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Di Felicianantonio, Cesare and Dagkouly-Kyriakoglou, Myrto (2022) The housing pathways of lesbian and gay youth and intergenerational family relations: A Southern European perspective. *Housing Studies*, 37 (3). pp. 414-434. ISSN 0267-3037

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2020.1807471>

**Publisher:** Taylor & Francis (Routledge)

**Version:** Accepted Version

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# **The housing pathways of lesbian and gay youth and intergenerational family relations: A Southern European perspective\***

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\*Final draft version of the paper published in *Housing Studies*, online  
first doi: 10.1080/02673037.2020.1807471

## **The housing pathways of lesbian and gay youth and intergenerational family relations: A Southern European perspective**

### **Abstract**

Against the heteronormativity of the increasing field of studies around intergenerational family relations within asset-based welfare systems, the paper analyses the housing pathways of lesbian and gay young people, focusing on family intergenerational relations and the implications concerning emotional, private and sexual life. The paper focuses on Greece and Italy, two countries characterized by the so-called 'Southern European' model of welfare system centred around the family. Given the persistence of homo/lesbophobia, this process pushes lesbian and gay youth to negotiate between housing choices and personal lives in ambivalent ways. The housing strategies analysed are regrouped into four categories: i) the return to the family house; ii) the dependence on the family of origin to buy or rent; iii) international migration to be more autonomous; iv) the experience of alternative housing models, mostly squatting, or sharing (including Airbnb). Our categorization must not be interpreted as fixed or immutable since people might try different solutions over time.

### **Key-words:**

Lesbian and gay youth

Housing pathways

Asset-based welfare

Intergenerational family relations

Southern Europe

## 1. Introduction

Following the 2007/2008 economic downturn and the widespread adoption of severe austerity policies throughout the Global North, several contributions in housing studies have focused on the transformation of the housing possibilities for young generations and the role of intra-family intergenerational support (Druta & Ronald, 2017; Heath & Calvert, 2013; Hoolachan et al, 2017; Stone, Berrington & Falkingham, 2011). Mortgage lending criteria have become tighter, making it difficult to borrow money for younger people with insecure jobs, thus preventing them from accessing homeownership (McKee, 2012). However, a closer look at this emergent field of studies reveals a widespread heteronormativity in their analytical assumptions, i.e. relations among younger generations, intra-family support, housing pathways and the meaning of home are framed without considering the tensions and negotiations involved for those LGBT youth who need to negotiate access to housing with their families (for an exception, see Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2017). As shown by several feminist and queer readings of housing, home and domestic spaces (Blunt & Varley, 2004; Gorman-Murray, 2006b, 2008b), for women and sexual dissidents the family home can be a site of violence, abuse and repression. The reconfiguration of intergenerational intra-family relations and its impact on the housing pathways of LGBT youth remains therefore underexplored.

Against this lack of attention, the paper analyses the ways different housing pathways for lesbian and gay (LG) young people<sup>1</sup> within family-centered welfare systems impact on their emotional, relational and sexual lives. Our understanding of housing pathways builds on Clapham's work (2002; 2005), defining them as "patterns of interaction (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space" (Clapham, 2002, p. 63). Against the linearity of the 'housing career' approach, housing pathways result from the interaction between individual life, household life and the experience of housing. Moreover, this approach includes the concept of 'categorical identity', referring to "the labels ascribed to us by ourselves and by society" (Clapham, 2005, p. 14), imposing expectations for appropriate behaviours from both ourselves and others. Given the focus of the paper, this concept appears useful to frame the double positioning as both 'children' and LG subjects in heteronormative societies, impacting on housing pathways and intergenerational relations.

The paper focuses on the cases of Italy and Greece, two countries characterized by the so-called 'Southern European' model of welfare system centred around the role of intra-family intergenerational wealth distribution (Castles & Ferrera, 1996). The Italian and Greek cases are relevant for an international readership for at least three reasons. First, these countries have registered increasing legal recognition towards LG people in recent years, creating tensions between liberal, progressive political agendas, and conservative right-wing parties and religious groups opposing LGBT rights because they are presumed to threaten the 'natural' order of societies, based on heterosexuality and the male/female gender binary (e.g. Garbagnoli, 2014). These tensions are highlighted by violent episodes against LGBT communities. Second, these countries were among the first to feature the "asset-based

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<sup>1</sup> We are aware that the definition of 'young' people is controversial and depending on the national context. In line with the debate on precarity in Southern Europe that has highlighted how younger generations are the most exposed to the negative consequences of the crisis (e.g. Di Felicianantonio, 2017), in this paper we consider as 'young' people aged under 35.

welfare” (e.g. Di Felicianantonio & Aalbers, 2018), mainly around homeownership, that now characterizes most countries across the Global North and beyond (e.g. Doling & Ronald, 2010; Groves et al, 2007). Third, these countries have been among the most hard hit by the financial crisis and the severe austerity measures adopted in response to it in the EU (e.g. Verney et al, 2009). Austerity has led to a massive reduction in public spending, thus reinforcing a vision of equality as a sort of private issue (as revealed by the cuts on social policies and the shutting down of shelters for people who experienced violence at home). This process produces therefore a tense situation for LG people: on one side they have obtained legal recognition and public visibility, while on the other they are more dependent on the support and the transfer of resources from the family of origin.

By analysing different pathways and strategies of LG young people we do not intend to demonstrate there is a difference in the possibilities available: LG people face the same housing alternatives available to their straight counterparts. However, the housing pathways of LG people call into question the role of (gendered, heteronormative) *difference* in shaping the expectations and values of the families of origin, thus impacting on the emotional, private and relational lives of LG people as a result of the negotiations with their families. Our analysis on LG housing pathways is *intersectional*, i.e. we acknowledge that class and other factors (e.g. faith, race, social and cultural capital) play a central role in determining which possibilities each person is presented with (therefore accessing homeownership through family support is not an option for everyone).

Our analysis contributes to housing studies by including the experiences of LG people in both the debate on intergenerational intra-family relations, and the differential access to housing tenures, thus challenging the persistent heteronormativity of this field of study (Matthews & Poyner, 2019). Analyses of the housing pathways of LGBT people have mostly focused on ‘homelessness pathways’ in the US where the phenomenon of LGBT homeless youth is very widespread (e.g. Castellanos, 2016; Shelton & Bond, 2017). In the context of Southern Europe there is a deep lack of data on the topic since questions on sexual orientation and gender identity are not included in public surveys, including those on homelessness.

The remainder of the paper is made up of five sections. In section two we review the literature on ‘queer home’ as a response to the heteronormative assumptions of recent studies on intergenerational family relations and housing for youth in the context of the reconfiguration of welfare systems and increasing precarity. Section three presents Greece and Italy in relation to the configuration of the welfare system and the persistent discrimination towards LG people. In section four we discuss the methodology behind the studies this paper results from. Section five analyses four categories of housing trajectory, highlighting both benefits and negative aspects in terms of emotional, relational and sexual life. Finally, in the conclusions we stress the need for housing studies to be more inclusive and intersectional, especially in the current times of lockdown measures because of Covid-19.

## 2. Queering housing intra-family support

The combination of tightened access to credit after the 2007/2008 financial downturn, increasing unemployment and income precarity, as well as the severe cuts to welfare benefits, seems to have reshaped the housing possibilities of younger generations, increasing their reliance on the support of parents (e.g. Druta & Ronald, 2017). Whereas the results of this

process are relatively new for several Western countries, including the UK and the Netherlands, it has long-standing roots for South European countries, where homeownership has been promoted as a main social value since the fascist dictatorships of the early XX century (Di Feliciano & Aalbers, 2018). This similarity has started to be addressed in housing studies (e.g. Doling & Elsinga, 2012); however, scholars have failed to address the impact of the transformation of the welfare system and the role of intergenerational relationships to access housing for LGBT people. We can consider as an example the study of Druta and Ronald (2017) on young adults' pathways into homeownership and the negotiation of intra-family support in contemporary Britain. The authors analyse the complex negotiations between different generations in-depth; however, it is unclear from their article whether LGBT people were excluded from the study or whether the authors did not find any difference in intra-family intergenerational relations for LGBT participants. A similar criticism can be addressed to the increasing literature on 'generation rent' (e.g. Hoolachan et al, 2017): while the recent work of McKee and colleagues (e.g. 2019) has started to address the role of *difference* in shaping the lived experiences of 'generation rent', especially in terms of class and gender, sexual orientation (as well as non-binary gender identity) remains completely unexplored.

This neglect of the experiences of LGBT people contrasts with the inclusionary approach that has emerged in housing studies thanks to feminist and queer readings of home, *homemaking* practices and the complex family negotiations involved. For LGBT people 'home' and the family of origin can be violent, repressive and harmful, leading them to establish new 'homes' in different and dynamic ways, including public/commercial venues (Gorman-Murray, 2006a) as well as migration/movement (Knopp, 2004). Home is an ideological construction established through experience; it can therefore nourish feelings of either belonging or alienation and estrangement (Gorman-Murray, 2006a), security or violence, desire or fear according to domestic experiences, social relations and emotions (Gorman-Murray, 2006b; 2008a; 2008b). Through these lenses home emerges as a multidimensional space involving meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships, and it is transformed by these accordingly (Blunt, 2005). But home is also an idea and embodies an imagery that people try to realize through specific housing choices during the life course; as acknowledged by a widespread international scholarship, homeownership has progressively become the hegemonic ideal (Ronald, 2008).

The idea of home has traditionally concerned the place where the heterosexual concept of family and its power relations are affirmed and reproduced while it is also significant for constructing and promoting particular gendered subjects. Such a normative idea has been widely supported by formal institutions and mainstream media (Mallett, 2004) as a way to reinforce the material, social, psychological and economic dependence of the individual on private family welfare and not on public systems. For young people home represents therefore the place where ambitions and obligations are imposed, "individual biographies and expectations are routed" and "emotional functioning of the family is often played" (Valentine et al, 2003, p. 481).

Gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality shape subjective experiences of home (Mallett, 2004). Concerning gender and sexuality, home is the place where normalized gender roles are formed in line with hegemonic heteronormative values and practices (e.g. Blunt & Dowling,

2006; Gorman-Murray, 2006a; Valentine et al., 2003). Both home and identities are socially constructed and they are the subject of continuous negotiation and reconstruction (Gorman-Murray, 2006a), so that researching everyday practices is fundamental to understand the tight connection between gender norms, heteronormativity and domestic imageries. From a post-structuralist perspective, Gorman-Murray (2015) has shown how subjectivities inside home are continuously constituted from the social relations prevailing there and vice versa. *Homemaking* as a concept indicates the ways in which housing choices and the meanings attached to home are shaped by people's desires, social interactions and social position independently from the normative imaginaries of home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006), leading to "diverse and increasingly fluid gendered and sexualized meanings of home" (Gorman-Murray, 2006b, p.244; see also Gorman-Murray, 2008b). However, global political, economic and social processes affect also domestic spaces (Blunt, 2005). Simultaneously, the rules characterizing public spaces also influence domestic ones, rendering home both public and private (e.g. Domosh, 1998; Elwood, 2000; Gorman-Murray, 2006b).

Even as home embodies societal norms for the construction of gendered identities that in turn reproduce the family as a social institution based on asymmetrical socio-sexual relations of power (Valentine, 1993), it also represents a key site to challenge hegemonic models (Gorman-Murray, 2008b). For LG people home represents a significant site for the constitution of one's identity, enabling their subjectivities as LG in order to preserve the sense of self by shifting gender dynamics and realizing sexual self-exploration and expression. In this respect, the work of Gorman-Murray explores how resistance to hegemonic models and ideologies can be enacted (e.g. 2008a) through a process defined as *queering* the heteronormative home based on non-normative practices of socialization and domesticity (e.g. 2006a; 2008b). It follows that even the family home can be a site of resistance to heteronormativity, where family members find support and affirmation of their LG identities (Gorman-Murray, 2008b).

When LG people form new households, a combination of both normative and non-normative practices of *homemaking* can be observed. For instance, the literature has emphasized the importance of home for lesbians as a refuge where they can freely express their sexual identity (e.g. Valentine, 1993; Johnston & Valentine, 1995), but also its public significance in terms of making sexuality more visible (e.g. Rich, 1989). Against such a dualism, the research by Elwood in Minneapolis/St. Paul showed that "lesbian living spaces disrupt our understanding of the differences between public and private space. In many lesbian experiences of living spaces, the private is made public. Whether these spaces are ultimately understood as public or private, they are highly politicized. Lesbian living spaces are directly involved in struggles over identity, control of social spaces, and social power" (Elwood, 2000, p. 13). Such a blurring of the private/public binary has been discussed also in relation to the construction of home for gay men, especially in those urban areas where there is a 'gayborhood' (M. Brown, 2014) and bars and other kinds of commercial venues become *homelike* (Gorman-Murray, 2006a).

Lesbian and gay living spaces tend to foster same-sex coupling and the experience of non-normative desires in a safe environment, where the "gay imaginary is nourished with thoughts, narratives, dreams and hopes for the future" (Gorman-Murray, 2006a, pp. 65-66). These safe spaces often tend to reproduce the heteronormative ideal of the couple/family

ideal centered around consumption, monogamy and the privatization and sanitization of sexuality. Critical scholars have defined this process as 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2002), although geographers have highlighted the complexity and diversity of everyday practices of 'homonormative' gay men (G. Brown, 2009; Di Felicianantonio, 2019). This critical positioning is aimed at de-essentializing identities, thus echoing the increasingly intersectional character of social sciences, including housing studies (e.g. Greene et al, 2012). The paper shares this perspective by considering LG experiences of housing and home in combination with their class status and the role of the welfare system in determining their access to housing.

### 3. Italy and Greece: Southern European welfare system and LG inequalities

In this section we contextualize our comparative analysis focusing on two main aspects that influence our argument: i) the configuration of the Greek and Italian welfare systems and their inability to tackle housing precarity; ii) the persistence of homo/lesbophobia despite the increased visibility of LG people. Although interconnected, we proceed by discussing these aspects separately to enhance clarity.

#### *The South European welfare system*

In the case of Southern European countries such as Greece and Italy, scholarship has shown the welfare system to consist of the following specific characteristics: "mixed" public intervention with universal provision in the domain of health and a fragmented pension system linked to the specific employment sector; low intervention to support people at risk of poverty through income redistribution; strong level of (private) familism, thus access to welfare benefits often relies on family networks, mainly through the unpaid work of women (e.g. Castles & Ferrera, 1996; Ferrera, 1996; Mingione, 1995). The main viable solution to survive is therefore a familial strategy to "gather odds and ends of income wherever they can find them" (Trifiletti, 1999, p. 53).

When considering the role of housing in the configuration of Southern European welfare systems, the main characteristic is the weak intervention of the state in the provision of social and affordable housing and/or direct support to rent. In combination with the weak provision of housing through the welfare state, homeownership has been favored through different policy instruments, mostly fiscal, as well as the tolerance of informal housing. Family occupies a central role in accessing housing (through homeownership) via inter-generational monetary or material support (Bricocoli & Cucca, 2014; Siatitsa, 2014). For instance, in a comparative study Poggio (2008) showed how in Greece and Italy, 31.6% and 34.6%, respectively, of homeowners accessed homeownership through intergenerational family transmission, the same rates being 21.8% in Germany, 13.9% in France and only 3.3% in the Netherlands.

In Greece, the traditional weakness of public redistributive intervention in the domain of housing has become even more accentuated in the phase of austerity politics. Following the reception of three bailout packages under the control of the so called 'Troika' (European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary fund), the Greek government approved new measures impacting on housing affordability (Petmesidou, 2013), while also making the process of house repossession faster (Alexandri & Janoschka, 2018). Since 2017 housing prices in Greece have increased rapidly because of the growth of AirBnB activity and the 'Golden Visa' program, widening housing inequalities (Pappous, 2019).



Housing prices in urban areas rose 9.32% during the year to Q3 2019 and rents 8.9%<sup>2</sup> in comparison to 2018 (Delmendo, 2020). Simultaneously, since 2012 Greece has had one of the highest unemployment rates among OECD countries (17.2% in July 2019), and the youth employment rate was 39.9% in December 2018 (EUROSTAT, 2019).

In Italy, because of austerity local institutions are now required to provide welfare services (including housing) with fewer resources, but without the possibility to introduce new taxation. It is no surprise then that the housing crisis has started to hit more and more people (as demonstrated by increasing evictions and foreclosures; see Bazzoli, 2018; Di Felicianantonio, 2017), while local councils did not make available new social housing units. At the same time, the response of the national government consisted in furthering the promotion of homeownership through the new 'Housing Plan' approved in 2014, depicting social housing as a mere temporary solution for those who currently cannot afford to buy a house (for a critical analysis of recent housing policies in Italy see Deriu, 2014; Di Felicianantonio & Aalbers, 2018). Increasing housing precarity is strictly connected to a more general process of precarization of life conditions, the unemployment rate being at 9.9% (July 2019), while the youth employment rate is 32.2% (December 2018).<sup>3</sup> Despite recent decreases in unemployment, poverty rates have increased as a result of increasing inequalities in the job market characterized by an increase in 'working poors'. The absolute poverty rate increased from 7.9% in 2016 to 8.4% in 2017, while relative poverty rate rose from 14% in 2016 to 15.6% in 2017.<sup>4</sup>

### *LG inequalities*

In relation to the inclusion and social acceptance of LGBT people across Europe, Southern European countries are often portrayed as 'backward' in opposition to an imagined 'modern' European Union which is inclusive, tolerant and promotes civil rights (e.g. Colpani & Habed, 2014). However, in the last decade there has been an increasing differentiation within the area, with Portugal and Spain deeply engaged in promoting a very progressive agenda with respect to marriage, adoption and combatting homo/lesbo/transphobia, while Greece and Italy appear to remain in a 'backward' position (Moreno & Mari-Klose, 2013, Martin, 2015). To get an idea we can consider the 'rainbow index' developed by ILGA-Europe, the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association<sup>5</sup>. The index maps the results of 49 countries in terms of equality towards LGBT people with respect to six criteria: equality and non-discrimination; family; hate crime & hate speech; legal gender recognition; civil society space; and asylum. In 2018 Italy is ranked 35<sup>th</sup> among the 49 countries mapped, with an overall score of 22% in achieved LGBTI human rights; Greece is ranked 14<sup>th</sup> with an overall score of 49%. More generally, homo/lesbophobia and legal discrimination in several domains of social life are acknowledged for both countries by scholars across disciplines (e.g. D'Ippoliti & Schuster, 2011; Drydakis, 2011).

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.spitogatos.gr>. [last accessed: 08/05/2020]

<sup>3</sup> Source: *ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics) [last access: 20/09/2019]

<sup>5</sup> Source: <http://rainbow-europe.org/> [last access: 20/09/2019]

Despite persisting discrimination and violence against LGBT people, public visibility has increased in the last decades, as demonstrated by the appearance of 'gayborhoods' in some of the main cities of both countries (e.g. Athens, Milan, Rome) and the organization of large Pride parades (Di Feliciantonio, 2016a). Increased visibility contrasts with the morally conservative values promoted by rightwing parties/groups (such as the Northern League in Italy and Golden Dawn in Greece) and the main Churches (Catholic in Italy, Orthodox in Greece). These institutions and political actors promote the idea of the heteronormative family as the main pillar of society (including welfare), opposing any form of legal recognition towards other forms of kinship.

#### 4. Research methodology

This paper is based on a comparative analysis of some of the results from different research projects the authors have conducted separately. In the case of Italy, data was collected through three different research projects carried out by the first author. The first of these projects was focused on alternative housing initiatives as a response to the impact of the crisis and austerity policies; the second one was focused on the relocation of queer migrants from the 'big city' to ordinary towns; the third one concerned Italian gay migration abroad (to Barcelona and Berlin) and intra-nationally (from Italian cities such as Naples and Milan to Rome). The three projects relied on biographic interviews, producing a total amount of 114 interviews collected between 2011 and 2016. 44 out of the 114 interviews were with LG people (participants were asked about their sexual identity); however, since the focus of the paper is on people aged under 35, two of them were excluded from the comparative analysis, i.e. 42 interviews have been considered. Participants were recruited in different ways (advertising on social media and dedicated websites/application; snowballing). Participation was voluntary, there was no financial compensation. The interviews were fully anonymous (i.e. any personal information making them identifiable was cancelled; other characteristics, such as age and occupation, were classified under general categories) and the participants were given the chance to choose a code or a nickname. In line with Crang (2005) and Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2011), interviews were analyzed through narrative analysis aimed at emphasizing the contextual and breaking-points within personal narratives, challenging the linear account that people often develop when asked about their lives. Interviews were listened to several times before transcription. Transcriptions were coded through a life-course perspective, thus turning points were highlighted (e.g. "leaving the family home"; "eviction"; "international migration") and 'emotional codes' (e.g. 'distress'; 'happiness', 'emotional tensions') were associated to each life transition.

In the case of Greece, during 2017 the second author conducted 52 semi-structured interviews in Athens as part of a study about the impact of family strategies on youth housing pathways. One of the dimensions explored was sexual orientation, so 12 interviews with LG people aged between 25 and 35 were conducted (participants were asked about their sexual identity). Participation was voluntary, there was no financial compensation. Participants were recruited through snowballing in order to reach also people who had not come out yet. The interviews have been anonymised and the participants given a pseudonym. Interview recordings were listened to multiple times and transcribed. The transcriptions were coded on

the basis of the housing practices and their impact on the emotional, relational and sexual lives of participants.

Table 1 details the number of research participants for each housing trajectory category in both countries, highlighting the benefits and the negative aspects connected to each choice.

The categories chosen result from in-depth discussion between the authors after data analysis as a combination of the housing practices and their impact on emotional, relational and sexual life as discussed by participants. This explains for instance the choice of the category “alternative (and sharing) housing solutions”: the housing practices included in these categories are pretty different (e.g. communal life in a squat, AirBnB), but the narratives of participants highlighted the same tensions for personal life (e.g. increased autonomy, lack of intimacy, precarious endurance). Despite the difference in the number of participants and their experiences for the countries analysed, we believe the comparative effort has the power to better highlight the ambivalent impact of different housing strategies in times of precarity over the emotional, relational and sexual lives of LG people.

A close look at the numbers in Table 1 reveals the contextual and transient character of the housing pathways of the research participants, some of them moving across different categories over time as the result of different factors (e.g. employment, romantic relationships, health, family issues). Our aim is not to create a rigid and all-encompassing taxonomy but to highlight how the tensions between the configuration of a family-based welfare system, precarity and a homophobic family environment are reflected in the housing choices of LG young people and how they impact on the emotional, relational and sexual lives of participants.

## 5. Different housing trajectories of LG young people in times of austerity and precarity

The housing strategies analysed are regrouped into four categories: i) the return to the family house; ii) the dependence on the family of origin to buy or rent; iii) international migration to be more autonomous; iv) the experience of alternative housing models, mostly squatting, or sharing (including Airbnb). For each category we highlight the benefits and negative aspects over the emotional, relational and sexual lives of those involved. Each choice involves therefore a tense negotiation for LG youth, often leading them to opt for other strategies when the circumstances change (e.g. a new job, a romantic relationship, etc.). The categories must therefore not be interpreted as fixed and all-encompassing but as a heuristic device that best highlights the implications of each choice. In this section we present each trajectory separately in order to favour clarity and better highlight the complex negotiations and tensions in terms of the emotional, relational and sexual lives of participants.

### *Return to the family house*

In contexts shaped by the primary role of family to access resources, ‘returning to the nest’ in times of financial constraints usually represents the first option considered by our research participants, especially those from lower-middle class backgrounds. As explained by MJ (lesbian, 25-30), who moved back to her family house in a provincial town in Southern Italy after living for several years in Rome: “I could not bear anymore to struggle each month to pay for the rent and bills, (...) most of the time I ended by asking my parents for some money. (...) After maybe the seventh or eighth temporary job finished, I said to myself ‘It’s time to

come back home”<sup>6</sup>. At the time of the interview (early summer 2014), MJ had been living back with her family for around 18 months, working in the small family business and saving money to buy a place on her own. In her words: “It is not that bad, at the beginning I felt somehow out-of-place but now I have some friends, I can often spend the weekend somewhere because I have more money, (...), this is temporary because my parents are not so happy with me bringing girls home, so if I see anyone (...) we need to be creative”.

Her story reveals the constraints around gender and sexuality in the family of origin: while her parents are “cool and kind of modern compared to the town mindset”, they made explicit to her that they don’t want her to bring girls home. However, the same rule does not apply to her straight brother who “brought maybe three girls in the last year alone”. We see therefore how family acceptance and support rely on heteronormativity, MJ’s parents justifying their unequal concessions as a way to ‘preserve her from pain’. Reflecting on this, MJ says: “Every time we talk about that, it ends with us fighting, I can’t stand their bullshit ‘We do it for you because our neighbours could be mean to you’, I’m a grown woman!”.

MJ’s account echoes the narratives collected in Greece, where families of origin are usually eager to have the youngsters back with them, although this usually implies the closeting of sexual orientation and desire. For instance, after living in Athens Alex (27, gay) decided to go back to living with his family of origin in a city nearby. This move affected the relationship with his boyfriend who had also decided to go back to living with his family. With one of them being in the closet and the other experiencing ostracism on the part of his family, things became very tough, and intimate and sexual life were difficult to manage. However, financial constraints and the lack of affordable housing prevented them from leaving the family house again. Despite the difficult conditions, some participants stressed how everyday life with parents is not necessarily negative. For instance, Alexandra (29, lesbian) said: “Not that my mother controls me or she suppresses me for anything, ‘when are you coming back? Where are you going?’ Not at all. She is really liberal in general with all of this”. Despite this positive portrayal of her mother, Alexandra has yet to come out to her and other family members.

Parental control and the inability to express their sexual life often generate anxieties among research participants, both those closeted and those ‘out’. For instance, XD (31-35, gay) stated: “This whole situation [being unable to have a sexual life at home] is freaking me out, (...) I find myself fearing that my parents will find out when I have someone home, last week they were not there so I invited a guy home, the next day I cleaned the whole house obsessively since I feared mum could smell something”.

The imperative of secrecy concerning the relational and sexual lives of young LG people in Italy and Greece could be viewed somehow as ordinary, where sexuality in general is often represented as a taboo, especially in the education system. However, as already anticipated by the words of MJ, the same imperative does not seem to work for straight males, who are encouraged to perform the ‘predator’ identity. On the other hand, young girls are expected to behave properly, with the ‘whore stigma’ rhetoric (Pheterson, 1993) occupying a central role in everyday discourse. This proves that family structure is organized through the (interconnected) lenses of both gender and sexuality. Despite the struggles discussed by most participants, we here want to avoid a uniform and unidirectional account. In line with the

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<sup>6</sup> All the quotes are from the personal interviews.

paper of Di Felicianantonio and Gadelha (2016) that emphasized how returning home can lead to a *queering* of the provincial town whilst establishing new family relations, the life narratives of some of our research participants reveal how returning home has favoured a new phase in relation to their parents, who now feel more open to talking about and discussing intimate life. Although this does not seem to erase the desire for more autonomy, it leads to unexpected comforting experiences.

#### *Intra-family support to buy or rent*

Living in countries where the family is at the core of social reproduction, young people take for granted that leaving the family home requires the financial support of their parents (Mencarini & Tanturri, 2006). As explained by Anthimos, (35, gay, Athens): “As I returned [from abroad], we discussed [with his parents] where I am going to live, what I am going to do and we decided to renovate [the house]. It belonged to my mother (...). We renovated the house and I stayed here (...). Essentially, it [the money for the renovation] came from the inheritance that grandpa and grandma left me. (...) Luckily, there was this money from the inheritance”.

Family inheritance and money transfers often emerge as the main vehicles towards housing independence, although tensions arise because parents often expect that money to be used to move in with a partner/spouse. This works also for LG people in the case of liberal/progressive families, where the family expectation around the heteronormative family model is reshaped towards a homonormative family model. As explained by JD (31-35, gay, living in Rome): “There was this money from my grandmother and my parents were like ‘Once you meet the right guy, you will buy a nice house and move in with him’. We fought a lot about that, ‘I don’t know if I will ever meet the right guy’ I said to them and after a while they understood and they gave me the money, (...) My mum still asks me all the time ‘What about him? He’s so cute, you would make a great couple’, I think they just can’t deal with me having sex all around”.

JD’s words express how family tensions and pressures often emerge even in non-homophobic circumstances, the hegemony of coupledness and family values being stronger than heteronormativity. His story echoes Eleanor Wilkinson’s argument in the British context where “the nation-state is, at one level, no longer attempting to privilege heterosexuality but, at the same time, continues to promote particular forms of intimacy and family life” (2013, p. 207). Wilkinson speaks therefore of mononormativity, i.e. the hegemony of the ideology of coupledness as the preferable intimate relation people can engage with. However, this process does not appear to be hegemonic in countries such as Greece and Italy where resistance to same-sex coupledness (not to mention parenthood) is widespread.

Despite heteronormative and homonormative expectations, parents tend to support their LG daughters and sons especially in the case of homeownership, since it is seen as the basic principle of societal organization (Di Felicianantonio & Aalbers, 2018). This financial dependence on the family of origin comes to produce obligations in terms of lifestyle. For example, parents asking or implying that the beneficiaries should be ‘discreet’ and not inviting many sexual partners home. They are therefore very different from the ones described by Druta and Ronald (2017) in the case of straight youngsters in Britain. Alex (27, gay) described these obligations through a very geographical (comparative) perspective: “When I told her [to

his mother] ‘what if (...) I introduce you a boy as my partner?’ She said ‘ok, it is not my favourite option but (...) if it is in a bigger city like Athens, it would not bother me so much. Because here in X [small country town] you know how the situation is”. However, in some cases these obligations appear also when furnishing the house. For instance, UH (31-35, gay, Rome) remembers how his mother insisted in helping him with the choice of the furniture, disputing that his taste was ‘too gay’ and pushing him to buy more ‘appropriate’ furniture. In the interview, he says how at some point she told him: “I don’t know why you want everybody to know you are gay, (...), you are still a man, no?”. Despite feeling hurt by his mother’s words, UH decided to follow her suggestion, explaining: “She was paying for it, so I thought I should accept her intrusion”. UH’s words confirm the gendered and heteronormative character of family expectations discussed in the previous sub-section.

The dependence on the family of origin entails very complicated results for those who have not come out with their families yet, especially where the new housing solution is located in the same building as the family of origin, this being common in both Greece and Italy. As expressed by Aris (30, gay, living in a semi-dependent house in Athens): “I feel restricted. (...) For example I could never think that I am going to bring a guy there, (...) at times I would like to be able to bring a person there. (...) This is the basic reason, one of the most important that makes me want to leave home and finally stay somewhere by myself”.

For people who have yet to come out there is a strong social pressure from the family when they are given or inherit a family house because it is presumed to lead to (heteronormative) reproduction and children. Pavlos’ (38, gay, Athens) parents offered him to take on the family house, expecting him to ‘form a family’ and have children, with this situation putting a great amount of pressure on him. The emotional conflict this generates emerges when he says: “In this moment I am trapped in this situation; I believe that my parents shouldn’t transfer the main house to me because it is a family house, something that I will never have [a family], [even though] it is somehow fair [to distribute the family property to the children like this]”.

While mixed feelings of appreciation, blame and lack of full autonomy emerge from most interviews, some participants expressed only the sense of reward and gratitude for their families of origin, leading to new ties and connections. As discussed by V. (25-30, lesbian, living in a small town in Southern Italy), the fact that her family gave her the money to buy her own house made her realize “how important they are, despite all the shit in the past, (...), I now see them as different people, sometimes I feel like they have finally come to appreciate me”. Through V’s example we see therefore how the implications of the dependence of LG young people on family money needs to be contextualized case by case, since different factors shape individual experiences.

### *International migration*

In the literature on LG migration, the ‘big city’ was historically considered as the destination of choice allowing LG people to leave the closet, associated with the family of origin in small towns (e.g. Knopp, 2004; Weston, 1995). Recent analyses have questioned the hegemony of the small town-big town trajectory (e.g. Di Felicianantonio & Gadelha, 2016, 2017; Gorman-Murray, 2009; Lewis, 2012), as the life experiences of LG people are more (spatially) complicated, being shaped by several factors, both material (e.g. work and study opportunity) and immaterial (e.g. sexual imagery and desire). In the context of welfare systems centred

around the family as in the Greek and Italian cases, moving to the big city in the same country usually still implies the reliance on the family of origin.

Against these conditions, international migration represents a way to escape difficult (or the lack of) family relations and the perceived lack of opportunities for personal autonomy. The motivation to relocate to a new country appears particularly relevant in the case of gay men living with HIV who felt stigmatized in the place they were living, and pushed into a 'second closet' (i.e. hiding HIV-status in order to avoid social condemnation and rejection; see Berg and Ross, 2014). In the narratives of these research participants, migration is framed as offering the possibility to 'get a new life' associated with renovated self-esteem, sexual comfort and openness in social relations. For those in more vulnerable economic conditions, international migration is associated with a better quality of life; all the research participants in this group blame low salaries and lack of career opportunities in Southern Europe.

However, relocating to a new country has also some negative consequences, especially immediately after the relocation when the sense of loneliness seems to prevail. As explained by YFW, (25-30, relocated from Rome to Berlin): "everything was somehow different, (...), I had been to Berlin several times in the past but it is not the same, (...) I'm struggling to learn German so I find that I am missing profound social interactions (....) Berlin is a great city but you have to learn many new things, Germans are so rigid!". Although acknowledging her appreciation for the new city, YFW's words reveal the everyday problems generated by moving to another country with a very different language. She connects her emotional struggles with language issues, her narrative *othering* Germans as a homogenous group.

Beyond the everyday emotional issues that emerge from these accounts, all but two of the research participants stressed how international migration improved their lifestyle. Nevertheless, they still perceive themselves as precarious because they are unable to save money and guarantee future financial stability. As argued by SD (gay, 31-35, moved from Bologna to Barcelona): "I can't really save anything, if anything serious happens to me tomorrow I don't know what to do and how to pay for it. (...) In this city you can easily find a job, but not the good ones, the jobs you find are the shitty ones, call centres, retailing, you can go out, you pay your rent, maybe you have some holidays, but you don't save". Precarity seems to also concern housing, especially in those places where the cost of living is extremely high and people cannot afford to live alone. As discussed by Alex, (27, gay, moved from Athens to London): "The issue that I am preoccupied about in London is this exactly, that, ok, I am going to live with flatmates who know about me and they are cool about it but anyway, I believe that it is not going to be so easy to bring someone, (...), it is not going to be easy for someone to come home regularly because I will not feel comfortable". His words reveal therefore how for some LG people 'coming out' does not erase the sense of discomfort felt when their sexual activity becomes evident to others, such as flatmates.

Both SD and Alex's stories reveal the increasingly precarious condition of the general population in big cities around Europe and beyond. Despite offering new possibilities and an improved lifestyle, LG international migration remains therefore embedded in the contradictions shaping our societies.

#### *Alternative (and sharing) housing solutions*

All the housing choices discussed so far concern market solutions. However, alternative possibilities exist for those who either do not want to or cannot rely on the financial support of their families of origin. Social housing has historically been marginal in both countries and the limited units available tend to be given to large households with young children, making it an unrealistic option for LG young people. However, alternative housing initiatives, mostly in the form of squatting, have a rich history in Southern Europe, especially in Italy; after 2008 several squatting initiatives emerged around the country, Rome being the most active (Di Felicianantonio, 2016b). Most of the squats are managed and inhabited by those that one of the authors has defined as “expelled” from the welfare system (Di Felicianantonio, 2017), mainly people aged between 25 and 40 who don’t earn enough to pay for accommodation on the market and do not want (or cannot) rely on the family for support. For most of them the alternative would be to return to the family home discussed earlier in the paper.

Hoping to continue to live in a big city where they feel they can express themselves more freely, some LG young people experiment with squatting, that has a strongly communal character. As explained by JHF, (lesbian, 25-30): “I can’t imagine myself living with my parents, (...), I think I have always imagined myself escaping from my hometown, from the control of people who I have known for all my life, (...), Rome for me is freedom, openness, it is being who I want to be without responding to my family pressures. (...) Living here [in the squat] sometimes is hard, you know those days when you would prefer not to see anyone, those days you feel kind of shit and you don’t know what you are doing, (...), sometimes taking decisions together is exhausting, but it is also the great part of living in a communal space, you learn all the time”.

Through the words of JHF we see how living in a squat can improve the social life for those who might not be able to afford life in a big city without family financial support. On the same time, she expresses some of the difficulties of communal life. However, it is important to stress how these emotional difficulties are often generated from external pressures and not from within the squat. One is represented by the precarious legal status of squatting, i.e. even though squatting is a widespread practice it remains illegal, leaving those involved in uncertainty, especially in the current phase of increasing (violent) evictions. We can refer here to the words of VH5 (31-35, gay): “You have this weird feeling, maybe tomorrow you will be evicted, if you sleep somewhere you are not really sure you will find your belongings again, (...) you know it could happen at any time, so maybe at one point you want to have more stability and go for a legal solution”. In other circumstances, negative feelings are caused by the family of origin, with those involved in these initiatives blamed by their parents. In this respect, VH5 says: “I always fight with my parents, they do not respect me, they think I’m a freak, so every time I visit them I get the same complaints, ‘You can’t live like this’, (...) Most days I’m fine, I really like my life, living here, but then sometimes you question yourself, you hear your father’s voice in your head and you start to think”. Despite appreciating the experience of living in a squatted building, VH5’s words emphasize the role of other actors, including the family of origin, in generating negative feelings towards the alternative housing choice made.

In the same category we find those who choose to share flats and rooms with partners, friends or ‘Airbnb flatmates’. In fact, given the extreme precarity of work and increasing poverty, many young people decide to rent a room in the house (owned or rented) they live in to make



some money and increase their income. Despite offering the opportunity to depend less on the family of origin, this choice reshapes everyday life at home because of the presence of strangers limiting intimacy and sexual life. On a structural level it embodies the realization of “entrepreneurial housing” as a specific biopolitical form of the urban question under late neoliberalism (Rossi, 2017). However, when exploring these practices of co-habitation more in-depth, we found out that there was still a family connection, e.g. the rented house was owned by a relative or a family friend. For instance, at the beginning of the interview, Elli (lesbian, 34, Athens) stated that she was living in a rented house, although it was owned by the family of her girlfriend. At the time of the interview the two had just decided to go live together so they rented out the house Elli was living in on Airbnb in order to increase their income, while the two of them lived together in another house owned by the girlfriend’s family. The couple’s ‘entrepreneurial’ autonomy therefore depends on properties owned by one of the young women’s relatives, thus confirming our argument about the central role of family relations.

#### 6. Coda: Why studying the housing experiences of lesbian and gay people is more important than ever

At the time of finalizing the revisions of this paper (May 2020), the world is experiencing the dramatic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The response in most countries, including Greece and Italy, has mostly relied on lockdown measures to prevent the spreading of the virus and the collapse of overwhelming healthcare systems. In this context, housing assumes a key relevance because the main message is stay-at-home. However, as discussed in the paper, home is much more than a shelter, its meaning and experience being shaped by *difference*. For lesbian and gay people, home can be a site of violence, neglect and oppression, and the current situation might exacerbate existing tensions. The combined effect of the quarantine and the economic recession that is expected to follow might push lesbian and gay people to rely even more on parents and family of origin, especially in those contexts, like Southern Europe, where the welfare state is mostly organized around intra-family redistribution of resources. As such the current situation requires a deeper engagement from housing scholars with the experiences of lesbian and gay people (but also trans people, and all those exposed to stigma and rejection by their families) and their connections to family intergenerational relations. Against the erasure of LGBT subjects within the increasing literature on the transformation of welfare systems and family intergenerational relations, in this paper we have developed a comparative analysis of the housing pathways of LG young people in Greece and Italy and the implications for their emotional, private and sexual lives. Given the persistence of homo/lesbophobia in countries where the welfare system mostly relies on intra-family transmission of wealth and benefits, LG young people negotiate between housing choices and personal lives in ambivalent ways. For each category of housing choice discussed (the return to the family house; the dependence on the family of origin to buy or rent; international migration to be more autonomous; the experience of alternative housing models, mostly squatting, or sharing), our analysis has highlighted complex negotiations and tensions in terms of the emotional, relational and sexual lives of the research participants. Theoretically, our analysis has relied on the housing pathways analytical framework because it keeps together home and identity.

With the diffusion of the 'asset-based' welfare model across the Global North and beyond (Doling & Ronald, 2010), and the rapid growth of national and transnational groups opposing LGBT equality, the cases of Greece and Italy are particularly informative for future research on the material everyday construction of equalities. When analyzing the impact of social processes- such as the configuration of welfare systems- over LG people's lives, we cannot consider only legislation. As suggested by Browne et al (2015, p. 3), "lived experiences may reveal the presence of resources other than juridico-political ones, that will enable a more constructive navigation of everyday places in both state-sponsored 'homophobic' and 'non-homophobic' contexts". In contexts shaped by persisting homo/lesbophobia, discrimination and domestic violence, the analysis of the ways in which the welfare system works and what kinds of social values shape it represents a main concern for critical social scientists. Because the active intervention of formal institutions plays a central role in the redistribution of resources, welfare systems offer specific social groups the opportunity to make the life choices they prefer for their well-being, escaping discriminatory environments. By showing the impact of different housing trajectories over personal lives, this article might inform policy interventions aimed at reducing the negative impact of persisting homo/lesbophobia; housing occupies an undoubtedly central role in the needs of LG youth in order to live freely without having to renounce intimacy and sexual life.

In analysing the housing pathways of LG youth, our aim was not to essentialize them: the four practices analysed per se were not different from those available to straight youth. What is different is the impact over emotional, relational and sexual life, with some people even pressured back into the closet in order to secure a shelter, thus avoiding the fate of an increasing number of LGBT youth experiencing homelessness (Castellanos, 2016). However, heteronormativity does not operate alone, it is connected to gender (inequalities) as well as to class and other factors (e.g. health status in the case of people living with HIV). Building on this critical stance, the paper has adopted an intersectional perspective, showing how intergenerational negotiations are not uniform for every LG young person, with social class playing an important role in shaping them.

In line with most scholarship on intersectionality (e.g. Valentine, 2007), the paper has relied on biographic interviews because they offer the opportunity to best explore the complexity of factors shaping people's lives over time. Housing research has increasingly adopted the framework of intersectionality. However, more can (and needs to) be done in this direction in order to better understand the uneven social and spatial implications of policies and processes through a more inclusive perspective; lesbian and gay people cannot be left out anymore.

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## Funding

The work of Cesare Di Felicianantonio is generously supported by the European Commission, MSCA-IF-EF-ST Action, grant number: 747110.

Table 1. The housing strategies of lesbian and gay youth in Greece and Italy: benefits and negative aspects

Housing choice	N. of Italian part.s	N. of Greek part.s	Benefits	Negative aspects
Return to the family house	10	6	- material support - possibility to establish a new kind of relationship - queering the family context	- lack of independence - control and anxieties
Dependence on the family of origin to buy or rent	15	9	- material support to establish an independent condition - renovated family ties	- 'interference' from families (+ blame)
International migration	22	1	- taking the distance from difficult family ties - create new possibilities for independence	- distance and loneliness - housing precarity
Alternative (and sharing) solutions	9	3	- autonomy - collective forms of living, new kinds of relationships - openness towards others	- precarious endurance - lack of privacy/intimacy - blaming from families

Source: the authors