over the years, women in the Migrants group were able to choose when and where they wanted to act according to Italian social norms or to disengage from any form of social regulation, as abandoning the social rules learnt in the village would not have any consequence for them in London.

As Agamben (1993) has argued, the passage between universal and particular, between act and potentiality, is not a one-way change. Indeed, through usage, the "natural" and the "particular" are often intertwined. Being able to observe different acts of women

with different cultural backgrounds, the Migrants are able to unravel the contextual nature of social norms. In other words, the process of experiencing different ways to present and manage the body feeds a new conceptualization of what is considered the “natural” or “universal” body and, after many years of negotiation, it leads to the abandonment of the idea that bodily practices are correct or incorrect, right or wrong. Through this process, migrants acquire the ability to switch off the need to act according to social norms, as they are aware that such norms are deeply rooted into their cultural background. It is interesting to note that women in both the Migrants and the Returned groups were aware of their condition, and that they understood that they lived in a dimension that is disengaged from their socialization, at least partly, and they consciously chose which contexts needed the application of social norms learnt in the village. In this sense, transnationalism is a personal element that becomes a social space when women migrants interact with other Italians abroad, or when they understand Borgo as a performative site, rather than their cultural background or natural environment. This dimension of transnationalism is not only reflected in bodily practices. For instance, when women in the Migrant group refuse to return to Italy permanently, they do it because they fear the social expectations imposed on women and they do not want to go back to their traditional role of housewives.

This thesis therefore argues that transnationalism does not just encompass two cultural realms – the one of origin and the one of settlement – but also entails the awareness that norms and behaviours regarding the body learnt through socialization are linked to cultural context. This consciousness augmented the Migrants group women’s sense of agency. Indeed, when they reflected on how they practised their bodies, they

described their choices and actions as being self-oriented rather than directed by external factors.

10.4 Future Research

Migration is increasingly transnational. Indeed, migrants today are better able to maintain relationships with their community of origin than before. Moreover, even those who do not migrate are influenced by other cultures, as accessing the habits of other nations is faster and easier through the internet and social media. Increasingly, brands are opening hundreds of shops on every continent, where they sell the same pieces of clothing. Future research could examine if this globalization of taste has an effect on how women engage with their local communities. As transnationalism, understood as a conscious disengagement from the social normativity of both the country of origin and the country of settlement, is a process that progresses and transforms over the years and decades after migration, future research could also consider comparing migrants who have aged in the country of settlement and migrants who migrated when they were already older.

As stated in the previous section, the data obtained for this research are deeply contextualized in two precise settings – Borgo and London – that have specific characteristics. The findings of this research could be applied to and tested on different groups of migrants from different regions, with qualitative research as well as quantitative studies, using larger samples.

Socially constructed norms and behaviours related to bodily practices are transmitted in the family through intergenerational channels. It would be interesting to investigate if and how second-generation migrants have been affected by transnationalism.

Appendix A: Residents

NAME	AGE	SCHOOL	FAMILY	WORK
Anna	67	Until 13 y.o.	Widow 2 children	Housewife
Adelaide	61	University	Married 2 sons	Office worker in a hospital
Alba	61	High school	Married 1 daughter 1 son	Office worker in a hospital.
Anita	64	High school	Married 1 daughter 1 son	Housewife
Ada	63	High School	Widow 1 daughter	Housewife
Alessandra	67	Until 13 y.o.	Widow 1 son	Works in her shop
Adriana	64	Until 13 y.o.	Married 1 daughter 1 son	Shop clerk
Alice	65	Until 15 y.o.	Married 2 sons	Primary school teacher
Amelia	71	Until 15 y.o.	Married Children Grandchildren	Retired. Former pimary school teacher
Angela	67	Until 15 y.o.	Married 2 sons 1 granddaughter	Primary school teacher
Antonia	61	Until 15 y.o.	Married 2 daughters	Primary school teacher
Agostina	64	Until 15 y.o.	Widow 1 daughter 1 son	Primary school teacher

NAME	AGE	SCHOOL	FAMILY	WORK
Ave	74	Until 13 y.o.	Married 2 sons Grandchildren	Housewife
Antonella	59	High School	Married 3 children	Secondary school teacher
Ambra	67	Until 13 y.o.	Married 2 daughters 2 grandsons	Housewife
Alida	71	Until 13 y.o.	Married 2 Children Grandchildren	Housewife
Agnese	63	Until 15 y.o.	Married 1 daughter	Retired. Former primary school teacher
Allegra	68	Until 15 y.o.	Married 2 daughters Grandchildren	Retired. Former primary school teacher
Amanda	59	Until 13 y.o.	Married 1 daughter 1 son	Office worker

Appendix B: Migrants

NAME	AGE	SCHOOL	FAMILY	WORK	YEAR OF MIGRATION AND VISITS TO BORGO
Barbara	65	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Married 3 daughters	Office worker. Previously worked in husband's restaurant.	1968 (age 22) 6-7 times per year in Borgo
Beatrice	72	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Married 1 daughter 2 sons 7 grandchildren	Housewife. Previously worked in husband's restaurant.	1959 (age 20) 1-2 times per year in Borgo
Benedetta	64	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Married 2 daughters 1 son	Waitress	1987 (age 40) 1-2 times per year in Borgo
Bianca	68	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Married 2 daughters 2 grandchildren	Housewife	1962 (age 19) 1-2 times per year in Borgo
Bruna	62	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Married 2 daughters 1 grandchild	Housekeeper	1969 (age 20) 1-2 times per year in Borgo
Bice	60	Until 13 y.o. In Italy and UK (Italian school)	Married 2 sons	Housewife	1961 (age 10) Summer in Borgo

NAME	AGE	SCHOOL	FAMILY	WORK	YEAR OF MIGRATION AND VISITS TO BORGO
Betta	72	Until 19 y.o. in Italy University in UK	Divorced 2 sons Grandchildren	Retired. Former secondary school teacher	1972 (age 33) Summer in Borgo
Benvenuta	67	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Widow 3 daughters 1 son Grandchildren	Retired. Former waitress	1966 (age 22) Summer in Borgo
Brigida	74	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Married 1 daughter 3 grandchildren	Retired. Former housekeeper	1958 (age 21) Summer in Borgo.

Appendix C: Returned

NAME	AGE	SCHOOL	FAMILY	WORK	YEAR OF MIGRATION AND AGE WHEN IN LONDON
Caterina	59	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Married 1 daughter 1 son	Office worker	1967 (15 - 55 y.o.)
Chiara	61	Until 13 y.o. In Italy and UK	Married	Waitress in Italian Restaurant in London	1961 (11-27 y.o.)
Celeste	64	Until 13 y.o. In Italy + 1 year in UK	Married 1 daughter 1 son 3 grandchildren	Housewife Has worked in the family restaurant	1962 (15 - 59 y.o.)
Costanza	71	Until 13 y.o. In Italy and UK	Widow 2 sons Grandchildren	Retired. Used to work in the catering industry	1952 (12 - 65 y.o.)
Claudia	65	Until 13 y.o. In Italy	Widow Sons Grandchildren	Housewife	1965 (19 - 27 y.o.)

Appendix D:

Information Sheet

University of Oxford
Oxford Institute of Ageing

Director:
Professor Sarah Harper
Professor of Gerontology
www.ageing.ox.ac.uk



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**The Dynamics of Body Changes and Self in Old Age: A Comparative Study with
Italian Older Women Living in Italy and in UK**

What is the purpose of this study?

The project '*The Dynamics of Body Changes and Self in Old Age: A comparative Study with Italian Older Women Living in Italy and in UK*' aims to explore how women describe the process of ageing in relation to bodily changes. Moreover, it seeks to compare two groups of women born in Borgo Val di Taro, to examine possible differences in their narrations.

This interview is part of a project being undertaken at the Oxford Institute of Ageing, University of Oxford. The Oxford Institute of Ageing conducts researches about a series of themes related to ageing. More information on the Institute and its research can be found at www.ageing.ox.ac.uk.

Who can take part in the study?

- Women who were born and grew up in Borgo Val di Taro and moved to London in their adulthood;
- Women who were born and grew up in Borgo Val di Taro and are still living in the village.

What will happen in the interview?

If you agree to take part you will be asked to participate in an interview, which will be tape-recorded and transcribed afterwards.

We can carry out the interviews at your home, workplace, or any other place of your choice. There will be no medical benefit or medical risk from participating in this study.

What type of questions will I be asked?

The interviews will be designed to be free flowing and the type of questions asked will to some extent depend on how the interview develops. However, the interviewer will need to gain certain demographic and background information.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information you supply, and any collected data are strictly confidential and we will conceal your identity in the doctoral thesis compiled from the interviews. We won't pass your private data to third parties. Data will be stored safely and privately so others will be unable to tell who gave the information. Data will be kept confidential according to the regulations of the University of Oxford.

Can I withdraw at any time?

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice, and you do not have to give a reason for your withdrawal. Information from participants who have withdrawn from the study will only be used if this is expressly permitted.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions, complaints or require any further information concerning this study please do not hesitate to contact:

Francesca Ghillani
Oxford Institute of Ageing
University of Oxford
66 Banbury Road
Oxford
OX2 6PR
07768995212
francesca.ghillani@sociology.ox.ac.uk

University of Oxford
Oxford Institute of Ageing

Director:
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Dinamiche tra Cambiamenti del Corpo e Sè in Età Anziana: Studio Comparativo tra Donne Italiane Residenti in Italia e nel Regno Unito

Qual è lo scopo di questo studio?

Lo scopo del progetto *'Dinamiche tra Cambiamenti del Corpo e Sé in Età Anziana: Studio Comparativo tra Donne Italiane Residenti in Italia e nel Regno Unito'* è di esplorare il modo in cui le donne descrivono il processo di invecchiamento in relazione ai cambiamenti del corpo. Inoltre, lo studio si propone di confrontare due gruppi di donne nate a Borgo Val di Taro, per esaminare le eventuali differenze nei loro racconti.

Questa intervista è parte di un progetto dell'Oxford Institute of Ageing, Università di Oxford. L'Oxford Institute of Ageing conduce ricerche riguardanti l'invecchiamento. Potete reperire ulteriori informazioni sull'Istituto all'indirizzo www.ageing.ox.ac.uk.

Chi può prendere parte a questo studio?

- Donne nate e cresciute a Borgo Val di Taro e che si sono trasferite a Londra una volta adulte;
- Donne nate e cresciute a Borgo Val di Taro e che vi abitano ancora.

Cosa succederà durante l'intervista?

Se deciderete di aderire al progetto vi verrà chiesto di partecipare ad un'intervista e, qualora lo desideriate, ad un successivo gruppo di discussione. L'intervista verrà audio registrata e successivamente trascritta.

L'intervista potrà avvenire nella Sua abitazione, sul Suo luogo di lavoro o in qualsiasi altro luogo di Sua scelta.

Partecipare a questo studio non Le causerà nessun rischio o vantaggio medico.

Che tipo di domande mi verranno poste?

Le interviste avranno un flusso libero e il tipo di domande dipenderà dal modo in cui l'intervista si svilupperà. Tuttavia, il ricercatore Le chiederà alcune informazioni di tipo demografico.

Che cosa succederà durante il gruppo di discussione?

Il gruppo di discussione si svolgerà in uno dei locali messi a disposizione dall'Associazione "Non ti Scordar di Me", in Borgo Val di Taro. Il ricercatore chiederà a Lei e altre signore, sedute insieme nella stessa stanza, di discutere liberamente di alcuni temi riguardanti la ricerca. Il gruppo di discussione avverrà come una normale conversazione; Lei sarà libera di non rispondere alle domande o di farlo nel modo che riterrà più opportuno. Il gruppo di discussione avrà luogo nella sede dell'Associazione "Non ti Scordar di Me", a Borgo Val di Taro.

La mia partecipazione allo studio verrà tenuta riservata?

Tutte le informazioni fornite e i dati raccolti sono strettamente riservati; la Sua identità verrà cancellata nella tesi di dottorato che risulterà dalle interviste. I suoi dati non verranno condivisi con terzi. I dati verranno conservati in modo sicuro e privato, in modo che non sia possibile risalire all'identità di chi li ha forniti. I dati verranno trattati in maniera riservata, conformemente alle regole dell'Università di Oxford.

E' possibile revocare la propria partecipazione?

Lei è libera di revocare la propria adesione allo studio in qualsiasi momento, senza alcuna conseguenza, e non avrà bisogno di fornire alcuna motivazione. Le informazioni dei soggetti che decideranno di revocare la propria partecipazione saranno utilizzate solo previa specifica autorizzazione da parte dei soggetti stessi.

A chi posso rivolgermi per ulteriori informazioni?

Se avesse bisogno di ulteriori informazioni o di esprimere qualsiasi lamentela o dubbio riguardo questo studio, non esiti a contattare:

Francesca Ghillani
Oxford Institute of Ageing
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Appendix E:

Consent Form

University of Oxford
Oxford Institute of Ageing

Director:
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CONSENT FORM

The Dynamics of Body Changes and Self in Old Age: A Comparative Study with Italian Women Living in Italy and in UK

Researcher: Francesca Ghillani, Oxford Institute of Ageing

Please circle the appropriate response:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. I can confirm that I have read the participant information sheet | YES/NO |
| 2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions | YES/NO |
| 3. I have received any additional information I have requested | YES/NO |
| 4. I understand that I may withdraw from this study without penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision | YES/NO |
| 5. I understand that this project has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee | YES/NO |
| 6. I understand who will have access to the personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project | YES/NO |
| 7. I understand that maintenance of confidentiality is subject to normal legal requirements | YES/NO |
| 8. I agree to participate in this study | YES/NO |

Name of participant

Date.....

Signature.....

Name of researcher

Date.....

Signature.....



DICHIARAZIONE LIBERATORIA

Dinamiche tra Cambiamenti del Corpo e Sè in Età Anziana: Studio Comparativo tra Donne Italiane Residenti in Italia e nel Regno Unito

Ricercatrice: Francesca Ghillani, Oxford Institute of Ageing

Si prega di apporre una crocetta ove appropriato:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Confermo di avere letto il foglio informativo per i soggetti partecipanti | SI/NO |
| 2. Dichiaro di aver avuto la possibilità di chiedere maggiori informazioni riguardo allo studio e di aver ricevuto risposte soddisfacenti | SI/NO |
| 3. Dichiaro di aver ricevuto tutte le informazioni supplementari da me richieste | SI/NO |
| 4. Dichiaro di essere consapevole di poter revocare la mia partecipazione a questo studio in qualsiasi momento e senza incorrere in alcuna conseguenza, comunicando al ricercatore la mia decisione | SI/NO |
| 5. Dichiaro di essere a conoscenza del fatto che questo progetto è stato revisionato e approvato dalla Commissione Etica di Ricerca dell'Università di Oxford | SI/NO |
| 6. Dichiaro di conoscere chi avrà accesso ai dati personali forniti, in che modo tali dati verranno conservati e cosa ne verrà fatto alla fine dello studio | SI/NO |
| 7. Sono consapevole che il mantenimento della confidenzialità è soggetto alle leggi vigenti | SI/NO |
| 8. Confermo di voler partecipare a questo studio: | |
| - ad una intervista | SI/NO |
| - al gruppo di discussione | SI/NO |

Nome del soggetto partecipante..... Data.....

Firma.....

Nome del ricercatore..... Data.....

Firma.....

Appendix F:

Ethical Approval

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
INTER-DIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Hayes House, 75 George Street, Oxford. OX1 2BQ
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ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk www.socsci.ox.ac.uk

Co-ordinator of the IDREC
Social Sciences Divisional Office



Tuesday, 15 February 2011

Francesca Ghillani
Oxford Institute of Ageing

Dear Francesca,

Application for research ethics approval

Ref No.: SSD/CUREC1A/11-018

Title: The Dynamics of Body Changes and Self in Old Age: A Comparative Study with Italian Women Living in Italy and in UK

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to the IDREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly approval has been granted.

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project, which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application, you should submit details to the IDREC for consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris. Ballinger".

Dr Chris. Ballinger

cc: Prof Sarah Harper, Oxford Institute of Ageing
Anne Millard, Department of Sociology

CAJB/EB

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