

Fear of flying? late leaving home for the youth in the south¹

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1- The need to fly away: independent life, autonomy and adulthood

Age is possibly the most transversal structuring social factor. Throughout their lives, people necessarily pass through different life stages, facing privilege and prejudice from both sides in a way hardly conceivable with other key social variables. Given this special nature, one might say that social problems linked to life course's transitions are universal. At the same time these stages are diverse within, affected by sex, social class or geographical and cultural contexts.

For young people, leaving the parental home is one of the most important events in the transition to adulthood. It is the beginning of the process of forming an independent household, which is the focal point for several developmental progresses, such as getting married or having children (Bendit, 1999); and is also related to taking fuller responsibility for actions and being able to create an identity, independently from that of the parents (Nilsson & Strandh, 1999). But it is also a very important moment for the parents, as their own household structure is going to be altered. The nest metaphor has been extensively used to describe changes in the household structure, with the 'empty nest' phase as the prime example of it. If we use that image, we want to understand the delicate moment when the little bird jumps off the nest to fly away for the first time. Or to fall, as not all of them are capable to do it. But they only find out when they try. International literature on leaving home characterizes the Southern European countries (Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal) as the region with higher average leaving home ages compared with the central and northern countries (Iacovou, 2002). This would be a consequence of the economic structure and low levels of welfare provision linked to a 'familistic' culture (Albertini & Kohli, 2013; Allen et al., 2004).

Late leaving home limits the ability of the young adults to govern their own life through relevant choices (Bertolini, Moiso & Musumeci, 2018), but it also has deeper effects. It has been noted that, despite their age, young people cohabiting with their parents often fail to see themselves as adult citizens and this limits their empowerment and capacity for action (Comás, 2015); it can even affect the economic

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opportunities of young adults, as prolonged dependency from their families can diminish their ability to independent living and working (Billari & Tabellini, 2011). Furthermore, if we broad our focus from the young adults to the whole society, late leaving home can be seen as a social problem connected to fertility and the demographic structure of society (Jurado & Naldini, 1996). Even when the people involved may not perceive their situation as problematic (lots of parents and children are happy living together after the latter have reached adulthood), the consequences of this decision, and the aggregated social effect of many likewise behaviours allow us to consider it a relevant social problem for our societies.

In this chapter, we analyse the social discourse of young people about late leaving home and the role of parental support in this transition in a context of economic crisis. We have focused in two case studies: Catania (Italy) and Granada (Spain). Both cities are located in the south of the respective countries, so that the north-south axis is emphasized. Even within the national context, 'the south' is associated with poverty, underdevelopment and a traditional view regarding family, and also has been more affected by the crisis, as its consequences have hit harder the poorer regions. Thus, we have selected two spaces of study where this social problem may be especially relevant. The economic situation appears in the youth's discourses as an obstacle to leaving the family home, increasing their fears; but paradoxically it has a soothing effect as it allows them to think of it as a social problem, instead of a personal one. Thus a new collective story arises, normalising dependency on the parents. Family appears in the social discourse of the young adults as a safety device, helping them to cope with fear in different ways. This is a very important role in a context characterized by precariousness in the labour market and in their personal lives. Our results are consistent with the literature, highlighting the importance of the family in both local cultures. At the same time, this protection causes further problems, as it does not allow young people to develop a true responsibility over themselves, maintaining a psychological and emotional dependence of their parents.

2- Leaving parental home in the Mediterranean countries: delay and dependency

Young people in the southern European countries leave the family home later, and on average show higher dependency from their families (Jurado & Naldini, 1996). The explanations of these differences include economic problems, the expansion of the educational stage, delayed marriage or a lack of institutional financial support, among others (Gil Calvo, 2002). The economic recession has altered the youth's trajectories throughout Europe: they are becoming more complex and unstable (Gentile, 2010; Kaplan, 2009; Stone, Berrington & Falkingham, 2014; Arundel & Ronald, 2016). The average age to leave the parental household has risen slightly since 2009 in both countries: in Italy the average age rise from 29.7 years old in 2009 to 30.1 in 2017 and in Spain from 28.3 to 29.3 (Eurostat, 2018). But in the same period, it was slightly decreasing in the whole European Union –that also had a much lower average age to start with- from 26.2 in 2009 to 26 years old in 2017.

The main reason for this difference between southern European countries and the rest is the prevalence of one particular type of parental support: co-residence. In Italy and Spain is the most frequent way of family support, even at advanced ages, when living with the parents will be inconceivable for their northern counterparts. Even when the young adults have already moved out, the parental home is seen as a 'safe house', available for return in the event of a couple breakup or an economic downturn (Albertini & Kolhi, 2013; Gaviria, 2002). Direct transfers of money are less common, but they involve larger amounts of money than in central and Nordic countries (Albertini, Kohli & Vogel, 2007; Albertini & Kolhi, 2013). The usual purpose for these funds is covering some specific expenses, like the acquisition of furniture, or the down payment to sign the mortgage (Albertini, 2010).

Living with the family is not seen as an economic transfer, as both parents and children naturally assume the situation, subtracting from its monetary aspects, and perceiving them as part of the family dynamic. Co-residence is not necessarily seen as a problem by young people since relationships between parents and children have become more flexible and less authoritarian along the last decades, reducing the traditional incentives associated with independent living (López, 2006). Co-residence in the family home can be seen as a half-adulthood, or a 'virtual autonomy' (Fernández, Ruiz-Ruiz & Herrera, 2003; Miguel, Sánchez & París, 2000). When freedom has been achieved in many aspects of life, the need for residential autonomy is reduced. For example, the need for privacy is not mentioned as a problem by the young adults involved in a relationship even when they live with their parents (Hérmendez & Susino, 2008). Furthermore, as they are exempt from most of the housekeeping duties, co-residence can be associated with independence and comfort (Bernardi, 2007; Fernández et al., 2003).

3- A qualitative approach to residential decisions of the youth

The results presented here are part of two qualitative studies conducted between the end of 2014 and 2016 in Granada (Spain) and Catania (Italy). As we mentioned earlier, both can be considered examples of the 'south of the south', thus showing a reinforced version of the archetypical characteristics of the Mediterranean culture. Andalusia and Sicily have to deal with higher rates of poverty and unemployment (especially for the youth), and somehow reproduce, at a smaller scale, the same north-south inequality dynamic that can be found in the European scale.

The Spanish study is based on 11 focus groups and also includes 11 in-deep interviews. In this chapter we have studied the results of the focus groups which took place in Granada in 2014-15 (5 groups). The Italian study is also part of a wider investigation (EXCEPT), covering- nine countries and including more than 40 face-to-face interviews in each one of them. In this chapter we will only use those taking place in Catania (19 interviews). Table 1 adds some details about the methodological approach and sampling.

Table 1: Sampling design and strategy

		SPAIN	ITALY
Location		Granada	Catania
Years of the fieldwork		2014-2015	2015- 2016
Data production technique		Focus groups	Interviews
Participants		36 (5 groups)	19
Sampling strategy	Age	18-30	18-30
	Gender	50-50%	50-50%
	Living arrangement	Living with parents and independently(always in differentiated groups)	Living with parents and independently
	Parental background	Different socio-economic status in each group. Oversampling families with less education	Different socio-economic status in each group. Oversampling families with less education
	Occupational Status	Not included	Temporary workers, unemployed people, NEET(not being in education, employment or training) and non-contractual workers (also 2 successful examples)
	Educational level	All educational levels, oversampling the less educated	All educational levels, oversampling the less educated
	Ethnic minorities/ migrant groups	Not included	2 interviews

Both studies were not designed with the aim of being compared, and there are some obvious differences in the research strategy; although the similarities between them clearly overpass the differences. The two studies share the dates in which they were performed (recession context); a similar sample; compatible fieldwork procedures (contacting, how to conduct the interviews, etc.); the same main topics (leave parental home, parental support, economic crisis, etc.) and location in the south of the country. All in all, we consider the comparison between data from out two studies not only compatible, but highly interesting, allowing us to broaden our view of the leaving home process in the south of Europe.

4- Effects of the economic crisis in the discourses about leaving the parental home

The economic crisis has directly affected the salaries, working conditions and even the very chance to find a job for young people throughout Europe. Other chapters of his book address the effects of this context on labour markets and subjective well-being but we are interested in the particular effect over young adults in their transition to independent living. The crisis has an indirect effect, changing their ideas, expectations and plans for the future even when they are not directly affected. These indirect effects can be identified and analysed in our respondents' discourses. The economic crisis is a constant background for all their housing-related decisions. They feel as victims of a context that does not give them opportunities to get ahead, thus put the blame on the crisis when looking for a culprit of their residential situation. But this self-victimization has an indirect soothing effect: if we are in such a terrible context, then it is acceptable to wait for better times before leaving the nest. The end result is a cocktail of contradictory ideas, shared

by young adults in very different personal and familiar situations, mixing pessimism and a reduction of the pressure to leave the family home.

-But of course, the thing of a stable job right now is practically impossible, I see myself until I'm forty in my house. It's horrible [...].

- I think that to becoming independent is completely linked with the labour situation we live in. (Non independent, lower socioeconomic status, 21-29, both sex, 2014, Granada)

Obviously, I'd rather have some tranquillity... a regular salary etc. It doesn't make you feel very good when you start thinking- 'shit, as of next month, I might not have a job any longer, that is to say, the cooperative could be shut down.(Non independent, lower socioeconomic status, temporary employment, 25, man, 2017, Catania)

Leaving the parental home seems to be more of a distant dream than a nearby reality (Bertolini, 2018). They live and act within a short-term time horizon, where everything seems brief and/or close. Thus do not specify long-term plans in terms of leaving home, it is something that will come as a result of a stable job. It is no longer a matter of not being able to leave the family home; it is a matter of not even considering it in the medium term. Thus, at no time they mention having savings for emancipation. They do not have any clear notion of the steps they should follow, nor do they know about social policies or instruments that could help them in the process.

For now, I'm not even considering (to move out), because I have got, I mean, I have a beautiful relationship with my mother, so it's an idea that has never crossed my mind, so I'm, I'm fine like this. (Non independent, lower socioeconomic status, 20, man, 2017, Catania)

The truth is that I have not informed (applied for public aid to rent). I have not raised it (leaving home) then I have not looked for information about that either. (Non independent, lower socioeconomic status, 21-29, both sex, 2014, Granada)

They are not in a hurry, so they can wait. But, what for? Family formation is still the key element. In Catania, young people linked leaving the parental home with the creation of a stable partner relationship and the decision to marry and have children. Moving out for reasons different from starting a new family might indeed be perceived as a sort of betrayal by parents. In Spain, this traditional view is still present in lower socioeconomic status groups. In middle class groups with higher education a new view is arising: they associate leaving home with the development of a professional career and personal growth.

The general discourse takes for granted the young adults want to leave, but they cannot, as their personal situation and the context does not allow them; so they wait. However, there is something that caught the attention in both researches: young people do not seem to have an urgent need to leave home even when their economic situation allows it. Indeed, we find young people with stable jobs who prefer to stay in the family home. Thus, late age to leave the family home can be explained by some cultural patterns

(and not so much by economic situation, even when blaming the crisis is the first and foremost discourse in our fieldwork).

Therefore, we have to separate the economic situation (the objective context, partly shared, but which also varies for each individual, especially when comparing different social classes) from the subjective perception and discourses about the crisis (shared and built upon the other). The crisis makes objectively more difficult to leave the family home, but it is also providing an excuse to delay it, alleviating the social pressure to do it, and also easing the returning trajectories of the ‘boomerang kids’ (Kaplan, 2009). But these allegedly temporary solutions may turn into permanent lifestyles, especially if another crisis hits our countries. Families will keep providing protection and help if they can (as expected in Mediterranean cultures), but this support comes with a price that we want to explore.

5- The role of the family. Expectations and strategies to cope with fears

Fears and concerns are constantly surging in our interviews and focus groups, both explicitly and implicitly. They are related to assume the responsibilities of adulthood, their couples and fears based on the economic situation. But the crisis has enhanced some long terms worries in the young population. They are afraid of losing control of their own life, of not being able to develop any long term plans or vital strategies. This kind of discourse is stronger in lower status groups.

I have other fears, I don't know, not knowing how to do my job properly [...]. I don't know, I am 27 and damn, I would like to have a cat, for instance. These things are a more personal kind of fears (laughs) The truth is, I can't have a cat, I don't know where I will be in a year [...] Those are fears of self-fulfilment, about my own reality, about the things I really want, more than about being homeless. (Independent, lower socioeconomic status, 25-30, both sex, 2014, Granada)

Middle class' young adults talk about precariousness as a temporary drawback, typical from young age, which can be overcome with the help of the family, and then a future of stability awaits. They are more optimistic in the long term, but cautious in the short term. They are afraid of taking missteps, thus prefer to wait and achieve a better position before risking a change.

But fears are not exclusively felt by the young adults: their parents also suffer them, and are conditioned in their actions by these worries. In fact, the creation and transformation of these fears takes place in the family home, but also outside, with their peers and in the broader social context. These feelings are really frequent, and they are shared by the immense majority of the population to the point they have normalized a situation atypical in the rest of Europe.

The fact that I still live with my (parents) I do not know, maybe in Sicily is a normal thing because only when I get married I can go out from my parental home. 'This is something normal in Sicilian (tradition)' (laughing). For us, it is normal. [...] For now, I consider a normal thing living with my parents because all of my friends are living with their parents but also when someone is employed, he/she cannot go away from

home because we are in Sicily and 'one cannot escape from parental home' (laughing). (Non independent, middle-lower socioeconomic status, unemployed, 23, woman, 2017, Catania)

The interviewee reiterates the normality of her situation, underlining how they only follow a social rule. This insistence on normalization also reflects an acceptance of the absence of control over her own life. She can't take a decision that directly defies her family's expectations. From this point of view, the delay in emancipation can also be understood as a family strategy. The role of parents is key to understanding the residential transitions of young Italians and Spaniards; but not only in terms of the financial support they can give them, but also in the transmission of preferences, values and expectations of living standards; as well as expectations about how the leave home process should be carried out. Family strategies try to achieve the upward mobility of children or at least the reproduction of the same inherited social class (Bernardi, 2007). For example, parents who have invested in education want to avoid social degradation of their children through co-residence. In this sense, unravelling family strategies will allow us to complete our study of residential decisions of young people. The literature on leaving the family home identifies three main support strategies, in three different moments: co-residence (before), financial and personal help (transition) and support after they leave.

Delaying the flight

Co-residence is not only a defensive strategy: young people can take advantage of this parental dependence to improve their level of education, or to be able to focus on finding a job according to their expectations. It should be noted that parents not only offer the family home, but also put pressure to stay until they reach status 'consistent' with their origins, developing retention strategies (Gaviria, 2002).

This kind of support is common in middle-higher classes: parents and children expect certain level of achievement (economic and professional). The important thing is to avoid a downward social mobility in the next generation of the family. Young adults in this situation have less insecurity, but they are also pushed to follow a path traced by the family, and to prioritize professional development before personal growth. Security is paid with reduced autonomy.

I have friends who maybe are waiting to have more savings because it is not a time in which if you have a job normally you are not earning a lot, then people think 'I prefer to wait, even at my parents' house and save what I'm earning, which is not much either'. It's a way to get comfortable and avoid risk, too. (Independents, high-middle socioeconomic status, 25-30, both sex, 2014, Granada)

'Assisted flight'

At the time of leaving the house, it is typical to receive money transfers. However, this kind of support is often related to keep the social status of their children when they leave the nest: the help provided is not

aimed to make it possible, but to make it better (so that they get a better house, or better furniture, than they could acquire by their own means). This kind of support can be found anywhere in Europe, but there is another way more characteristic from southern counties. As the accumulation of wealth in the form of housing property is frequent in Mediterranean countries (Torrado, Duque-Calvache & Palomares, forthcoming), frequently the family has additional properties available for the children to move to so they can separate from the family, achieving more day-to-day freedom, but not real independence.

*Whereupon, when I arrived at home telling my father that I am expecting this child, suddenly my fathers-in-law and my parents gathered to look for a better accommodation for me and my wife, ok? And thus, since concerning my wife's family there are some uncles who have got empty houses which they rent in certain periods of time...they proposed me to go in one of their houses. I only had to buy the furnishings, but it was an extraneous house. Then, my father-in-law, since he has got a house here and another one at ***, 2 flats, one over the other, and he said 'Let's do a thing, I go to *** and you remain here, in my house'. (Independent, medium socioeconomic status, temporary employment, man, 22, 2017, Catania)*

Although the help provided is really important, this quote reflect how the decision is taken away from the interviewee, and was placed in the hands of a council of the families. To the point it ended being a reversed leaving home process, where the kids stay and the parents leave. This kind of solutions can solve the residential problem of the young adults, but, is it actual autonomy, regarding independence, self-fulfilment and transition to adulthood?

Safety nets

Even when young adults leave the parents' home, they may keep receiving support. Direct, periodical economic transfers are not common (except for students; education costs are usually covered if the family has the means to do it). However, it is quite common to get several types of financial help, which tend to be stratified by social class. Punctual money transfers, before large or unforeseen expenses can be found among upper-middle class families. In lower classes, it is more likely to provide 'Tupper help' (taking prepared food from the parents to eat at their own home), to 'go shopping' (taking groceries from the family home or shopping together –and let the parents pay-) or eat daily at the parents' house, , even the poorest families won't allow their children to be improperly feed. This kind of help, and also support in child caring, requires geographical proximity to the family home to be really effective, thus is also connected to the residential location choice.

(Support from the family) It is not only economic, that may be the most important part, but [...] I have many friends in my situation, and they go to their parent's place for, the typical things: you broke something you don't know how to fix, then you look for your father; or also typical, going for lunch at the family home, for whatever reason, because a lot of these people can sustain themselves. As you said, having the family close by, (is important) for any kind of thing. Maybe you feel lonely, and then you can always... maybe you had a bad day, and you can always go to your home, see your parents, or play with your dog. (Independent, high-middle socioeconomic status, 25-30, both sex, 2014, Granada)

This last quote introduces an important way of support for young people in unstable working contexts. The family home appears in the speeches of young people as a last ditch against failure. The parents' home is a safe place to return in case of need, almost without any negotiation; a situation hardly imaginable in northern countries, but statistically significant and socially acceptable in Spain and Italy². If the emancipation project goes wrong, either because of an economic problem, or because of a couple breakup, the door of your old home will be open. This potential help does not need to be used to be important: knowing you have the chance of returning is reassuring even if you never do it.

The big problems at a personal level, in the couple, started when I changed working hours: we hardly ever saw each other. [...] This made us grow apart little by little till it was over [...]. At that point, keeping my own place wasn't advantageous because I could barely make it financially, I said 'why not, I'll move back in with my parents, I'll be relaxed again'. (Independent, lower-middle socioeconomic status, temporary employment, 27, Man, 2017, Catania)

This safety mechanism can help reluctant young adults to leave the family home, reducing fear. At the same time, it is a half-measure, as it allows them to avoid full responsibility over their decisions; the end of the quote hints a childish attitude, preferring to be relaxed and dependent than facing life's hardships.

6- Fear or caution? Ambivalence in young adults' residential decisions

The qualitative comparative analysis has shown that young people in Spain and Italy, as countries in the South, have similar emancipation trajectories and discourses. The economic crisis has worsened the conditions in which young people make their home transitions, but social pressure to leave has also decreased, and gives them a new shared discourse that justifies late leaving and dependence on family support.

The family acts as a safety nest or parachute, giving young adults the security labor market and institutions do not offer. However, we wonder about the ambivalence of this reassurance: to what extent family support really diminishes the fears, allowing taking flight (knowing they can always return to the nest) or, on the contrary, it incapacitates them to take full responsibility over their own life. Accepting the help, they are also indirectly accepting the fact that the parents are ultimately the ones responsible of their welfare, not themselves.

²To be fair, this tacit agreement can work both ways in the long term. Many elderly parents move to their children's homes when they are facing health problems or loneliness. Family networks keep providing well-being services during the whole life course.

The various types of support generate different types of economic, psychological and emotional dependence that could end up causing the failure of emancipation projects. In the case of co-residence, the family home functions as a golden cage that retains them, related to comfort, minimum responsibilities and virtual autonomy (Fernández et al, 2003, Miguel et al, 2000): moving out will mean a loss of quality of life. In the case of assistance in the purchase of housing, this help compels to compromise in decisions regarding the housing type, quality and location. If young adults accept the cession of a family home, the non-decision component is even greater because it eliminates the typical decision-making experience involved in the purchase (about price, state, typology, preferences, etc.). In this sense, the expectations that parents place on their children's status and the kind of help they provide may not allow them to empower themselves and feel in charge of their life trajectories.

The social problem of late leaving home will not be solved with the end of the economic crisis, because its roots are deeper. We agree with Comás (2015) that there is a generational pact where young people, parents and society as a whole accept the dependence of their children, while they maintain a certain level of life that they would not have without parental help. But we are in the brink of having a lost generation, with a large proportion of people unable to develop a personal and familiar trajectory of their own if this situation turns permanent. We keep the current situation under the assumption of it being temporary, but a new crisis –currently foreshadowed by many analysts- can turn the tide. Thus we are facing a serious social problem. One that cannot be solved only with employment or housing policies (which undoubtedly would help), but we also believe it is not a mere economic issue; it has a strong cultural and social class component. Fears and strategies are not individual, but familiar, and are linked to downward mobility, expectations for the future and social promises of success and achievement.

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